PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 289

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIFTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-FIFTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1996–97

COMPRISING PERIOD
27 January—7 February 1997

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27 January 1997

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIFTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 27 APRIL 1992]

FORTY-FIFTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 289**

SIXTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1996–97

House of Commons

Monday 27 January 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Deregulation

1. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to visit the European Commission in Brussels during the current Parliament to discuss deregulation in business. [11110]

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Michael Heseltine): My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has regular contacts with the Commission and our European partners to discuss deregulation. He is to be congratulated on the considerable progress that has been made. We will maintain pressure for regulatory reform in Europe over the coming months.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will my right hon. Friend make one of his visitations, preferably prearranged, to the European Commission to make the European Union understand that the idea mooted by the Advocate General that the acquired rights directive should not apply to service contracts would be gravely prejudicial to British interests as regards competitive tendering in local government and market testing in national government? That is an urgent matter which potentially affects the terms and conditions of employment of many thousands of people and many contractors in the United Kingdom.

The Deputy Prime Minister: All my visits are prearranged and tend to attract a great deal of attention. I can assure my hon. Friend that I am sympathetic to the idea that he has in mind. The timetable for the next few weeks may not allow for a high-profile visit to Brussels, but the Commission would undoubtedly welcome a visit and be immensely sympathetic to the message that I would deliver.

Mr. Cabora: Will the Deputy Prime Minister enlighten the House about the latest proposals from his Department's deregulation unit, which I think have been code-named sunset provisions? Can he confirm the reports that the latest idea from the unit, which was discussed in Cabinet this morning, according to the *Financial Times*, is to withdraw all regulations on companies after a period of five years, unless the Government take a clear decision to continue them? Will the Deputy Prime Minister inform the House whether that madcap idea has been discussed with the European Commission? According to the *Financial Times* this morning, the proposal was intended to appease small business. Will the Deputy Prime Minister harangue any that do not agree with him?

The Deputy Prime Minister: We all congratulate the *Financial Times* on reporting this morning conversations that have yet to take place. The Government have rigorously scrutinised all legislation and regulations to see how we can lighten the load on small businesses. We will continue to do that, but it is inconceivable that there would be an automatic sunset provision in all regulations introduced in the House.

Information Technology (Government Departments)

2. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the progress of his

Department's initiatives to use information technology within Government Departments and to disseminate information to the general public. [11111]

The Paymaster General (Mr. Michael Bates): My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster will be making a comprehensive statement after the conclusion of the period for comments on the Green Paper "Government Direct", which was published last November. There have already been a large number of responses to the Green Paper and more are expected before the closing date, which is 7 February.

Mr. Bruce: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his answer and on his promotion to the Government Front Bench. The Government are helping to move out the information super-highways presaged by the Green Paper. Will we in South Dorset have one of the computerised terminals that would allow my constituents to find information about government and communicate directly with the Government?

Mr. Bates: I thank my hon. Friend for his welcome to me to this position. The terminals have proved extremely popular throughout the country and many pilots have been available, but there is none yet in South Dorset. My hon. Friend's championing of interest in information technology and openness of government may lead us to consider that location shortly.

Mr. Derek Foster: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his elevated position. Despite his Geordie credentials, I hope that his tenure of office will be short.

Is the hon. Gentleman aware that a so-called unbeatable anti-benefit fraud scheme which was pioneered in the north-east was abandoned after only a year because the criminals cracked the system? Does that not prove that the Government are ill-prepared for the information revolution and impotent in protecting taxpayers from fraud? How can a Prime Minister who cannot lead his own party rise to meet the challenges of the information society and how can a Government who cannot see beyond the end of the week lead the nation into the millennium?

Mr. Bates: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his barbed welcome. It gives me an opportunity to thank the Leader of the Opposition for removing the right hon. Gentleman from his position as Opposition Chief Whip, thereby ensuring that my last year in the Whips Office was easier than it might otherwise have been.

We have taken many new initiatives to try to clamp down on benefit fraud—and it is notable that the Opposition have opposed every one.

Royal Yacht

3. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his role in the co-ordination and presentation of Government policy in respect of the replacement for the royal yacht. [11112]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Roger Freeman): My right hon. Friend chairs the Ministerial Committee on the Co-ordination and Presentation of Government Policy and undertakes other activities as necessary to ensure the successful presentation of the Government's policies across its range of responsibilities.

Mr. Viggers: Does my right hon. Friend agree that last week's statement about a replacement royal yacht has been widely welcomed? Does he agree also that, ideally, Britannia should become the centrepiece of the millennium project in Portsmouth harbour, spanning Gosport and Portsmouth? I am sure that that idea would prove very popular.

As to plans for a new yacht, does my right hon. Friend share my distaste for the Opposition's tactics? They had every opportunity to express their grudging and negative attitude during the past two years when the project was under discussion.

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding us that the royal naval ship to replace Britannia should be commissioned in 2002, which is the golden jubilee of Her Majesty the Queen. I hope that the new ship will play an important role in those celebrations.

As to the Opposition's attitude, we have witnessed their small-mindedness and their misunderstanding not only of the role of Her Majesty but of the promotion of the best interests of the United Kingdom economy abroad.

Mr. Cunliffe: How can the Minister reconcile in any shape or form public expenditure cuts—which have forced many authorities, such as that in my area, to sack home helps and teachers and make all kinds of cuts to public services—with the proposed expenditure on a new royal yacht? Is that not indefensible, as most people consider the vessel to be a kind of floating palace which is used mainly by the privileged? The idea is totally unacceptable to the majority of British people and certainly to many of my colleagues.

Mr. Freeman: I think that the hon. Gentleman misunderstands the function of the royal yacht. It is in no sense an irrelevant "floating palace": its primary role is to make a very positive statement abroad about the importance of this country and to promote trade with the rest of the world. Her Majesty the Queen will use the royal yacht on certain occasions, but it is not for her exclusive use. I am very glad that Her Majesty is pleased with the decision.

As regards the proportionality of the decision, it does not represent additional, unplanned public expenditure, as the money for the Ministry of Defence will come from the reserve.

Sir Sydney Chapman: In welcoming the Government's recent announcement and disagreeing with the uncharacteristically unfair comments by the hon. Member for Leigh (Mr. Cunliffe), for whom I have great regard, I ask my right hon. Friend to confirm that a replacement for Britannia is justified on commercial and trade grounds alone. In answer to those who say that the money might come from the national lottery rather than the taxpayer, will he confirm that everyone who buys a ticket in the national lottery immediately pays 12p to the Treasury? Therefore, if we were to hypothecate, we could say that a fraction of the lottery money will pay for the new royal yacht.

Mr. Freeman: It will take the next five years to design and build the new royal yacht. She will be commissioned

with, we hope, a life of 25 to 30 years at the very least. It will be money well spent by the Government on behalf of the taxpayer in promoting the best interests of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Beith: Will the Minister confirm that it has been the Government's practice to consult the Opposition parties beforehand on every announcement affecting or concerning the royal family, so as not to embroil the royal family in any political controversy? Will he explain the thinking behind the refusal to accept any element of business support for the project? Surely we have passed through the days when it was fashionable to disparage those in trade. Are the Government not acting rather like one of the Minister's former hon. Friends towards one of his right hon. Friends, who referred to him as the sort of person who had to buy his own furniture?

Mr. Freeman: On consultation with the Opposition parties, this is not a constitutional matter. It is a right and proper decision for the Government in commissioning a royal naval ship. I hope that the House will appreciate that business sponsorship of a royal naval ship, which occasionally will be used by Her Majesty the Queen, is not appropriate.

Mr. Jessel: Will my right hon. Friend confirm my arithmetic that £60 million, when divided among the United Kingdom's population of 58 million, works out at about £1 per head, or about 20p per head per year over five years? Is it not unbelievably small-minded of Opposition Members to carp about such a small sum that can do such a great deal to generate employment and exports?

Mr. Freeman: I am sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends will very much agree with my hon. Friend. The Opposition do not understand the importance of promoting the best interests of the United Kingdom throughout the world.

Government Policy

5. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he last met the Prime Minister to discuss the co-ordination and presentation of Government policy. [11115]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I meet my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister regularly to discuss many areas of my responsibility.

Mr. Jones: Why did not the Government discuss matters concerning the royal yacht with Her Majesty's very loyal Opposition? Why did the Government contrive a situation that caused deep embarrassment to the sovereign? The presentation of policy under the right hon. Gentleman is an unmitigated disaster.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster a few moments ago.

Sir Donald Thompson: When my right hon. Friend is discussing with his right hon. and hon. Friends the co-ordination and presentation of the Government's policies, will he not omit the way in which Government policy has enriched the north, the north-east, Wales and Scotland as well as the south?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend. I am sure that the House will recognise the further continuation of Government success as a result of Nissan's exciting recent announcement.

Mr. Prescott: Will the Deputy Prime Minister explain to us the difference between seeing my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition about extra millennium expenditure and having discussions about the Queen's yacht?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Very simply, I saw the Leader of the Opposition as a millennium commissioner; I speak in the Chamber as a Minister.

6. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will review the co-ordination of Government Departments in respect of the provision of information on Government policy on the European Union. [11116]

Mr. Freeman: We have no plans to carry out any such review.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Does my right hon. Friend share my concern and alarm that, throughout the recent big row about value added tax on food, no reference has been made to the fact that, under article 28.2 of the sixth directive, which, incidentally, was approved by the Labour Government, a right to continue a zero rate ended on 31 December 1996 and has continued only by a legal ploy, which is likely to be challenged at the European Court? Would it not be fairer to the electors if the Government and the Opposition were to make it abundantly clear to the people of Britain, instead of putting up silly posters, that there is a real danger that we shall shortly have to pay VAT on food and on children's clothes irrespective of who wins the general election?

Mr. Freeman: I very much regret that I cannot agree with my hon. Friend's analysis. I am sure that he is sincere, but there is no imminent danger of VAT being put on food.

Mr. Shore: On the co-ordination of Government policy and information about the European Union, will the Minister tell us whether today's release through the British press of the excellent article written by the Prime Minister, in which he makes clear his great repugnance of the idea of a European central bank on democratic grounds, was cleared with the Chancellor of the Exchequer?

Mr. Freeman: I have not seen the reports to which the right hon. Gentleman refers. The Prime Minister, on behalf of a unanimous Cabinet, made our policy quite plain. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) may laugh, but I am repeating for the record the facts of our policy on the single European currency.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my right hon. Friend remind our colleagues in the European Union that this country has had much greater success in creating jobs that they have? The reason for that is that we have a relatively deregulated economy, whereas they have overregulated economies.

Mr. Freeman: Her Majesty's Government will continue to remind the British electorate of the advantages of our opt-out from the social chapter of the Maastricht treaty. We will also continue to remind the electorate that the Labour party would jeopardise that opt-out, increase unemployment and reduce our competitiveness.

7. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many meetings he has had with his Cabinet colleagues and civil servants since October to discuss the presentation of Government policy. [11117]

Mr. Bates: That subject has arisen frequently in meetings during that period.

Mr. Cunningham: Does the Deputy Prime Minister remain in charge of Government policy, given that he was not allowed to present the case for the royal yacht?

Mr. Bates: Questions on that subject have already been answered. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] They have already been answered. The hon. Gentleman asked a serious question, and I shall give him an answer based on my experience. I visited India two years ago, not long after the royal yacht Britannia had been there. During its visit, £1.3 billion-worth of orders for British companies were secured, which meant thousands of jobs. The new royal yacht will mean 500 jobs for the shipyards—a subject that Labour Members used to care about, but that now only Conservative Members care about.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: When my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister discusses the presentation of Government policy, will he stress yet further the great success of the private finance initiative, particularly in north-west Kent, where, thanks to the PFI, we will get the brand new Darenth Park hospital? Will he contrast the Government's policy with that of the Labour party, which would have us waiting in the queue for Government handouts of NHS capital, as we have waited for the past 25 years?

Mr. Bates: I agree absolutely with my hon. Friend's observations on the private finance initiative. I know of his interest in this matter. His constituents will benefit from our policies, which create extra beds and extra facilities in much-needed health care.

Mr. Donald Anderson: Were not the attempts to portray Government policy as full of probity, honesty and honour called into question by the cheating of the Government Whips just before Christmas? Why has there still been no apology for that cheating? Why have no heads rolled?

Mr. Bates: Perhaps because it was not cheating. It could be more easily explained as sheer incompetence by the Opposition Chief Whip.

8. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his Department's role in co-ordinating Her Majesty's Government's economic and social policies. [11119]

Mr. Bates: My right hon. Friends and I work closely with colleagues to carry out the policies that are best for Britain. Our key policy themes include the delivery of economic prosperity, the upholding of decent common-sense values in the pursuit of law and order and justice, and the provision of first-class public services.

Mr. Dykes: Does my hon. Friend expect the forthcoming economic statistics to confirm the strong underlying growth trend in the United Kingdom economy?

Mr. Bates: We do indeed. I agree with my hon. Friend about that trend. This morning, we learned of yet more figures demonstrating strong growth: there has been a growth of 2.3 per cent. in gross domestic product. That further endorses the Government's performance in delivering good, solid growth that is non-inflationary, something that has eluded past Governments for about 50 years.

Mr. Wigley: Is the Minister aware that last Wednesday—the very day on which the announcement about the royal yacht was made—the Secretary of State for Wales announced, in reply to a question from me, that the Government could not go ahead with their commitment to a community hospital in Porthmadog which they had promised for the past seven years, because it had to await the private finance initiative? If the Government are providing public money for the royal yacht when private money is available, and not proceeding with hospital projects when no private money is available, what are their social priorities?

Mr. Bates: During this Question Time, we have heard of instances in which the private finance initiative is working for health care; I know, from experience in my part of the country, that that is happening. The subject will be dealt with by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales—but I seem to remember that, on that same day, my right hon. Friend announced the creation of 700 new jobs as a result of inward investment in Wales.

Mr. Congdon: I welcome the success of the Government's economic policies since 1992. Since that time, they have led to the best growth record in comparison with the other major European countries, and to a record fall in unemployment. Does my hon. Friend agree that all that would be put at risk by the imposition of a minimum wage and the implementation of the social chapter, as advocated by the Labour party?

Mr. Bates: Absolutely. I thank my hon. Friend for drawing that to my attention. Let me again stress the threat to jobs that would be posed by the possibility of an alternative Government. The reality is that the unemployment rate in this country is coming down, and my hon. Friend may be interested to learn—even if the Opposition are not—that the London chamber of commerce has today put paid to the myth promulgated by the Opposition that the jobs involved are all part time. It says that the growth in part-time jobs was greater in the 1950s and 1960s, and that these are new full-time jobs that are extremely welcome.

Mr. Winnick: Are we to take it that the person who heads co-ordination—the Deputy Prime Minister—denies any responsibility for the announcement about the royal ship? Is it not clear that that announcement was meant as an election ploy, but has backfired on the Government? Is it not a matter of deep regret that the Queen has been embarrassed in such a way by this Government?

Mr. Bates: Listen: we are not going to take that from the Opposition. *[Interruption.]* May I just make a few points clear? The hon. Gentleman, who is a very experienced Member of Parliament, may remember that, in the middle of the general election campaign of 1951, a Labour Government announced the placement of an order for the royal yacht.

Mr. Rowe: While taking an interest in the presentation of Government policy, will my hon. Friend remind the chattering classes who currently appear to be taken in by new Labour that, in 1979, they and their predecessors were convinced both that the country was becoming ungovernable and that the north-south divide was entirely unbridgeable? Both those factors have been turned on their heads by the success of the present Government.

Mr. Bates: I certainly endorse what my hon. Friend has said. It was generous of him to draw attention to the eradication of the old phrase "the north-south divide". The north is now sharing in the benefits of our present economic prosperity, along with the rest of the country. Last week, jobs were announced in England, in the shape of Nissan; in Wales, in the shape of a meat processing factory; and in Northern Ireland, in the shape of Shorts. This week, jobs have also been announced in Scotland. There is not a part of the United Kingdom that is not benefiting from this economic prosperity, and therefore there is not a part of it that would not be at risk from a Labour Government.

10. **Mr. Hutton:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the role of civil servants in the co-ordination and presentation of Government policy. [11122]

The Deputy Prime Minister: Civil servants continue to play a role in co-ordinating and presenting Government policy consistent with the spirit and the letter of the civil service code and the civil service management code.

Mr. Hutton: Will the Deputy Prime Minister confirm that he agrees with the principle that civil servants should not be asked to take part in activities that could give rise to criticism that people who are paid from the public purse are being used for purely party political reasons? Will he therefore explain why, on at least two occasions in the past six months, that appears to have taken place, first, in the laughable attempt to cost Labour's manifesto commitments and, secondly, in the establishment of a so-called good news network in the business community to argue for Tory policies? Do not both those activities expose the fact that the Government have broken the spirit, at least, of those guidelines?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will be fully aware that the costing of Opposition policies is carried out under guidelines established by the head of the civil service, so I in no way accept his first suggestion. The second suggestion is that civil servants were in some way improperly used in examining areas where supporters of Government policy might exist. That is the subject of an investigation by the Select Committee that is appropriately responsible for the matter, which took evidence from the head of the civil service, who made it clear that nothing improper had taken place. However, before the hon. Gentleman feels that I am wholly in accord with the spirit of what he suggests, he will be aware of the statement by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher):

"leaked documents are particularly welcome. I promise to make good use of them."

I have never read a more disgraceful statement by a Labour party spokesman positively encouraging civil servants to break their high standards.

Mr. Marlow: I believe that it is right that civil servants in the United Kingdom are not supposed to involve themselves in the organisation and presentation of Government policy. Why therefore is it right that Brussels's very own Dr. Goebbels, Geoffrey Martin, of the European Union office on the other side of the square, wishes to involve himself in the great democratic process known as the British general election? Will my right hon. Friend do something to stop that involvement happening? It is scandalous.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I will send a little note to the gentleman concerned drawing his attention to my hon. Friend's views.

Mr. Llew Smith: Will the Deputy Prime Minister inform the House whether civil servants or the Government co-ordinated the Prime Minister's statement over the weekend that, if we become part of a single currency, we will hand over economic decisions to an unelected and unaccountable European central bank?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman has obviously not been fully in touch with what has been going on recently on these matters because, if he had been, he would realise that the party that is threatening to hand over more power to the European movement and to extend qualified majority voting is his own party.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Would it be right to assume that civil servants did discuss the policy on the royal yacht with Ministers and to congratulate them as well as Ministers on the policy? Surely it has become clear from exchanges this afternoon and well before that, like its predecessor, the new royal yacht will earn billions of pounds, which will enable the Government to build many more schools, hospitals and the like than could be built for £60 million.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Let me make it absolutely clear that the decision about the royal yacht was taken in the normal practices of Government after discussion with officials from the Departments concerned and that the decision was collectively agreed by Ministers. But the whole House will have witnessed the most extraordinary thing: when the announcement was made, one conspicuous voice on the Opposition Benches, the right hon. Member for

Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), had the guts and integrity to speak for Britain. If I have to choose between new Labour and old Labour, give me old Labour every time. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I think that Mr. Faulds is making it clear that he also caught my eye on that occasion and was very supportive. *[Interruption.]*

Value Added Tax

13. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he last met the Chancellor of the Exchequer to discuss the co–ordination and presentation of Government policies relating to VAT. [11125]

The Deputy Prime Minister: Labour Members have not recovered from my last reply. I shall try another one.

I keep in regular touch with my right hon. and learned Friend to consider how the Government can further the success of their economic and fiscal policies.

Mr. Gerrard: Will the Deputy Prime Minister confirm from his discussions with the Chancellor that the Chancellor has several times clearly stated his view that the VAT tax base is too narrow and specifically mentioned food, children's clothing and newspapers as candidates for the extension of VAT? Precisely which of those is being considered for VAT?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The Chancellor has made his position absolutely clear, despite Labour attacks suggesting that he proposes to extend VAT to food. Both my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer have said that that is simply not the case. Nothing is more indicative of the scurrilous nature of Labour's coming election campaign than the preposterous posters with which it is adorning the countryside. It is extraordinary that Labour should ask us to answer questions about taxation. Why cannot it answer questions about any of its own taxation proposals?

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Cyprus

23. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much assistance was given to Cyprus in 1996. [11138]

The Parliamentary Under–Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Dr. Liam Fox): Bilateral assistance to Cyprus totalled £473,000 in 1995-96. Assistance from the European Union was £450,000 in 1994, of which the UK share was some 16 per cent. Those are the latest years for which figures are available.

Mr. Evans: Does my hon. Friend think it is regrettable that tensions on the island seem to be increasing? Not only were there tragic deaths last year on the green line, but it has been announced that Cyprus intends to buy the S300 military system from Russia. At the same time, the authorities in the north have said that they will retaliate with more army personnel in the north. Does he agree that negotiation is the only way to resolve the problems and hostilities on the island, particularly in view of Cyprus's European Union application? Does he further agree that the real losers will be both sides if we allow military tensions to increase any further on this beautiful island?

Dr. Fox: The missile deal is extremely unwelcome. It dangerously raises the stakes in an already tense area. Equally, the Turkish threats are unacceptable. All parties must look for ways to reduce tension, not add to it, and I am sure that that view is shared by all hon. Members.

Mr. Faulds: Would the hon. Gentleman agree that perhaps the more relevant question would be how much assistance has been given to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which the Greek regime has prevented from happening? But would he also agree that the provocations on the green line, the UN separating border, have been by the Greek Cypriots because no other forces apart from the UN are supposed to enter that area?

Dr. Fox: The Government do not recognise the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus—only Turkey does. There can be no change in our policy of maintaining balanced contacts with both communities. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary deserves praise for his recent initiative in trying to take forward peace in Cyprus. Only by a negotiated settlement and equal movement on both sides can peace be achieved.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that the greatest assistance that can be given to Cyprus is for the island to be reunited so that the refugees can return to their homes?

Dr. Fox: We are looking at the 10 points that my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary made in taking the peace process forward. If we are to achieve a settlement, both Governments must reduce the tension. The No.1 move needed at the moment is for both sides to get away from the dangerous rhetoric of recent weeks and to start to reduce, not increase, the tension. We should like to see fewer arms on both sides in Cyprus than there are at present.

Rwanda

24. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further assessment he has made of the effects of conditions attached to aid from (a) the World bank and (b) other sources on the causes of the civil war in Rwanda. [11139]

Dr. Liam Fox: The causes of the crisis in Rwanda are complex and go back many generations. However, the report, "Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda", did not conclude that previous development assistance was a primary cause of the crisis in Rwanda.

Mr. Spearing: Does the Minister agree that the five-volume report, which the Minister of State has placed in the Library, makes it clear that there were many factors in the crisis? Is it not true that an over-emphasis on competition, particularly among people of similar ethnic background and in certain regions of a country,

increases the risk of armed conflict? Has not history shown that that is true? Would not it be good if in future the World bank, the International Monetary Fund and national Governments paid attention to that fact when drawing up loan conditions?

Dr. Fox: It is certainly true that the report's historical analysis attaches some blame to ethnic policies during the colonial period, although the United Kingdom was not primarily involved in that area. Our aid to Rwanda is of a humanitarian nature, and we should remember that people in Rwanda—regardless of which ethnic group they belong to—may be starving. Our primary objective in Rwanda is to deal with its humanitarian needs.

Mr. Foulkes: Does the Minister recall that, last week, the Foreign Secretary admitted that the United Nations' arms embargo is not enforceable in our dependencies, which is why Mil-Tec of the Isle of Man was able to supply more than £3 million of arms to the perpetrators of genocide in Rwanda? Will the Minister assure us that no other such violations are occurring, and attempt to close the loophole so that seedy companies in those island boltholes cannot undermine all our humanitarian efforts?

Dr. Fox: I might have expected that the hon. Gentleman, rather than concentrating on the £175 million bilateral humanitarian aid that the United Kingdom has given since 1994, would try to find the single negative aspect in Britain's involvement in the Rwanda crisis. Customs and Excise is currently considering whether there is a case for more prosecutions, and I am therefore unable to answer his specific question. Should further details emerge, I will write to him. Instead of the pathetic sniping we have just heard, it would be nice if, for once, the Opposition were to praise the United Kingdom for the help it has provided in the Great Lakes crisis, and to praise our non-governmental organisations and those who put their lives at risk.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Is it not the case that the countries of Africa and elsewhere that have complied with programmes suggested by the World bank made very great progress, whereas countries such as Rwanda, which are involved in political expression and racial politics, have not lived up to the standards of the new Africa and new developing countries?

Dr. Fox: I should have thought that it was self-evident that the political situation in Rwanda is holding back any economic development. There has been much economic movement in neighbouring countries such as Tanzania or Uganda, in which there has been some political co-operation—which, sadly, we have not seen in some of the other countries of the Great Lakes region. I hope that the Governments in the region will co-operate to provide a stable political environment in which economic development can occur in Rwanda. Clearly there must be a regional solution; we cannot impose one from outside, through financial institutions or by other means.

Tanzania

26. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what additional assistance has been provided in the last year to help Tanzania cope with the influx of refugees from Rwanda and Burundi. [11141]

Dr. Liam Fox: Britain has committed £3 million bilaterally since January 1996 to help Tanzania to cope. We are ready to do more.

Mr. Griffiths: I thank the Minister for that response, and I am very pleased that the Government's emergency aid to Tanzania has been increasing. However, will he stop for a moment, ponder the wider picture and try to imagine what would happen if, for example, half a million people suddenly moved into the south-west of England, Wales or the highlands of Scotland and started to live off the land, on which they were dependent for all their requirements? A radical transformation in economic and financial policy is occurring in Tanzania. In such circumstances, why have the Government halved their general aid programme to that country in the past five years? Will they now admit that they should be doing more to help the Hutu refugees return to their own country?

Dr. Fox: I returned last week from a trip to Tanzania. I discussed the refugee problem with the Tanzanian Government, whom the House should congratulate on the efficient and sensitive way in which they have dealt with the Rwandan refugees, given the size and the nature of the problem. We have already provided substantial aid and we are willing to do more. The problem that the Tanzanian Government identified was not a matter of need as such, but of access to many refugee groups. The Government are constantly looking at that problem. We have an open dialogue with Tanzania and if the Tanzanian Government ask for specific help, we shall certainly consider it.

Great Lakes

27. **Mr. Timms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much of his Department's bilateral and multilateral budget was allocated to the Great Lakes area of Africa in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [11142]

Dr. Liam Fox: More than £14 million of gross public expenditure was provided to the Great Lakes region in the financial year 1995-96. Comparable information on multilateral expenditure is not readily available.

Mr. Timms: I thank the Minister for that answer. In view of his earlier answer, will he reassure the House and the country by expressing outrage at last week's revelation that British arms were supplied to Hutu extremists in Rwanda? Does he agree that it is extremely important that the perpetrators of genocide in Rwanda are rapidly brought to justice if we are to ensure that the welcome British and other aid that has been supplied since 1994 is not wasted?

Dr. Fox: Indeed, human rights problems cause us great concern not only in Rwanda but in Burundi. The perpetrators of genocide must be brought to trial. We are looking at events in Rwanda to make sure that the trials

are fair and that a proper system of justice is applied because, as the hon. Gentleman rightly said, without basic political stability we will be unable to use the large resources that are currently available in the Great Lakes region to help the refugees. The greatest problem identified by non-governmental organisations is moving the stocks that are already in place to the refugees; political stability is required first.

Mr. Rowe: In such a tangled area there have, of course, been distressing stories of some aid being misappropriated. Will my hon. Friend assure us that, particularly in parts of Africa where the NGOs are far less strong but aid is given, every possible means is used to avoid it being misappropriated or falling into the wrong hands?

Dr. Fox: Of course we shall try to do that as far as we can, but it would be quite wrong and improper for me to suggest to the House that we have that degree of control over where the aid goes once it has been disbursed. We hope that the organisations to which we provide aid will make the best use of it. We should commend the courage of the NGOs, especially those who have been willing to put their lives in danger to use the aid that we supply for the greater good. We are grateful that people are still willing to take that risk for humanitarian reasons.

Miss Emma Nicholson: Will the Minister inform the House how much of his Department's bilateral aid programme has been dedicated to education? Education in Rwanda touches only the 8 per cent. of the population who are literate, despite the fact, of which the Minister does not appear to be aware, that for the past two and a half years the Rwandan Cabinet has been a coalition, elected from all parts of society, and a very good Government. None the less, our Government are still not supporting UNESCO through multilateral aid, despite the wonderful work of the organisation there. Will the Minister discuss the matter with UNESCO's deputy director-general, Professor Maurizio Iaccarino, who will be in London this week?

Dr. Fox: While I am always willing to take part in discussions that I believe will be fruitful, our position has been made quite clear in UNESCO and I need say nothing further on that. Much aid is focused on the internal structure in Rwanda. Since 1994, £127 million of European Union money—of which £18.5 million was United Kingdom money—has been given for human rights, health, education, environment and other projects in Rwanda. The Government have a good record on supporting education projects in Rwanda. It is certainly nothing to feel sorry about. We are proud of our record since 1992.

Aid Budget

28. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received since the Budget regarding the level of aid projected for 1997–98. [11143]

Dr. Liam Fox: We have received a number of representations from hon. Members and others.

Mr. Pike: Are not organisations involved in overseas aid concerned that the figure for 1997-98 represents a real-terms cut of 8.4 per cent.? It is also a cut in cash terms. Do not the Government stand condemned on their record of cutting money for overseas aid?

Dr. Fox: I really did not think that any Opposition Member would have the nerve to say that today. The Labour policy document of October 1996 says:

"Labour will start to reverse the decline in UK aid spending."

I wonder how that squares with what the shadow Chancellor said last week. Either Labour's tax and spend promises are not worth the paper on which they are written or Labour Members, if they now agree with our tax and spend priorities, have been telling porkies for the past 17 years. Either the shadow Chancellor's document is dishonest, or Labour now admits that it has been consistently wrong for the past 17 years. If it is going to increase aid, what will it cut—or is its promise just another casualty in its seemingly insane search for power?

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

National Audit Office (Staff)

33. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission how many staff without professional qualification are employed by the National Audit Office. [11148]

Sir Terence Higgins (Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission): The National Audit Office employs 328 staff who do not currently have a professional qualification. Included in that number are 91 staff who are training for a professional qualification and 100 others who have been trained to a high standard in the professional disciplines required by the office. The remaining 137 include the full range of support staff required by a professional organisation.

Mr. Steen: Is it not clear that the National Audit Office is doing well and reducing the number of staff because it is working with a Government who are committed to reducing bureaucracy, cutting red tape and getting rid of unnecessary laws? Is it not true that if the Labour party ever got into power, the number of staff, skilled and unskilled, in the National Audit Office would rise dramatically, simply because of the number of rules and regulations that a Labour Government would introduce? Labour does not trust the people and would introduce ever more laws, so more people would be needed in the National Audit Office to check on what was going on.

Sir Terence Higgins: In 1997-98, a greater volume of work will be done at a lower real-terms cost. As for the second part of my hon. Friend's question, he may well think that, but it would be wrong for me to answer a hypothetical question.

Mr. Maclennan: Does the Public Accounts Commission accept that the qualifications of those in the National Audit Office are adequate—indeed, highly

suitable—to take on the task of considering the work of the non-departmental public bodies that spend public money? The work of those bodies is not subject to review and has for too long been excluded from proper oversight. Will the right hon. Gentleman invite his colleagues on the commission to consider the resource implications, if any, of expanding its remit in that way?

Sir Terence Higgins: The main work of the office covers 570 accounts, involving expenditure and income of more than £500 billion. It is also the auditor of half of the 300 or so non-executive agencies to which the hon. Gentleman referred. I shall consider carefully what he has said and bring it to the attention of the commission.

Mr. Janner: Has the commission complied with the recommendations of the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality to carry out proper sex and ethnic monitoring? If so, what are the results?

Sir Terence Higgins: I cannot give the hon. and learned Gentleman an immediate reply, but I shall happily look into the matter and write to him. Alternatively, he may wish to table a specific question. I am not aware of any form of discrimination in the employment of the staff to whom I referred in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen).

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Angola

29. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support his Department is giving to (a) school and (b) higher education schemes for Angola; and if he will make a statement. [11144]

Dr. Liam Fox: We are supporting efforts to improve the teaching of English in secondary schools and at the Institute of Languages.

Mr. Greenway: Is my hon. Friend aware of the devastated condition of many schools in Angola following the civil war? Is he aware that quite a lot of aid is given to Angola? Should not that aid be directed into education, which would best enable the country to help itself and its citizens?

Dr. Fox: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question. I am also grateful for the fact that schoolchildren in his constituency, following his visit to Angola, raised £500 and donated it to the Chiva primary school near Huambo for classroom furniture and educational materials. We currently have two English language teaching projects, costing £900,000. It is important for us as a nation to recognise that whatever the colonial legacy in terms of language, English is the international business language and the language of the future. It is important for developing nations to learn English if they are to trade successfully in the future.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Disestablishment

34. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, if he will estimate the costs of disestablishing the Church of England. [11149]

Mr. Michael Alison (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): Disestablishment would not lie with the Church Commissioners to initiate and, without formal instructions and definitions, cost estimates are impracticable.

Mr. Brown: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. However, does he agree that whatever the costs, they would be well worth paying to enable the Church of England to renew itself? For example, the diocese of Lincoln, which covers my constituency, has become a laughing stock because the bishop, for whom I have the greatest regard, is unable to preach his Christmas sermon in his own cathedral. Does my right hon. Friend agree that as many vicars—two thirds, so it is said—are unable to remember even two or three of the Ten Commandments, there is a case for allowing the Church of England to go its own way, to renew itself and to take part in political debate without politicians criticising it when it does so?

Mr. Alison: I share my hon. Friend's dismay at the damage that the Lincoln cathedral dispute has done. I am grateful for the concern that he has expressed, the interest that he has taken and the support that he has given to the Bishop of Lincoln. Disestablishing the Church of England, however, could prove detrimental to Church and to state. It would be paradoxical thus to extend even further the detriment that has already arisen from the Lincoln dispute.

Mr. Frank Field: Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that no disestablishment Bill has gone through the House without disendowment? The effect of disestablishment would be that, the day after, the same old crew would be running the same old show with a lot less money.

Mr. Alison: I am happy to confirm the point that the hon. Gentleman has shrewdly and pertinently made. Queen Anne's bounty, which has a remote but important historic pedigree and origin, is at stake in the matter of disestablishment and, if disendowment occurred, there would not be sufficient resources to pay clergy stipends at their present level.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I join in the support for the Bishop of Lincoln who has had a hard time and who deserves fully to be supported. It would, however, be helpful if the Church Commissioners assessed the benefits of disestablishment. It has been no disbenefit in Ireland and no disbenefit in Wales. The better and more democratic position in Scotland has been no disbenefit either. The benefits would be to the Church which, it seems to me from all the Gospel teachings, should not be part of the establishment but challenging it.

Mr. Alison: The hon. Gentleman should reflect on the point made by the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field)—that disestablishment would inescapably be associated with the controversial issue of disendowment. Although that might be a great benefit to the non-conformist Churches, which might claim some of the assets of the Church of England, and to the Roman Catholic Church, it would bring considerable financial detriment to the clergy in the Church of England.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Will not my right hon. Friend give a more robust defence of establishment? Does he agree that one inestimable benefit of establishment is that every man, woman and child in the country has, as of right, the services of the established Church unless he or she is a member of some other religion or sect?

Mr. Alison: I am happy to support my hon. Friend and I hope that my references to the hon. Member for Birkenhead showed that I am intrinsically robust in my approach. In the light of the importance and significance of Church Commissioners' questions every month, I hesitated so as not to exalt too highly the benefits that might accrue to Parliament from having questions answered regularly by a Conservative Back Bencher.

Church Funds

35. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what new proposals he has to improve the transparency of Church funds. [11150]

Mr. Alison: The statement of recommended practice "Accounting by Charities", issued by the Charity Commission, and part VI of the Charities Act 1993 and the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 1995, provide the framework for charity accounting with which dioceses and parishes of the Church of England must comply. The Church Commissioners are exempt from the regulations but complied in full with the statement of recommended practice in their 1995 accounts.

Mr. Flynn: When will the Church publish the report that might partly explain the calamity whereby the Church Commissioners lost a third of their total assets in the great property boom and how they lost £80 million in an absurd venture in Kent? It seems that we are not to know the details. When will the right hon. Gentleman answer the campaigns by CELFRA—Church of England's lost funds recovery action—and Mr. Ancrum Evans who claim that the Church Commissioners should sue Coopers and Lybrand and Chestertons and anyone else who advised them during the loss of that £80 million? The Commissioners are still refusing to publish the full report. When will we be told the truth?

Mr. Alison: The hon. Gentleman will know that all the details of the losses, which occurred some years ago, were published in the properly scrutinised and audited annual reports. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman, who although he comes from Wales is not inimical to the Church of England, will be glad to know that the largely paper losses that arose from the drop in valuation of the Church of England's assets have now been almost fully recovered. On the question of the property in Ashford in Kent, if the hon. Gentleman would like to table a question, I will happily give him at least a written answer. Consideration and investigation of the background to that debacle—I agree that it was no less than that—are continuing and results will be published in due course.

Points of Order

3.32 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will be aware that, last week, Mr. Justice Kay discontinued the trial of people accused of escaping from Whitemoor prison. One of the reasons that he gave for doing so was the deteriorating health of the accused as a result of the conditions in which they were kept in the prison. Has the Home Secretary given any indication that later today he will seek your leave to interrupt business, to make a statement about the debacle of that trial?

Madam Speaker: I have not heard from any Minister, and certainly not from the Home Secretary, that he is seeking to make a statement later today, although, of course, the House will be sitting and any Minister is able to make a statement later in the day, as the hon. Gentleman is aware.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It may surprise you to know that in the past, two members of the royal family have communicated their approval to me of campaigns that I have run, but—following "Erskine May"—I have never mentioned that fact in the House. I should like us to consider what is stated on page 376 of "Erskine May":

"The irregular use of the Queen's name to influence a decision of the House is unconstitutional in principle and inconsistent with the independence of Parliament."

Today, we heard the use of the Queen's name as approving a controversial decision, and there were similar examples last week. We all regret the fact that the Queen's name has been dragged into a controversial political matter. May we have a ruling on whether the rules of the House have been broken?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is quite correct; I would refer any Member who is interested to page 376 of "Erskine May", where it reminds us that it is disorderly to

"use the Queen's name to influence a decision"—

or the judgment of this House. In this instance, I heard the remark that was made, but did not hear anything irregular in any of the exchanges this afternoon—just as I did not during the statement last week, although many remarks got close to being objectionable. I should, however, take this opportunity—I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising the matter—to remind all Members, whether they are Ministers of the Crown, Front Benchers or Back Benchers, that the Queen's name should not be used in this House during such exchanges.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman is probably aware that, once I have given a ruling, I do not accept further points of order on the subject. I have nothing further to add to what I have already said. If he can make a different point, I will of course hear it.

Mr. Williams: It is an extension of the point.

Madam Speaker: Now who is rewriting the constitution?

Mr. Williams: I am sure, Madam Speaker, that you will see my point to be an extension. I accept entirely your ruling that one must not use Her Majesty's name in such matters. Is not it also part of the rule that one should not embroil the Crown in party political disputes in the House—which is a wider point? Was not what happened on Wednesday a calculated and deliberate attempt to do just that on the eve of an election? Is not the matter even more serious, given that the statement last week could not have been made without the Prime Minister's consent? If what I have put forward is a rule of the House, should not the Prime Minister therefore come to the House to explain his conspiracy in breaching that rule?

Madam Speaker: It seems to me that the right hon. Gentleman is trying to involve the Speaker of the House in party political exchanges. I am not prepared to be so involved. I have given my ruling and I stand by it.

Orders of the Day

Sex Offenders Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

3.36 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill is an important further plank in the Government's strategy for protecting the public against sex offenders, particularly those who prey on children. It contains two distinct parts, both with the common purpose of protecting children from sexual abuse. Part I imposes a requirement on those convicted of sex offences against children and other serious sex offences to register their name and address, and any subsequent changes, with the police. Part II makes it an offence for United Kingdom residents to commit certain sex acts against children abroad. The Bill's measures represent an important step in our comprehensive strategy to combat sex offenders. I should say something about the overall strategy, of which the Bill is a part.

In the Crime (Sentences) Bill, as the House will recall, we are providing for automatic life sentences for those convicted, for a second time, of a serious sex offence: rape, attempted rape or unlawful sexual intercourse with a girl under 13 years old. Passing a life sentence on those who have demonstrated the propensity for repeated serious sexual offences will ensure that such people are not released unless or until it is judged safe to do so. In addition, the Crime (Sentences) Bill provides that all sex offenders will receive extended supervision after release for a minimum of 12 months or 50 per cent. of sentence, extendable up to 10 years at the court's discretion.

As well as the Crime (Sentences) Bill and the Bill before the House today, the Government are legislating, through the Protection from Harassment Bill, against stalking—a phenomenon that may often have a sexual element, sometimes directed against child victims. We are also supporting two important private Members' Bills. The Sexual Offences (Protected Material) Bill will regulate access to victim statements in sex offence cases, and prevent the despicable practice of such material being used for pornographic purposes, and the Criminal Evidence (Amendment) Bill will extend police powers to obtain DNA—deoxyribonucleic acid—tests for all convicted sex offenders still serving a sentence.

Finally, we are today publishing proposals for a prohibition on sex offenders seeking employment with children. Copies of the proposals have been placed in the Library. That was one of the elements discussed in last summer's consultation paper and it received widespread support, but it was clear from the comments received that further work was necessary to develop an effective scheme. The results of that further work are contained in the paper published jointly today by the Home Office and the Scottish Office and we look forward to receiving further comments from the public on how the arrangements should work.

To return to the Bill, the suggestion that sex offenders should be required to register was first put forward by the Police Superintendents Association of England and Wales, and I am grateful to that organisation for its assistance in developing our proposals. We decided to issue a consultative document, "Sentencing and Supervision of Sex Offenders", in June last year to canvass opinions on a range of measures that could improve public protection against sex offenders, including a registration requirement. There was strong support for the idea of registration—as there was for all the proposals in that document—and the Bill has been drafted in the light of the detailed comments that we received on how the scheme should work in practice.

Recent tragic cases have brought home to all of us the risk posed to children by paedophiles. There is a clear need for additional measures to strengthen the arrangements already in place to protect the public against sex offenders. We should not delude ourselves into thinking that there will ever be a complete defence against the determined sexual predator, but the Government must, and will, do all that they can to make sure that children can be protected as far as is possible.

The primary purpose of requiring convicted sex offenders to notify the police of their name and address and of changes to those details is to ensure that the information contained within the police national computer remains fully up to date. At the moment, the address held in police records will be the last one known to the police, which is usually the one where the offender was residing when convicted. The unsatisfactory result is that the police have no means of learning when a convicted sex offender has moved into their area.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Are the arrangements different for any other sort of offence? For example, if a repeated drugs offender or repeated mugger moves house, does he have to register his address somewhere?

Mr. Maclean: No, such offenders do not have to register their address. The requirement to register is an innovation and, so far, we are proposing that it should apply only to those convicted of the offences listed in schedule 1. Of course, prisons notify local police of people leaving prison who were convicted of serious offences, and those who have received a life sentence may have conditions built into their life licence that they should notify the police of any change of address. However, other than in those circumstances, there is no requirement on individuals to tell the police that they are moving or, indeed, that they have moved.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North–East): I am sure that the Government want to do everything possible to ensure that good information is held The Minister mentioned that the police are passed information when an individual is released from prison, and I believe that that information is also passed to social services departments. Will the Minister therefore clarify the instructions for local authority departments? In the paper, "Working Together", which was published a few years ago, it was said that local authorities should not keep lists of suspected offenders, despite the fact that there was a court case—Regina *v.* Devon county council—in which local authorities were held to be responsible for keeping such information and using it.

Mr. Maclean: It may be legitimate for authorities to keep lists of offenders, especially when there is any

likelihood of their seeking employment with children. As I continue my speech, the hon. Gentleman may be satisfied by comments that I make. In addition, I shall address another point that he raised in the press at the weekend.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): Will the Minister assure us that he believes that the Bill's provisions are sufficient to deal with paedophiles who, as he probably knows, frequently change their names and the areas in which they live? One matter that concerns me is the difficulty that the police and social services have in keeping track of such people when they have changed their name or moved to another area. Is the Minister happy that the Bill's provisions will ensure that paedophiles can be tracked by the police and social services?

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point, which I shall come to shortly. The short answer is no. That is why I am informing the House that I shall propose a small amendment to impose a requirement for additional information to be provided by the person, to enable the police to identify more accurately the person standing at their desk and giving them a name and address. I have concluded that the requirement for merely a name and address needs to be strengthened.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): If the aim of the provisions is to give added protection and security to the general population and to act as a deterrent to a potential offender, and if that is such a splendid idea, why are the provisions not extended to other categories of dangerous people? There seems to be some illogicality in my right hon. Friend's proposals if he limits them in that way.

In that context, did my right hon. Friend see the remarkably interesting and sensitive article by Matthew Parris in *The Times* last Friday?

Mr. Maclean: Yes, I did see the article and I shall refer to it in a moment, but I say to my hon. Friend that we must not attempt to bite off more than we can chew.

I believe that everyone accepts that, among criminals, paedophiles are in a special category. We can distinguish their sexual activity from that of violent criminals, muggers or other serious criminals because, as our research appears to show, usually paedophiles are highly manipulative and clever and often their offending behaviour intensifies as they get older. They are in a particularly dangerous category, and the request by the police for some form of register was made to tackle the particularly recognised problem of paedophiles.

That is a sensible starting point. Once those arrangements are in place—bearing in mind the fact that the police will have the administrative burden of dealing with the large number of paedophiles who will register under our proposals—we might be trying to run before we can walk if we try to go much further before we have a successful paedophile register in place.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Will the Minister reassure me and the House that the register is not only for paedophiles but is a register of sex offenders? He knows from my recent questions to him that in this country child prostitution is rife and successful prosecutions against those who entice young people into prostitution are minimal—there have been only six in the past five years. To be effective, a register must be backed by good detection and criminal proceedings.

Mr. Maclean: Of course the hon. Gentleman is right. On his first point, the Bill is properly called the Sex Offenders Bill. For shorthand, we have tended to call it the "paedophiles Bill" and to talk about the paedophiles register, but schedule 1 of the Bill includes not only offences against children, but other sexual offences, including rape.

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North–West): My right hon. Friend said that paedophiles were in a special category. Does he accept that paedophiles are mentally sick people for whom there is no effective treatment, so they should be detained indefinitely? Will he consider that point, and do so in the context of amending the mental health Acts, which effectively would do away ultimately with the need for a register?

Mr. Maclean: I hear what my hon. Friend says. Some paedophiles may fall into that category, but I do not think that all could be defined as such—although I suspect that we would all say that those who kill someone else must be sick to do such a thing. One of the difficulties of dealing with hardened paedophiles is that they do not consider their activities to be wrong; hardened paedophiles believe that the rest of us have set unfair parameters to their sexual activity. They do not believe that having sex with children is wrong—many of them believe that it is a right thing to do and that we are the wrong ones for trying to restrain that activity. That is what makes them especially dangerous, and that is why some are so clever and manipulative.

I do not regard the Bill as a panacea to prevent all sexual offences against children; no measure can do that. No measure can control all paedophiles, but the Bill is a significant step in helping the police to track down the whereabouts of those who may be offending against children. If the police are armed with the information provided under the Bill, it will not only help them to identify suspects once a crime has been committed; it will act as a deterrent to some reoffenders.

I want now to explain the main provisions of this part of the Bill, and to describe the key clauses. The registration requirement will apply in any part of the United Kingdom to all who are convicted of a qualifying offence, either there or in any other part of the UK. It will apply equally to those convicted under courts martial, and to those convicted in the UK of offences committed abroad—under part II of the Bill. In England and Wales, it will also include those who are cautioned for any of those offences.

The qualifying offences are set out in schedule 1. They cover sexual offences involving children, including child pornography offences, and also the most serious sexual offences against adults: all cases of rape and attempted rape, and cases of indecent assault for which a sentence of 30 months' imprisonment or more has been imposed. The Bill is intended to protect children, both boys and girls.

The Government intend to add one further offence to the list set out in schedule 1. We wish to close a loophole in relation to the prohibition on importing indecent and

[Mr. Maclean]

obscene material featuring children. Difficulties with establishing possession under section 160 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 can sometimes arise; but on the same facts, it is possible to secure a conviction for importation under section 170 of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979. We shall therefore table an amendment in Committee.

It is the paedophile and the serious sex offender whom we are targeting. That is why a number of offences that would otherwise attract registration have age-related exemptions. Some people have sought to argue that all consensual homosexual acts should be excluded, but we must be careful that, in seeking to exclude consensual sexual offences from the requirement to register, we do not inadvertently place under-18-year-olds at risk. In his article in *The Times* last Friday, Matthew Parris suggested incorrectly that consensual homosexual acts between adults would be caught by the Bill. The age exemptions focus on consensual teenage sex and adult homosexual acts. By restricting the age exemption in that way, we have been mindful of the possibility of manipulative and coercive pressure being exerted by older people on younger impressionable people.

The requirement to register applies indefinitely to those convicted of the most serious offences—that is, those sentenced to imprisonment for 30 months or more. Those sentenced to shorter periods of imprisonment are required to register for a finite period: up to 10 years if the sentence is more than six months, and seven years for a sentence of six months or less. Non-custodial penalties and cautions will attract a registration period of five years.

Those are significant requirements—rightly so, in the Government's belief. Registration periods need to be long enough to reflect the long-term offending pattern of paedophiles. Should the offender be convicted of a further relevant sex offence, the requirement to register will be extended; or if it is after the expiry of a registration period, a further one will be imposed. Periods of registration also apply to persons found not guilty of one of the schedule 1 offences by reason of insanity or by having been found to be unfit to plead, even though they committed the act with which they have been charged.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Does the Minister recall the harrowing reports last year of two young girls, aged nine and 13, whose charred remains were found in a brothel in Bangkok? Will he assure the House that those guilty of offences committed overseas against children will be included on the register? If that is not done, surely there will be more of an impetus to export sexual offences against children, if British nationals believe that they can commit them abroad with impunity.

Will the Minister comment on whether he thinks that one month's imprisonment is long enough for someone who fails to register?

Mr. Maclean: I shall shortly be commenting on sexual offences committed overseas, in the context of part II; but I believe that it is not possible to require people convicted of any offence abroad to register here. If a paedophile who has committed an offence abroad is convicted in the United Kingdom, we can certainly impose the requirement, but not on people convicted of any offence overseas who have not been convicted in this country.

Mr. David Mellor (Putney): I warmly welcome the Bill, but can my right hon. Friend help me with the thinking behind the point that he was elaborating? He said a very true thing that bears out my experience of more than five years in his office. He said that paedophiles are incorrigible, all the more so because they believe that society is wrong, and that they are not. Clearly, paedophiles are the criminals least likely to mend their ways.

Once the decision has been taken—a major and significant step—to require people convicted of paedophile offences to have their address registered with the police, why is a distinction drawn, based on how long each has been required to serve in prison? That depends on two variables, neither of which is particularly reliable. The first is whether the judge got the initial sentence right. The second is the difference between a fumbled indecent assault and the murder of a child, which depends on how clumsy were the attempts to restrain the child's efforts to protest. That has been my experience. Once people are convicted paedophiles, why should not they remain on the register throughout their lives?

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend makes an interesting point. I believe that we have got the balance about right. It would be difficult to impose a lifetime registration requirement on any person convicted of a sexual offence of the type specified in schedule 1. There may be a philosophical difference between us. I am open to the suggestion that the registration periods are not right, that they could be extended or perhaps that they should be shortened, but it would be a draconian measure to impose a lifetime requirement on any person convicted of any of the sexual offences in the Bill.

The requirement as drafted is quite draconian. For anyone convicted of a sexual offence who gets a sentence of more than 30 months—not a long sentence—there is a lifetime registration requirement. For anyone who gets more than a six-month sentence, there is a registration requirement of 10 years. Those are fairly hefty, but I shall listen carefully to my right hon. and learned Friend's speech if he catches your eye, Madam Speaker. He might be persuasive, but at present he is not.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): I congratulate the Minister on his approach and on his willingness to listen to other hon. Members' arguments. That is extremely helpful to the atmosphere of debate. The relationship between offences committed abroad, which are listed in schedule 2, and offences committed in this country, which are primarily listed in schedule 1, is extremely important. Is it the case that offences listed in schedule 2—those committed abroad—which the schedule brings within the ambit of United Kingdom law, will therefore require registration in the same way as offences committed in the UK under schedule 1? I note that schedule 2 is more narrowly drawn and I understand the reasons for that, but should there not be a requirement for the registration of offences dealt with under UK law?

Mr. Maclean: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his kind words. He may be slightly confused about what I said or by my answer to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor).

It is clear that those who are convicted in the United Kingdom of offences in schedule 1 will be required to register. Those who may be convicted of offences overseas would not be required to register. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why not?"] That would be impossible. In most cases, we would not know whether people had been convicted overseas. In cases where someone had committed offences overseas that were tried in the UK under part II of the Bill, and the person was convicted in this country of offences committed overseas, the requirement to register would exist.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The Government are likely to be informed about offences committed overseas because, as the Minister well knows, most of the groundwork is performed by an international network of non-governmental organisations that would readily seek to protect children by providing the relevant evidence to the Government. Will the Government reconsider the matter, otherwise there will be a glaring loophole in the legislation?

Mr. Maclean: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman reconsiders the enormity of his suggestion. We operate—as does part II of the Bill—the dual criminality test. Everyone who is convicted by a British court of the relevant offences will be required to register. However, the hon. Gentleman suggests a haphazard registration system that would include those who might come to public attention because they had been convicted of an offence in a foreign country. I suspect that the vast bulk of such people would not have to register and that the British dual criminality test would not operate. People might be convicted in foreign countries of offences that are not recognised in British law and that are not compatible with our requirements. For instance, we all know that the age of consent differs between countries. It is a recipe for disaster.

Our prime duty at this stage is to deal with criminals who are convicted in this country of serious sexual offences—there are about 2,000 such cases a year. Once we get that system working correctly, I might be tempted to examine the radical extension that the hon. Gentleman proposes.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I appreciate the Minister's argument, but I press him to re-examine the matter even before we consider it in Committee. His proposal might send a signal to people who have such tendencies and who would be convicted in a British court to commit those offences abroad. I ask the Minister to reconsider his position.

Mr. Maclean: I am always happy to consider carefully the views expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House about an entirely non-political issue such as this. I shall examine carefully all the points that have been made. However, I think that the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) focuses on only one narrow question. The Bill has two parts and the second part deals with sex tourists. We intend to introduce powers to prosecute people in this country for offences that they have committed overseas. I think that there will be few such prosecutions in this country, not because people will wish to be prosecuted overseas, but because of the difficulty in obtaining evidence. Britain has a very good record of extraditing those who have committed offences overseas, and we shall continue that practice provided that the normal rules are satisfied. Those involved then face tough penalties in the countries where the offences were committed.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I welcome the legislation because my first Adjournment debate in the House of Commons addressed the problem of sex tourism in Thailand. We must do all that we can to ensure that people do not escape the law in this country by perpetrating dreadful acts abroad. I urge my right hon. Friend to reconsider the case of someone who travels abroad and who is tried and convicted abroad of a serious sexual offence. Is it not better to catch some such paedophiles on the register in this country rather than saying, "Oh well, people will fall through the net, so we had better have none rather than some"?

Mr. Maclean: I am not sure how our obligations under the European Court of Human Rights would be affected by a provision that said, "We shall impose draconian conditions on those whom we know about but not upon those who have been convicted abroad but whose convictions have not come to our attention." That is not a sensible way to proceed legislatively.

If serious sexual criminals from this country are returned to foreign countries to stand trial, the National Criminal Intelligence Service will know about it. That organisation keeps tabs on such people, and it will notify the police if they return to this country after they have served their sentences. The National Criminal Intelligence Service performs a valuable liaison and intelligence role in keeping the police informed of the whereabouts of the most serious paedophiles and sexual offenders.

I am conscious of the fact that many hon. Members wish to speak in the debate, so I must make progress.

Clause 2 defines the nature of the notification requirement. Any change of name or address must be registered within 14 days, either by personal attendance at a police station or by written notice to the police. The Government intend to tighten the notification requirement in the light of further views put to us by the police, who have argued that in practice they will need fuller information, to ensure the proper identification of the offender furnishing the information.

We shall therefore be tabling an amendment to require a person to notify his name and address at the time of conviction, his last notified name and address, his date of birth and the information which he is notifying the police has changed. We shall also be requiring that notification be made to a police station in the police force area where the offender's address falls. That will remove unnecessary administrative burdens from the police and will be more effective in ensuring that the local force is the first to know.

Clause 3 makes failure to comply with the requirement, or false notification, a criminal offence. At present, the penalty is a fine of up to £1,000—that is level 3 on the standard scale—or up to one month's imprisonment, or both. Once again, we have reflected further in the light of views expressed since the Bill was published, from a number of bodies including those concerned with the protection of children, as well as the police. The penalty in the Bill was decided upon in the light of responses to the original consultation.

[Mr. Maclean]

We are now persuaded, however, that a more severe penalty would provide a more effective incentive in persuading offenders to comply with the registration requirement. We shall therefore be tabling an amendment to raise the maximum penalty to a period of imprisonment of up to six months or a fine of up to £5,000—that is level 5 on the standard scale—or both. We shall also table an amendment making it clear that the offence of failing to register, or false registration, is one that will continue to be triable beyond the normal six-month period for a summary offence.

I take the opportunity to thank those who have commented on the proposals set out in the Bill since it was published, enabling us to announce some sensible amendments even before the Bill is considered in Committee.

Clause 4 sets out certain provisions that relate to young offenders. The periods of registration that would otherwise be applicable, be they five, seven or 10 years, are halved for offenders under 18 years of age, and a custodial sentence cannot be imposed for non-compliance. In addition, the court has the power to direct that a parent or guardian should bear the responsibility for complying with the requirements if the offender is under 18, or under 16 in Scotland.

In some circumstances, the registration requirement will apply also to those convicted of relevant offences in the past. Those offenders still in contact with the criminal justice system—those in prison or on probation, for example—will be required to register. Those still in prison will be required to register after release if the period of registration from the date of their conviction for a qualifying offence still has time to run.

It would be a vast undertaking to track the many thousands who would be involved and then to calculate who should still be subject to registration having regard to the length of sentence originally imposed upon them. It would be a still greater exercise to subject all those persons to a fresh risk assessment, as some have suggested. We concluded that it would be impracticable to place such an obligation at large in that way.

Having examined the measures taken to protect children from sexual abuse in the United Kingdom, I come to the vile activities of British citizens and British residents who commit offences against children abroad.

Mr. Thurnham: Does the Minister agree that probably more than 50,000 previous offenders will not be within the terms of the Bill as constituted? It will be decades, therefore, before the register is of any use to anyone.

Mr. Maclean: I disagree with the last part of the hon. Gentleman's remarks. The register will be of immediate use when it is set up. It will contain over 2,000 names a year from England alone. The hon. Gentleman is right in the first part of his observations, however, in that there are likely to be about 50,000 people—that is, if we go back far enough—who have been convicted of a sexual offence. Some of those previously convicted may still be active paedophiles. Equally, many of them will no longer offend.

It would be impossible to track down those who have been convicted since 1956, when the Sexual Offences Act was introduced, or who were convicted before the war. Some people would be in their 60s or 70s. We would have to go way back in taking account of a 70-year-old, for example, who was convicted in the 1920s, 1930s or 1940s of certain offences that do not match current offences. Assuredly, some homosexual acts would be brought into consideration, committed with or without consent. We would have a dog's breakfast on our hands. We are talking of information that the police would find impossible to make sense of and to assimilate.

I am happy to listen to what the hon. Gentleman has to say if he wishes to explain in detail—that is, if he catches your eye, Madam Speaker—the report that appeared in the weekend press. On the basis of the information that he provided over the weekend, I do not think that it is practicable to try to track back every sex offender who passed through the United Kingdom's criminal justice system and then to subject those people to a new risk assessment.

It is of deep concern to the Government that people from this country are among those who travel to countries where child prostitution is rife and sexually abuse young children there. Parliament recently showed its commitment to addressing the particular problem of child sex tourism when it enacted the Sexual Offences (Conspiracy and Incitement) Act 1996. It recognised the importance of extending the jurisdiction of our courts over acts of conspiracy or incitement in the United Kingdom to commit sexual offences against children abroad.

The question of taking extra-territorial jurisdiction over the offences themselves presented the UK with some difficulties, and has required some pretty careful thought. The requirement of oral testimony and the right of the defence to cross-examine witnesses are central to criminal trials in this country, and it is, therefore, much more difficult for us than it is for many other countries to mount successful prosecutions for offences committed abroad. Nevertheless, it was right that the Government should have considered carefully the concerns expressed to us, and in the light of those concerns, we set up an interdepartmental review of extra-territorial jurisdiction to consider the general position.

That review, which reported in July last year, confirmed that considerable practical difficulties would be involved in obtaining sufficient evidence and witnesses from abroad, but concluded that some prosecutions could be successful in certain circumstances. In view of that, and the particularly serious and unpleasant nature of the offences concerned, the Government concluded that extra-territorial jurisdiction could be justified in this case.

Clause 7, therefore, makes it an offence in England and Wales or Northern Ireland to commit, in a country or territory outside the United Kingdom, the offences listed in schedule 2. For England and Wales and Northern Ireland, those will be the same as those covered by the Sexual Offences (Conspiracy and Incitement) Act 1996, which include rape, sexual intercourse with a girl under the age of 16, buggery, and indecent assault on a child. In addition, the major child pornography offences will be covered.

The clause applies to offences committed by British citizens and residents of the United Kingdom.

The jurisdiction of the courts would be extended in that way only where the conduct concerned was a criminal offence both in the United Kingdom jurisdiction and in the territory of the state where it was committed. That is

the so-called dual criminality test, and it is an important safeguard. We in this Parliament rightly consider that it is our function to pass laws that apply in the territory of the United Kingdom. We would take great exception if the law-making body of another country attempted to pass laws that would apply here. Equally, therefore, we must not attempt to export our laws overseas. The dual criminality test avoids that trap. The Bill provides that the test is to be taken as satisfied unless the defence shows grounds for believing that it is not so satisfied; in which case, it is a matter for the courts to decide.

Clause 8 contains the similar Scottish provisions. They are framed slightly differently from those applying in the other United Kingdom jurisdictions because of the differences in Scots law. For instance, several of the offences caught by the Bill in Scotland are common law rather than statutory offences. However, the effect is essentially the same in all jurisdictions.

The provisions will supplement the Government's other activities in discouraging child prostitution worldwide. We continue to believe that the best place for prosecutions is the country in which the offences are committed. If a British tourist was accused of abusing children overseas, we would look to the authorities in the country concerned to prosecute him under their own laws. This country, unlike many others, has no barrier to the extradition of our own nationals, provided of course that the normal extradition safeguards are satisfied. However, if extradition is not possible for any reason, for offences as obnoxious as these, it is right to make the necessary commitment to bring perpetrators to justice here.

The Government have a proud record in the fight against sex offending, particularly offences against children. That was clear from the prominent role that we were able to play at last August's world congress on the commercial sexual exploitation of children, in which the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope), who will be winding up the debate, took a leading part. But there is always more to be done, and the Bill before the House today marks an important next step forward. I commend it to the House.

4.14 pm

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): I welcome the Bill, and give an assurance that we will work with the Government to get it through as quickly as possible—although I hope that we can improve it in some respects during the process. We promise to do what we can to work positively, particularly in Committee.

I also welcome much of what the Minister has said. He promised to introduce a number of amendments, and, although we shall need to examine the drafting of those amendments carefully, from what the Minister has said it seems that they will be helpful and positive. He has expressed a willingness to listen to representations on points of detail, and I think that we can look forward to constructive discussion during the Bill's passage.

Nevertheless—despite the Minister's positive approach—I regret the way in which the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister delayed the introduction of the Bill. I remind the House that this is yet another example of Labour's setting the law and order agenda, and forcing the Government to take action against paedophiles. For a long time, the Government rejected Labour's call for domestic prosecutions against child sex tourists from Britain, and last year they blocked attempts by Labour Members—in particular, my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson)—to set up a national register of paedophiles.

Despite a clear statement from the Home Secretary at the Conservative party conference in October that he was taking action on paedophiles and child sex tourists, both proposals were dropped from the Queen's Speech, and only after the intervention of my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), the Leader of the Opposition, did the Prime Minister—in one of the fastest U-turns in political history—accept the case for Government action.

I welcome the Minister's conversion in relation to offences committed abroad, which he has had to reject in a number of debates in which he and I have participated over the past couple of years. Having made that point—because I do not think that it is a piece of history that should be completely disregarded—I assure the Minister that we will co-operate with the Government to put the Bill on the statute book as soon as possible, and to ensure that it targets, in an appropriate way, those who should be targeted.

Important practical questions must be answered, and I hope that the Under-Secretary of State will answer some of them at the end of today's debate. First, what will the Government do to ensure that the introduction of the legislation is effective in practice?

Secondly, how will information be held? Given the current stage of the development of information technology, it should be possible for information to be updated rapidly and made available throughout the country, without the difficulties that have featured in the keeping of manual records in the past. Are the Government acting to ensure that, from the outset, the information that is registered is up to date, and accessible to all who need to use it? Thirdly, how will the information be used? The question of access is not covered in the Bill.

Even more important, what is to be done with information that is registered with the police? I can tell the Minister that chief constables are not sure what their responsibilities will be. Their initial reaction is that information will have to be passed on; but to whom, and in what circumstances? That, too, is not covered in the Bill. It is important to have clear and effective guidelines on how information is used.

It may well be—I offer this as a suggestion to the Minister—that an amendment to the Bill, enabling the Home Secretary to set out clear guidelines in a statutory instrument after consulting widely, would ensure the existence of a protocol subject to scrutiny by the House, but absolutely clear to those holding the information. I think that it is only fair to the police to make it clear what they are expected to do with that information, and also in the interests of the public for everyone to be clear about the way in which that information is to be used and acted on.

Mr. Donald Anderson: Much of the good work in the Philippines, Thailand and other countries is done by British non-governmental organisations. Does my hon. Friend incline to the view that responsible organisations should in certain circumstances be able to consult the

[Mr. Donald Anderson]

register here to find out whether individuals they suspect of being involved in paedophile activities in those countries are registered here?

Mr. Michael: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the way in which information about paedophiles is exchanged between countries. Access from people overseas to the register is different from access by British NGOs. It is a sensible point to consider in Committee, and I hope that the Minister, who said that he would listen to points made during the debate, will consider that one. I look forward to discussing the point in Committee.

To return to the practicalities of handling the information, there is the question of how the registration of information in the Bill relates to the Police Bill, which we will be debating in the near future. We also need to set the Sex Offenders Bill in context with other activities in which Government should be taking a lead. The Minister has presented the Bill as part of a coherent strategy, but a real strategy needs action by Ministers, not just legislation, important though Acts of Parliament should be.

I am sure that the Minister agrees that the low level of sex offence convictions is worrying, that the high level of abuse shown by different indicators is a matter of concern, and that there is the wider context of child protection, which my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) will particularly deal with in the debate. We cannot just shrug off the responsibility of dealing with these issues to local authorities and social workers. There must be a proper understanding of the problem, and a lead from Government.

The extent of the problem is illustrated, for instance, by the fact that, in 1994-95, Childline counselled more than 89,000 children about all sorts of problems and concerns, but 21 per cent. of those counselled—more than 18,000—rang about physical or sexual abuse, and often both. The recorded crime statistics do not always identify the age of the victim, but it is sufficient to point out that, for unlawful sexual intercourse with a girl under 13, there were 178 convictions in 1995—considerably lower than two years earlier—that there were 1,287 convictions for gross indecency with a child, 3,150 convictions for indecent assault on a male, 4,986 convictions for rape of a female, and 150 convictions for rape of a male—although, as a new offence, that last statistic may be less reliable.

There is considerable evidence of the extent of the problem. For instance, "The Cook Report" questioned more than 300 child sex offenders in prison. The findings are clear. The programme said:

"Our respondents told the police they'd committed between them some four thousand eight hundred offences, but in truth, as the survey shows, the total was nearer fifty thousand. We also asked them how long they'd got away with it before they were caught and these are fairly typical examples. This man, nine a half years, this man fifteen, this man nearly twenty, and this one a staggering thirty-two."

Like the Minister, I feel that, to an extent, we are dealing with the tip of the iceberg. It is therefore important to set the Bill in context against the nature of the problem as a whole.

That has led to organisations welcoming the Bill as a step forward, but seeking to remind us of the context. For instance, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children said:

"A Child Sexual Offenders Register will assist in the protection of children, but it must be co-ordinated with other measures which will offer a more complete package of protection. For example, there must be improved vetting procedures linked to a public education campaign about child sexual abusers."

It also calls for investigation systems in court procedures that will offer a comprehensive package of child protection.

Getting the law right is one aspect of the matter, and I do not underestimate its importance, but the systems that are used to investigate, prosecute and try offenders and the way in which the wider context of child sex abuse is dealt with are also extremely important. We deal only with what we put in legislation at our peril. I hope that, during the debate or in Committee, we will go further and set the measure in context. The Minister sought to set it in the context of other legislation, but in terms of this measure, we need to look at the Government's wider responsibilities.

Recently, some of my hon. Friends from a number of Front-Bench teams met representatives of children's charities to discuss issues that worry those charities. The need for co-operation and co-ordination between the public and private sectors came out as a clarion call from those discussions, and it was clear that that is not the way that the public and voluntary sectors are used to operating. In the light of that, I note the comments on the Bill by the Children's Charities Consortium:

"whilst the Bill's purpose is to be welcomed, it can only form a very limited part of a much more comprehensive response to child sexual abuse. The majority of children are not abused by convicted offenders and that in the minority of cases where prosecution follows the disclosure of abuse, the rate of convictions remain disturbingly low."

In relation to prosecution, the consortium calls for the full implementation of the Pigot committee's recommendations on children's evidence. The Opposition, and especially my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding), have been pressing for that for many years. There are concerns about the way in which judges use the facilities currently available to them, and that matter needs to be pursued.

On the other side of the equation, Liberty and others have expressed concern at the possibility that some people who are not a danger to children or to other adults may be inadvertently affected by the Bill. I welcome the Minister's acknowledgement of that. I am not sure that the targeting is yet sufficiently precise, and I hope that the Minister will listen to constructive debate in Committee. There is also a risk that we might miss some offenders who are a danger to children. For example, a 13-year-old girl who was subjected to abuse by a man who is just under 20 would not be caught by the register as it stands.

I understand the difficulty of targeting such cases, which the Minister and I have debated in the past. However, if we use the clear consensus to target the right offenders in the right way, amendments could be used to fine-tune the legislation. The issue of child sex offences overseas has been mentioned, not least by my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson).

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could expand what he said earlier. He said that

the vast majority of acts of abuse were not committed by convicted criminals, and that they could make up only a small part of the total. Many hon. Members agree that we need to use the Pigot committee recommendations. Does the hon. Gentleman think that a register should include information on those against whom there are strong grounds for suspecting child abuse—perhaps even grounds that have been tested under civil conditions in court? Is the hon. Gentleman arguing for the broadening of the register?

Mr. Michael: I am certainly not asking for that at this stage. The Government left that as an open question for the future, and there is enough to be done at this time in targeting convicted abusers. There is considerable evidence that many convicted people have a string of offences over a long time. Therefore, some of the most dangerous abusers are in that category.

I should make the point—which my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport will deal with again later in the debate—that other registers exist in education and social work. We should be clear about how the Bill's provisions will fit in with those registers. The hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) was right to highlight the problem, but the Bill deals with specific, targeted activity. We have enough problems in dealing with that activity without now attempting to deal with the issue too generally. I believe that the Government came to that conclusion—although the Minister will correct me if I am wrong—and I think that it is the right conclusion.

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman's summary of the Government's position is about right. Trying to impose a registration requirement on people whom the police suspect are apt to abuse would be a very radical measure. How would people know that they were supposed to register if the police have not told them that they are suspect of activities? I do not know how we could force people to register if they are merely suspected of abuse.

However, I can assure my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury that, if police and their local intelligence systems have information on individuals, they will maintain that information. There is no requirement for an individual to register. If the person seeks a job, however, the police may share their information—there are proposals on access to criminal records—with relevant child protection agencies.

Mr. Michael: The Minister's remarks confirm the Government's view—which is shared by hon. Members on both sides of the House—on how far we should proceed now, and leaves open the possibility of linking and developing information in records in future, when more experience has been gained.

In the past, the Minister and I have stressed the need for international co-operation on child sex offences overseas. It is much easier to agree with him now that he has accepted extra-territorial jurisdiction, at least in some cases. I ask him to consider—as hon. Members asked in earlier interventions—provision for registration of offences abroad, at least in the clearest and most flagrant cases. Such provision would be consistent with his earlier remarks, especially if it were part of a wider protocol and of the development of agreements between nations on how to deal with that international problem.

I am sure that all hon. Members would agree that few crimes are more appalling and devastating than sexual crimes committed by adults against young children. The Labour party has clearly and often expressed its position on the issue, and, in June 1996, published "Protecting our Children". As they are already on the record, I shall not go into the document's details now.

However, the document stresses the point that measures must be complementary if we are to deal adequately with the problem. It is vital to ensure that our procedures for tackling child sexual abuse are as effective as possible, and that the Bill's objectives are efficient and well-targeted. In that context, we look forward to considering the Bill's details in Committee.

In the debate on the Crime (Sentences) Bill, we underlined the importance of the effectiveness and availability—in prison and in the community—of treatment programmes for convicted and unconvicted sex offenders.

There are some problems in the Bill's details on targeting, as some of those who should be covered by the registration requirements may be missed out. There are also problems in ensuring that the Bill's provisions do not apply accidentally to those who are not a danger to others, and particularly not a danger to children. The Minister made it clear that, so far as possible, his intention is to hit the right targets, not unintended targets. I accept that assurance, and offer to work with him to help to fine-tune the Bill. I believe that we can make constructive proposals towards a well-targeted measure.

I should point out the dangers of the Bill's current phraseology in respect of notification of address. It requires the address of a person's

"sole or main residence in the United Kingdom".

Why is it limited to that? People in a number of professions have more than one important address—the office of Member of Parliament springs to mind. Most hon. Members spend a considerable part of each week at two different addresses. Many people who work in London are in similar circumstances, as are people who live in one part of the country and work in another. Should that not be covered in the Bill?

A person may have a flat or home in one place, but spend part of the week with a partner, who may have young children. That could cause difficulties, as the Minister well understands. The Bill does not cover those circumstances. There is no requirement for offenders to inform the police where they spend the most significant part of their time.

Commercial travellers, business people and lorry drivers travel a great deal, and there have been examples of that being relevant to offending behaviour. I hope that the Minister will take that point on board, and that we will be able to amend the Bill in Committee.

There are also problems in that the public will assume that the police have certain information once the register becomes law. It is important that the register should not only aid the investigation of new sex crimes but act as a deterrent to those on the register and assist agencies that offer treatment programmes.

I do not know whether the Minister heard a former offender being interviewed on radio last Thursday night. That individual acknowledged that he would always be a danger. He was reminiscent of a former alcoholic when

[Mr. Michael]

he spoke about the danger of constant temptation. Unlike the people to whom the Minister referred, he acknowledged the long-term nature of that danger. I am sure that the Minister accepts that the fine tuning of the Bill should reflect the need to offer such people help and the opportunity to avoid further offending, as well as the capacity to assist the police in investigating offences.

Some organisations have expressed concern about the Bill in respect of cautions. As a caution requires the admission of guilt, some of those fears may be misplaced. Perhaps the Bill should be amended in Committee, however, as a lack of clarity could produce unintended consequences.

Finally, it is important in this and other legislation not only to be sure that information is available to employers who are considering taking someone on—whether they are public bodies, in the voluntary sector or private organisations involved in activities such as child minding—but to provide for clear checks on employers. The Government did not accept that proposal in respect of the private security industry, where there is clear evidence of offenders running companies. However, it becomes even more important in respect of the care of children.

This is an important measure, which should be targeted on offenders who are a danger to children and others. It is important for the confidence of the public that we are clear about what will happen to the information on the register, and that the police and other agencies will work together to ensure that appropriate action is taken to avoid reoffending. Those issues need to be dealt with in the House. I welcome the Minister's acknowledgement of that, and I look forward to a constructive—albeit brief, I hope—Committee stage, so that the Bill can be improved and can pass on its way without delay. I welcome the Bill and the spirit in which the Minister has introduced it.

4.39 pm

Mr. David Mellor (Putney): I echo the welcome given to the Bill by the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) from the Labour Front Bench. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister on bringing it forward. The approach of those on both Front Benches to the Bill is a model of how Parliament should operate. On some subjects, deep and often embittered partisanship is inevitable. On others, hon. Members do the House no disservice by working together, pooling our experiences and talking sensibly about an issue that is beyond party politics but is of fundamental importance.

I shall not waste precious time saying how much I agree with the Bill when so many others want to speak. However, although I do not want to appear to be making the best the enemy of the good, there are ways in which the Bill could be improved. I see it in a John the Baptist role, pointing the way towards further changes that may become inevitable, following the thinking behind the Bill. I entirely accept that it will be a major achievement to get the Bill on the statute book before the election. I do not want any of my thoughts to impede that progress, but it is important to look ahead to work which the next Parliament will have to do on this important topic.

The Bill applies to all sex offenders, but to avoid exceeding reasonable time, so that everyone who wishes to participate in the debate has the chance to, I shall confine my remarks to paedophiles.

I should like to return to the point that I raised with the Minister. It is in no sense a carping point. I appreciated what he said about the nature of paedophilia. It is important that we understand it. Many hon. Members have extensive experience of working in the courts, including the hon. Member—I could almost call him my hon. Friend without embarrassment—for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), who has had many years at the Bar, and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence). I have also had extensive experience working in courts and spent a number of years discharging the Home Secretary's discretion, under his superintendence, on the release of mentally disordered offenders and others. That experience brought me face to face rather starkly with the problems of paedophiles.

Many middle-aged and elderly men who now sit in armchairs tut-tutting about the crime wave and the behaviour of the younger generation were, in their day, teddy boys, mods or rockers, and engaged in all manner of anti-social and often criminal activity. However, people grow out of such behaviour. The teenage burglar, the teenager who takes and drives away, or the teenage serial offender, often grows out of all that—and thank goodness they do, because, if certain people continued offending in adult life at the rate at which they offended in their teens, the situation would be pretty sad.

That is not true for paedophiles, as my right hon. Friend the Minister eloquently pointed out. Paedophilia is perhaps the most deep-seated of all the perverse emotions and feelings with which people can be inculcated. We talk about paedophiles being "cured". I suspect that paedophilia is an inherent problem rather than one that people acquire. We therefore have to think about how it can be controlled. It is a variant of pathetic fallacy to think that it can be cured. I know of no basis on which it can be cured. It is a particularly devastating problem.

Many crimes are vicious and unpleasant, but the crime of sexually abusing a young child, robbing that child of its innocence and sometimes of its life, is surely so repugnant that we are entitled to look for special ways of dealing with it and making clear society's abhorrence of such activities.

Mr. Thurnham: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mellor: I should like to develop my argument. I shall not take a long time.

As the Minister so eloquently said, the problem with paedophilia is that so deep-seated is the paedophile's predilection that he is likely to think that society is wrong.

How many of us remember trying to outlaw the Paedophile Information Exchange some years ago? In countries such as the Netherlands, these people are still allowed to move about freely, which has caused the problems that have emerged in Belgium. Allowing them to spread and proliferate suddenly brings a dreadful day of reckoning. Anyone who has seen the national outpouring of grief and concern that followed the discovery of the activities of the paedophile ring in Belgium will know that we must not allow our country to deteriorate to that extent.

Against that background, I should like to make one detailed point. Because of the difficulties of getting children to give evidence on oath and obtaining convictions based on the uncorroborated evidence of a child—even though the Government have been able to make significant changes to prevent the evidential burden from being heavily against the child, some of them during my time at the Home Office—no more than 5 or 10 per cent. of paedophile cases come to the attention of the courts. Few experts would disagree with that—my right hon. Friend the Minister will have access to more experts than I do. When cases come to court, we should not create artificial barriers to prevent the full weight of the Bill from being brought to bear on paedophiles while they are likely to remain active.

I mentioned in an intervention that may have gone on too long the important point—at least, I think that it is an important point, and I hope that I can persuade others to agree with me—that it is profoundly unlikely that a person just dabbles in paedophilia. Once a paedophile, always a paedophile, is a much more certain saying than once a burglar, always a burglar, or even once a rapist, always a rapist.

I appreciate that there is a tendency not to go too far, and to offer a few concessions to those who oppose a measure. I understand why the barriers at 10 years and six or seven years have been introduced, but where is the opposition to the measure? I do not see it.

I do not know whether my right hon. Friend is involved in the Home Secretary's discretion on life sentence prisoners, but when he considers dreadful child sex murders and looks at the previous convictions, he will realise that rarely does the tendency come out of the blue—there is normally a sign. It is rarely an equally serious matter, but lurking somewhere in the past is the clear evidence that the person in question has that particular intent.

We are being asked to legislate on the basis that judges—almost as fragile a breed as politicians, as likely to get things wrong as right—pass the right sentence. My experience does not suggest that that is invariably—or even very often—the case.

I know from reading more than 1,000 life sentence prisoner cases when I was at the Home Office, many of which involved the sexual or sadistic murder of children, that the difference between a nasty sexual assault and murder is not great. A child protests at the indignities that it suffers. The clumsiness and crudeness of the attempts to suppress that child's resistance will often make the difference between an offence that can be written off as indecent assault, punishable by a few months' imprisonment, and a murder, punishable by life imprisonment.

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): I strongly support what the right hon. and learned Member is saying. He has identified the same issue as I picked out. Is it not true that many judges are not trained to deal with sexual cases, and pass too many lenient sentences, even when the children get caught? Only a fortnight ago, a case was brought up in the House. That case has gone back to the Court of Appeal because of the leniency of the sentence. The barrier of seven or 10 years seems artificial.

Mr. Mellor: I am glad that the hon. Member has mentioned that point. She was an indefatigable campaigner on these issues back in the 1980s when I was doing the job that my right hon. Friend the Minister is doing now. I welcome her further intervention.

I found myself on television this morning discussing the case of Myra Hindley with someone who took the view that she should be released, and who thought that politicians should not intervene in such cases because they were a matter for the judiciary. However, I well remember how in 1983, when Leon Brittan, with my assistance, decided that the minimum period of imprisonment for those who were convicted of the sadistic or sexual murder of a child should be 20 years, there was an outcry from the judiciary. I regularly saw cases in which the Lord Chief Justice of the day would recommend only 14 years of imprisonment for such a murder.

Against that background, I ask my right hon. Friend the Minister to put into practice the conviction he so eloquently expressed about the deep-seated nature of paedophilia. Given that, to use the old cliché—I suppose that clichés become clichés because they are true—we are dealing only with the tip of the iceberg when we deal with the cases that come before the courts, I ask my right hon. Friend please to make the law apply to all these people. In the sexual lifetime of an adult, seven years is the twinkling of an eye, and 10 years is not much more. We would have cause to regret somebody escaping the full force of the recommendations merely because their conviction became time-expired. That is one change to the Bill that it would not be difficult to make.

I now move on to matters that are probably too difficult to deal with at this time, but which relate so directly to the Bill that it is worth at least pointing ahead.

Having decided that it is right that the police should be able to keep tabs on people and that their addresses should be notified, we shall have to confront the problem—I am slightly surprised that the point has not been raised already in this debate—that is already quite commonplace in America. The problem is that, if the police have a right to know, why do the public not have the right to know? If someone with a string of convictions for sexual offences against children moves into a house, why should the nice young family living next door not be told about him? Why should the community not be told?

I understand all the points about vigilantes and about people taking the law into their own hands. We need, however, to consider carefully the right way in which to deal with the problem. If we believe that paedophiles are in a category entirely on their own, we should consider whether it would be appropriate to take the exceptional step of saying that, when a paedophile lives in a neighbourhood, all those living in the neighbourhood should know.

My right hon. Friend the Minister is right. One reason for requiring registration with the police is that it becomes easy for the police to trace someone who may have been responsible for a terrible offence. The other reason is deterrence; someone will feel that he is under pressure. It is a way of putting likely persistent offenders under pressure and telling them that they are unlikely to get away with the crime if they give way to their urges in a way that causes serious harm to young and vulnerable children. I believe that, in the longer run, we shall be hard put to resist the claims, which will undoubtedly come, that something should be done so that the public are let in on the secret about who is living in their street.

[Mr. Mellor]

It is important that, although we see the Bill as a significant step forward, we do not make too many large claims for it. I want to draw attention to two recent cases which show how much further we shall have to go if we are serious about tackling the problem of paedophiles.

I refer first to the murder of Sophie Hook. Sophie's father Christopher is someone I know well; I have discussed these matters with him, and I know that he has also discussed them with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. Indeed, he discussed them with him back in November, and he raised with him the question whether the public should be told where convicted sex offenders lived. My right hon. and learned Friend undertook to talk to the Association of Chief Police Officers about the matter. Two months on, it would be interesting to know whether there has been any response. I am sure that not only Christopher Hook but some of the rest of us would like to know what the Home Office's latest thinking on the matter is.

Sophie Hook was a nine-year-old. She was not one of the "streetwise" children we are told about—poor little mites who are left to wander the street by parents who do not care about them, and who are therefore in a vulnerable state. Sophie Hook was a cherished child, who illustrated the fact that good parents are as vulnerable as bad parents to having their children abducted; that is a salutary lesson for all of us.

On a hot night two summers ago while on holiday, Sophie Hook was sleeping in a tent with her two cousins in a garden in north Wales. From there, she was abducted by a creature called Howard Hughes. He was notorious in his neighbourhood for his paedophile and other anti-social tendencies, and was regarded as a ticking time bomb. He was 6 ft 8 in tall, and wandered round the town dragging his rottweiler behind him; everyone was afraid of him. Sophie Hook, aged nine, was taken out of the tent, sexually abused, battered, beaten, tossed into the sea and left to die.

The Bill will do nothing about Howard Hughes. We have to ask ourselves a question which came up, strangely enough, on television; television stations are usually the least likely places to find a real insight rather than a soundbite. I appeared on "Heart of the Matter" with Chris Hook to discuss the issue. One of the foremost forensic psychiatrists dealing with the problems of paedophiles put in a nutshell the dilemma we face as legislators, when he said that the trouble was that we were concerned with punishment and not with dealing with dangerousness.

Howard Hughes could not be punished, because, until he abducted Sophie Hook, he had not done anything for a good many years that the courts could pick up on; but he was manifestly dangerous and known to be dangerous, to the extent that, when Sophie's body was found, everybody in the district said, "Well, it's Howard Hughes. It must be him."

There is an issue that we shall have to leave hanging in the air for the moment, but which we shall have to grasp eventually. If we are indeed of the view that to be a paedophile is to be beyond the pale, if we wish to protect our children, and if we know that paedophilia is a deep-seated instinct—once someone is known to be a paedophile, they are known to be a ticking time bomb—is there not a case, as one of my hon. Friends said earlier, for some kind of finding to be permitted to the courts? It would not necessarily rank as a conviction, but might be equivalent to being bound over to keep the peace, which is not a conviction, but which sometimes operates as a deterrent against the bad behaviour of certain ill-disciplined people.

Could we not have a finding of being a paedophile, whereby some form of supervision was carried out on people such as Howard Hughes, to the extent that, if the framework of good behaviour set out by that supervision was disobeyed, it would be possible for some form of preventive detention to be imposed? If not, we shall always find ourselves being wise after the event. It sounds tremendous to say that there will be life imprisonment after the second serious offence, but that second offence is predicated on the fact that two innocent youngsters will have to suffer horribly before society nerves itself to take action. We need to think about that.

That point leads me to the second case that I want to bring forward, without wearying the House—the case of Trevor Holland. He came to the notice of some as recently as last summer, when, having been convicted as a serious paedophile, he was taken to Chessington World of Adventure on a day trip. It was rather like taking an alcoholic to a brewery for a little R and R. Trevor Holland absconded, and there was a great deal of concern about the case.

It might be worth considering the case of Trevor Holland again. He was convicted of a serious assault against a 12-year-old boy, and he went to prison for a number of years. He would therefore be caught by the Bill, and would have to register his address. However, when Trevor Holland was released from prison, he made threatening telephone calls to the home of his victim, blaming the victim for the fact that he had been in prison and saying that he would go round and sort out the victim and his family. He put those people in fear, but they were then told by the police that they could do nothing until something happened.

Interestingly, such was the danger posed by Trevor Holland that it was found possible under the mental health Acts to detain him last summer—I hope that he is still detained—not because he was still serving the prison sentence for the offence of which he had been convicted, but because he was regarded as a danger to the public. Somehow, the authorities found a basis on which to confine him under the mental health Acts, but they had to bring into use Acts that were not intended to be used in that way.

It should not be too long, if we are serious about paedophilia, before a proper court or tribunal is set up to make a finding about paedophile tendencies, and, as a consequence, a form of lifelong supervision is introduced—which could be waived at some point if good behaviour was evident—that would allow society to intervene before rather than after a terrible event. In that way, we could close the stable door before the horse had bolted.

In a sense, my speech has been a mixed message. Yes, the law will be improved by the Bill, and I hope that this afternoon's spirit of co-operation will prevail through the remaining stages and take it on to the statute book before the election. However, we have taken only a small bite out of the problem, and many terrible cases will continue to happen. We will have to screw our courage to the

sticking place and take further, severe action if we are to curb some of the worst cases that have been reported in the newspapers in recent months and have caused us so much dismay.

5.1 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. I have long supported the calls for the Bill, as have many other right hon. and hon. Members present—the old gang. I was an Opposition spokesman on home affairs for four years. The right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) disagreed with me on many issues, but we agreed on one or two, and one of them was the protection of children.

The Bill is not just about paedophilia. I want to talk about a category of people who will be covered because they are the same kind of wrong-doers as paedophiles. They are evil people who take away childhood and innocence. That is why the House should concentrate carefully on the Bill. I was pleased by both Front Benchers' speeches, because it was made obvious that the Bill can be improved in Committee, even if we have a short Committee stage, perhaps more than any other Bill that I have taken an interest in.

The Bill covers not just paedophiles who take children's innocence away: it also covers those who entice children into prostitution. When I first entered the House, if we talked about paedophiles, people did not want to know. It was an unpopular subject and people thought that there were just one or two crazed individuals who might be interested in that kind of perversion. I pay tribute to the former hon. Member—now, sadly, deceased—Geoffrey Dickens, who represented Huddersfield, West when I represented Huddersfield, East. He introduced the subject to the House and made much headway in bringing the subject to our attention. I remember when he first spoke in the House; people were not interested, or found the subject amusing, but we have learnt more about paedophiles and their ghastly interests over the years and now we have the Bill.

Many people think that they would have to take a trip to Bangkok to find out about child prostitution. We know the figures for child prostitutes—between 200,000 and 800,000—in Asia, but child prostitution is also rife in this country. There are child prostitutes down the road from the Palace of Westminster, and child prostitutes are available in most towns and cities in the country. Investigation and research into the problem shows that there is a cycle of abuse of young people who run away from home or who are enticed from home and are found on the streets. The problems do not start with young people of 15 and a half, but at 11, 12, and 13—a very young age.

There are real problems in dealing with child prostitution, and the national register will not be effective unless we do something more positive about the problem of the exploitation of children. That exploitation goes deep and starts very young. Often, a group of men—it is normally men—find young, innocent children, usually girls, who can be seduced into a way of life. Evidence shows that groups of men specialise in enticing young children into a relationship that leads, inevitably, to prostitution. We know those people as pimps—people who live off the immoral earnings of, usually, women.

I looked at the statistics in preparation for the debate. It is worrying that the number of prosecutions of pimps has declined. Ten years ago, there were 150 successful prosecutions for the offence of living off immoral earnings, but that figure declined to about 50 in the last year of record. Even more worrying, 10 years ago there were three recorded successful prosecutions for the offence of enticement of children into prostitution, but in the past 11 years there have been only 16 successful such prosecutions. How does that square with the fact that child prostitution is rife, as any hon. Member will find if he talks to his chief constable?

The figures are not the police's fault for not prosecuting offenders. The problem, under our law, is that if the police see an under-age child working as a prostitute—on the game, as it is called—their prime responsibility is her welfare. They must take her out of that way of life and put her into a safe place or into care. That is the real problem because successful prosecutions for living off immoral earnings depend on surveillance.

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): My hon. Friend is making an important point and the south London area that I represent suffers from the problems that he has mentioned. Does he agree that we also have to deal with television companies that give enormous publicity to that way of life, which undoubtedly has a serious effect on many youngsters? It would be helpful if the Minister could tell us what action he intends to take to stem the glorification of child prostitution.

Mr. Sheerman: While researching this issue, I have watched and listened to all the investigative programmes on television and radio over the past two or three years. I hear what my hon. Friend says, but must disagree with him in one sense. Good television and radio programmes have drawn the subject to the public's attention. Indeed, their attention has been focused on the subject as a result of some very good programmes, especially those on Radio 4, Roger Cook's on Central Television, and others, which have addressed the issue, highlighted it and reminded us all of what is going on. The issue has been addressed not only by television and radio programmes, but by The Children's Society, in its report "The Game's Up", which redefines child prostitution.

The difficulty of which the House should be aware is that, if we do not tackle the police's problems identifying the people who entice others on to our streets as prostitutes, our poor record of targeting evil pimps, prosecuting them and putting them in prison will continue.

There is an anomaly in the law, which I hope the Minister will tackle. Why can the offence of living on immoral earnings receive a penalty of as much as seven years in prison, but the maximum penalty for enticing a child into prostitution is two years? What is the logic behind that? I am sure that many hon. Members would agree that the penalty for enticement should be at least the same as—if not greater than—that for living on immoral earnings.

All of us must focus on some very difficult issues on Second Reading and in Committee. The Bill is not a magic wand. Establishing a register is a very positive step; we must make it as good, comprehensive and sensitive as possible. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) and the right hon. and learned Member for Putney put their fingers on it when they said that we must have a fully co-ordinated approach. From asking questions of a range of Ministers, I have formed

[Mr. Sheerman]

the overall opinion that they are all saying, "It is not really my business, Guv." Such a response is replicated in local authorities, education authorities, social services and the police. There is no co-ordination, either nationally or locally.

I call on the House to provide the impetus to tackle the issue in a positive and purposeful way over the coming years. We have been ignoring the problem for too long. Now that we are fully aware of the extent of the crime—the young lives of hundreds of children are being ruined; their childhoods are being taken away by evil people—we must address it and its causes. I wish the Bill good speed and hope that it tackles the broader issues as well as the specific issues concerning the register.

5.12 pm

Sir Wyn Roberts (Conwy): The Bill and the debate sharply illustrate the extreme seriousness with which we all view the offences to which the Bill refers. The debate reflects our awareness of the public's strong feelings of justifiable outrage when such offences are committed against innocent children, young people and even very elderly people.

I had personal experience of such public reaction when a little girl, Sophie Hook, to whom my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) has already referred, was snatched from a garden tent at night while on holiday with relatives in Llandudno in my constituency and brutally murdered by a local paedophile, Howard Hughes, who had been known to the police for some years. Although there was a history of complaints about this man's behaviour, the only previous conviction secured against him was for common assault on a boy in the early 1980s. Had the Bill been in force at that time, it is doubtful whether Hughes would have had to give notification under it. That fact—and that case—have rather dominated my view of the Bill. I know that it is very dangerous to draw general principles from particular cases, so I shall put forward suggestions.

I am told that paedophiles tend to amass a great deal of material relating to their obsession. Hughes was no exception. Perhaps we should try to create an offence of possessing such material in certain well-defined circumstances, which would lead to notification under the Bill. I was very glad to hear my right hon. Friend the Minister say that he intends to table an amendment in Committee to deal with the importation of paedophile material, but I doubt whether, with the best will in the world, that would cover the fact of possession if imported, and possibly non-imported, material is found in an individual's possession.

Mr. Maclean: I think that I can help my right hon. Friend. We have already included a provision that requires those who have been convicted of possessing indecent photographs of children, or of taking, showing or possessing such photographs with a view to distributing them, to register. The Bill does not cover only importation. We are now plugging that loophole.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I am very glad to have my right hon. Friend's assurance. I do not want to discourage him in any way, but he will be aware that the sort of material that appears to excite the imaginations of paedophiles is very extensive, and even extends to court records. I therefore hope that he will refine his requirements in the amendment.

It concerns me that the Bill deals only with convicted offenders. I think that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney was concerned about that too. We know that, although there is a history of complaints about many paedophiles, the complaints have not been pursued due to the reluctance of parents and children to become involved in court proceedings—all of which is perfectly understandable. Surely there should be some investigative service, possibly under the national health service or social services, which considers complaints about which the police and other organisations are aware but can do little about.

We know that, once established as a personality trait, paedophilia tends to persist and may—obviously—cause concern to the paedophile's relatives and friends. They might be glad to unburden themselves in response to sympathetic inquiries. In the event of a positive outcome to such an inquiry, therefore, at least the authorities and everyone else would be aware of the tendencies inherent in an individual.

Mrs. Golding: Does the right hon. Gentleman think that the full implementation of Judge Pigot's report would be helpful in such cases?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I dare say that it would. I am basing my remarks on my experience of a particular case in my constituency, but I am sure that the matter is covered in the Pigot report. Nevertheless, and as I am sure the hon. Lady will understand, it is a difficult area.

The issue on which we are all being pressed is the use that the police will make of the information resulting from notification. I am bound to say to my right hon. Friend the Minister that I had expected to see that spelt out in the Bill and I am disappointed that it is not. However, there is no doubt that the police will find the information helpful, especially in implementing the various child protection strategies to which schools, the probation service and other organisations contribute.

In respect of the dissemination of the information, we are all aware that antipathetic feelings towards paedophiles run high. It is difficult to believe that the diffusion of knowledge about their location—as practised by the police in Washington state, for example—would not result in unhelpful public houndings of convicted paedophiles from one locality to another, thus discouraging notification to the point where the purpose was defeated. Dissemination of knowledge of convicted paedophiles' whereabouts and physical appearance through distribution of photographs and so on should, therefore, be confined to those with a need to know—for example, head teachers of schools where persons with an unhealthy and obsessive interest in children are pestering pupils, or child care employers who are suspicious of persons whom they are thinking of engaging.

Mr. Brazier: As one who has recently visited Washington state and spoken to the Seattle district attorney—I have even been out on patrol with the Seattle police—may I put it to my right hon. Friend that one merit that Washington state possesses, unlike its near namesake,

Washington DC, is a rapidly falling crime rate? I believe that Washington state has had the second or third largest fall in crime in America. Perhaps there is something to be said for looking at the methods used there.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I certainly agree that we should look at those methods, which were shown on the television programme to which my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney referred. My personal opinion, however, is that it would not be wise in this country to disseminate photographs to neighbours of paedophiles as was done in Washington state. I have a feeling that the result would be more crimes, not fewer.

I am aware of the controversial and sensitive nature of the proposals in the Bill. Notification must not become an additional punishment; it must be a preventive measure. The police must be careful when using the information that they gain as a result of the Bill. I agree with the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) that some guidelines for the police might be welcome.

The question has been asked: why pick on sexual offenders, rather than some other group of criminals who might be more likely to reoffend? The answer lies in the particular horror and revulsion felt by the public when the defenceless are attacked and in the extreme terror that sexual offenders can strike in communities.

We all believe that the police are well informed about convicted offenders in our midst, but that is not invariably the case. I am frequently surprised by their lack of knowledge about offenders who find their way back into the community from prison or psychiatric hospitals. That is an area of police information that should be subjected to closer examination and scrutiny. I am especially concerned about the actions of some of our mental health tribunals, which give little warning, and consult very little with the police before releasing individuals into the community.

5.24 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North–East): I welcome the Government's action in introducing this important Bill. It would have been a mistake to have left it as a private Member's Bill; the public's concern is massive and the Government were right to make it a Government Bill. In some respects, however, they have been timid—not a word that I often associate with the Minister—and I am glad to hear that some amendments are proposed, such as an increase in the penalty for non-notification. I urge the Government to go further: the Bill represents only half a loaf and we should attempt to explore in Committee whether we can make it more effective.

The public need to know that there is an overall register containing all the information that is needed. The danger is that the Bill will lead only to one more list being prepared—one that will not be the comprehensive list that is needed. From the Minister's recent answer to me, I gather that we already have six national lists: the police national computer list, the national identification service list, the National Criminal Intelligence Service list, Scotland Yard's national paedophile index list, list 99 of the Department for Education and Employment, and the Department of Health consultancy index list—not to mention the other lists held by local police stations.

Local authorities are in a confusing position because of guidance issued by the Government telling them that they should not keep lists, despite the fact that they have a legal obligation to use the information that they have. Finally, lists are also held by voluntary bodies such as the Scout Association and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

What is the register to be? Is it to be only the seventh list, or is to be the overall list that is needed and that the public want? If it fails in that respect, there will be a deep sense of disappointment. I know from my discussions with the Greater Manchester Police Federation that its members were disappointed to learn that the list would not be fully retrospective: to be useful to the police, it must be retrospective. Even if the register established under the Bill cannot be retrospective, as the Minister explained, there must be an overall list containing all the information available, including details of suspects. All the evidence shows that, if the list is to be effective, there must be close co-operation between all those who are concerned with the problem.

The whole question of who should and should not be on the list has already been discussed. The Childrens Charities Consortium made an important point when it said that the list should not include those cases where there had been victimless, adult consensual acts, because that would add unnecessary names to the list.

I hope that the requirements for Scotland will be fully in line with those for the rest of the country. We need global information, but without common information covering Great Britain, it will be difficult to get common information covering the rest of the world. I am appalled to hear that individuals who are known to have been convicted for serious sexual offences abroad will not be on the register here. I agree with the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) that it is absurd that such offenders should be omitted.

People who are known to have been convicted of one of these serious offences and are known to the police should be notified that they must inform the police of changes of address. In that way, we can make the register more useful more quickly than if we leave matters as they are; otherwise, it will be decades before sensible action can be taken.

Suspects must be included on the list where the information on them is sufficiently serious. The National Association for the Development of Work with Sex Offenders says:

"There is an urgent need to address the issue of known sex offenders who are not convicted. There should be clear guidance about the management of information in such cases."

According to the Childrens Charities Consortium,

"the majority of children are abused by unconvicted offenders, and in the minority of cases where prosecution follows the disclosure of abuse, the rate of conviction remains disturbingly low."

Research shows that, on average, before a child sex abuser is caught, he or she will have attempted or committed more than 200 offences.

How can we leave strong evidence of abuse off the register? If a local authority requires a man to move out of a house because he has been found to be abusing the children, and if he complies with that requirement, there may not be a conviction but surely his name should be on the register with those of people who have been convicted; we know that in many cases it is difficult to secure a successful conviction.

[Mr. Peter Thurnham]

In 1994, the latest year for which we have figures, there were 54,000 protection referrals for child sex abuse, which led to fewer than 500 convictions: fewer than one in 100 were convicted. The information that is available to social services must be included on an overall register if the register is to have value.

It is ridiculous that the names of children at risk of sexual abuse are placed on a register but the names of people who have committed the crime are not. It is the only crime where the victim's name is placed on the register but the perpetrator's name is not. I ask the Government to give more thought to creating an overall list that includes such information. I understand that the National Criminal Intelligence Service already maintains a database of about 4,500 suspected paedophiles, so the Government already keep some of this information. We all expect the Government to try to maintain more of it.

I said earlier that the courts established in R. *v.* Devon County Council ex parte L that social services have a duty to maintain surveillance of suspected child abusers, even if they are unconvicted. There is, therefore, a clear duty on the Government to maintain the best possible information systems and to assemble an overall list that will pull all that information together.

As the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) said, we need clear guidance on who should have access to the information in the register. There is nothing explicit in the Bill about access to the register. Matthew Parris said on Friday that the principle of public notification is unsound. I urge caution in the way in which the information is used. I would be satisfied to leave it to a chief constable to decide how it should be used and to notify people when he thinks it necessary, but the Bill should say clearly how that guidance should be issued.

I am pleased that the Government accept the need for a higher penalty. One month was obviously inadequate and would have led to paedophiles risking discovery rather than coming forward, as they should. I hope that offences abroad will be counted as offences for the purposes of the Bill. If not, there will be a temptation for paedophiles to commit their offences abroad.

The right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) said that he thought it was impossible to treat offenders, but I draw his attention and that of other hon. Members to the very good work done by the Faithfull Foundation at Wolvercote. Its residential treatment centre has achieved high success rates but, sadly, it faces closure because the Department of Health, which owns the property, apparently intends to sell it shortly. In the light of that success, I urge the Government to ensure that there is at least one residential treatment centre in every region. It is appalling that the Government have no plans to secure the future of the Faithfull Foundation treatment centre or to establish treatment centres elsewhere.

I look forward to an active Committee stage, during which amendments may be introduced to strengthen the Bill and ensure that it becomes the type of Bill that the public want. If the names and addresses of previous offenders are known to the police at present, surely it is no problem for the police to notify them that they must inform the police of any future move. That would not impose a great burden on the police, and it would help to assemble the necessary information.

It is perfectly possible to strengthen the Bill's ability to deal with people with previous convictions and where there is strong evidence of abuse although there may not have been a conviction.

I look forward to the Committee stage and hope that the Government will give full attention to the need to develop treatment centres and assessment centres.

Mr. Maclean: I have heard the main thrust of the hon. Gentleman's plea that we should impose a requirement on people who do not know that they have been convicted, because they have not been convicted, to register with the police and that they should be liable to six months' imprisonment if they do not do so. How would he justify to the House, to the country and to his new party a sentence of six months on people who failed to register when they did not know that they had to do so because they had never been charged with or convicted of any offence?

Mr. Thurnham: If the Minister had been listening, he would have heard me say that, when the person's name and address is already known it will be possible to notify him of the need to inform the police of any move that he might make, and if there is sufficient evidence against him the conviction could be secured on the basis of existing evidence. It is perfectly possible to bring a prosecution if it is thought that that would be in the public interest.

I agree with the thrust of some of the remarks made by the right hon. and learned Member for Putney that, in effect, an indeterminate sentence is needed. Why release a person if it is known that he poses a risk to the public? If he is known to pose a risk to the public, there should be a full assessment before sentence is passed. There should be treatment during the period of sentence and no release without an assessment that the risk to the public was at a minimum.

At present, people can be released when they are known to pose a risk to the public and it is then necessary to wait for them to reoffend before they are reconvicted. I urge the Government to consider more closely the need for a full assessment before sentence is passed, so that indeterminate sentences can be imposed on people who continue to pose a risk to the public. The Government should propose much stronger measures.

5.36 pm

Mr. Michael Alison (Selby): I join the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) and many other hon. Members in applauding the introduction of the Bill, especially part II, and I wish to say a word of congratulation to my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, who has involved himself in this subject exhaustively over a long period.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State reminds me of one of those great capital ships that one used to see in documentary films about naval encounters, speeding towards the war. There was a period when, some of us thought, the great guns that my right hon. Friend carried tended to face in the wrong direction; but, slowly and deliberately, those massive guns have undergone a switch in trajectory and they have swung right round to focus their powerful charges on this appalling and horrible type of criminal.

Not only has my right hon. Friend involved himself deeply in this subject, but I think he will agree that he has received substantial help from outside pressure groups such as the Coalition on Child Prostitution and Tourism, and his proposal gets to grips with the problem. I warmly congratulate him on that and thank him for the part that he has played.

I should be grateful if my right hon. Friend would give me some further advice when he replies, or on another occasion, or even in Committee. The Coalition on Child Prostitution and Tourism has made a point relating to the exclusion proposed in clause 2(3)(d), which applies to someone who

"is outside the United Kingdom"—

while the time requirement of up to 14 days is ticking away. Can the fact that such a person is outside the United Kingdom at the relevant time provide him with an indefinite escape from registration? He might, for instance, decide to stay outside the UK for one of the periods stipulated on page 2 of the Bill—five years. That might enable him never to have to register, because the time for which he has to register would expire before he returned to the United Kingdom. I should be glad of the Minister's guidance on that technical point.

Another aspect of the Bill slightly worries me, and it was vividly put in interventions by the hon. Members for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) and for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton). My slight misgiving about the Bill is paradoxical. The aim of the Bill is to protect vulnerable children and juveniles in overseas countries and territories. Certainly, part II will indirectly benefit children in this country, but its essential purpose is to help to safeguard poor, vulnerable children or juveniles in overseas countries. I hope that my right hon. Friend will be able to reassure the House that this part of the Bill will not inculcate a tendency or preference on the part of paedophiles for going overseas to commit their crimes.

A paedophile might go overseas because of the difference between what constitutes a culpable offence in Britain and such an offence in another country. My fear is that paedophiles might concentrate their activities on, say, girls over the age of 14 in some Asian countries; at that age they become marriageable and are allowed, without committing an offence, sexual intercourse. Thus a group of girls who may be protected under our framework of law are not necessarily so protected in other countries: they are therefore more vulnerable.

Does the Minister share my anxiety, furthermore, about the possibility—this is a double jeopardy—that those guilty of offences against girls outside the narrow age range of 14 to 16, and susceptible to charges under the Bill, might go abroad to commit their crimes, and then hand themselves over to the local jurisdiction if they have the faintest suspicion that their activities have been discovered by, for instance, investigators from a non-government organisation? They might then plea bargain, asking to be prosecuted for the alleged offence, and in exchange for pleading guilty they would demand a sentence of deportation. Many less developed countries try to deport overseas visitors caught in criminal activities as rapidly as possible, because the last thing they want is the image that attaches to countries that prosecute tourists. For them, deportation is a quick and easy way out.

If such a plea of guilty has been entered and deportation has ensued, does that mean that the case cannot be tried back in the United Kingdom?

Is my right hon. Friend certain that we are not introducing any measure that will promote such activities against children in overseas countries—such locations being, from the point of view of those who may be apprehended, the lesser of two evils? I wish to reinforce the point argued by the hon. Members for Bolton, North–East, for Swansea, East and for Mossley Hill. Serious consideration must be given to registration when an offence has been tried abroad and knowledge of that event has reached us.

Otherwise I warmly endorse everything positive that has been said about this Bill, and I congratulate Ministers on the action that they have taken.

5.44 pm

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Anyone who saw Sue Lloyd-Roberts' excellent film on child prostitution in Sri Lanka, shown about 10 days ago, will have no hesitation in arguing that people convicted of sexual offences in other countries ought to be on the register in this country too. Anyone who saw the film will have seen a Swiss millionaire who has been accused of abusing about 2,500 young people in Sri Lanka and who is currently being tried in that country. It is terrifying to think that he might come to live here without anyone knowing that he had been convicted of sexual abuse in another country. His and many other examples argue strongly in favour of including such people on our register as well, in case they plan to come and live here.

We tend to speak of our own direct experiences. In my constituency a few months ago, a man was convicted of sexually abusing 18 young children—this in one small village. The man had moved to Cynon Valley from Liverpool, where he had been convicted of sexually abusing under-aged children. He had served his sentence and then moved, presumably because he knew that he would be anonymous in Cynon Valley. Like many paedophiles, he was very clever. He was married with two children. He kept horses, and had a bouncy castle in his back garden. He had a great many things that attracted young children to his house. Indeed, he offered to baby-sit, so parents in the area thought he was a nice man—he seemed kind to children. He was also a taxi driver.

It was almost by chance that the man was eventually caught out. The parents of the children concerned are extremely upset and angry because they believe that he has been given a relatively short prison sentence. I do not want this evening to discuss the length of prison sentences. Suffice it to say that if parents in my area had been aware of the man's conviction of serious sexual offences elsewhere, they would have been on their guard and would have protected their children.

That is why I believe that the register must be retrospective if it is to have any worth. I know that several right hon. and hon. Members feel the same. Many of these people continue to pose a serious risk to the public, and will do so for many years to come. Some repeat sex offenders are known to have been given short probation and community service orders or short custodial sentences even though they have previously served longer sentences. I therefore ask the Minister to think again. There are all too many examples to show that, had there been a retrospective register of this kind in the past, many people would have been enabled to protect vulnerable children.

[Mrs. Ann Clwyd]

There is another case in my constituency where several local business men have been accused of sexual offences against under-age children. That is proceeding, so I shall say nothing about it, except that as we roll over the stones, the ghastly picture of what is happening in our society emerges.

When I heard the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts)—the former Minister at the Welsh Office—speaking about his concerns, I wondered why the Welsh Office had not sent inspectors to examine a problem that had been evident in north Wales for many years and about which plenty of evidence had been given to the Welsh Office. Where was that inspectorate?

What happens when the state is responsible for the protection of young children? It must be the most awful thing of all, when children are taken away from homes where they have been physically or sexually abused, put in the care of the state and find that things are worse than they were at home, and when the state allows abuse to go on against those children. As we know, a tribunal is meeting in north Wales. Some of my constituents are involved in it and will give evidence there, and some will choose not to do so, because they find the experience so painful.

For many years children who were in the protection of the state were continually sexually abused by those who were supposed to care for them. Unless the register is retrospective, it will not identify people who have previous convictions and who are still in positions of responsibility, working with children.

Someone who is in charge of an organisation that trains young people telephoned me in July and said that he was concerned that when he was taking on new staff and asked the police for information because he had doubts about certain members of his staff, the information was withheld from him. It is essential that such information is given to those who are responsible for employing staff who will come into contact with young people.

Do the Government intend to give direction—not just guidelines—to chief constables on the policing of known sex offenders, and the disclosure of information to child welfare protection agencies, housing agencies, prospective employers and the general public? Without such direction, it is arguable whether police forces will be any more effective than they are at present in preventing further offending, bearing in mind the fact that they already have at their disposal information through the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders and existing police intelligence reporting. Indeed, police forces nationally, as the Minister well knows, complain that limited resources impede their ability to reduce crime. The added task of collating information, with no direction on its usage, becomes increasingly questionable.

With such limited sanctions as fines not exceeding scale 3 and/or imprisonment, with the maximum term not exceeding one month, the Bill should not be viewed as a deterrent to serial sex offenders who we know are skilled in concealing their identity and whereabouts. At best it may serve as a further deterrent to lesser-risk convicted offenders—those who have committed opportune offences where the process of detection and conviction has already reduced the likelihood of recidivism. The Bill would give the police considerable power over lesser-risk sex offenders, but with regard to serial paedophiles, part I is unlikely to deter their activities and therefore to protect children or other vulnerable sections of the public.

The Bill does nothing to alter the rate of prosecution for those alleged to have committed sex offences. For example, the number of prosecutions resulting from a major police inquiry into child abuse in north Wales was minimal, considering the number of complaints made. If Parliament wants to address more effectively the prevention of sex offending, it should consider measures intended to distinguish between different types of offenders, enforcing treatment where appropriate, and measures to protect the public when that is deemed necessary.

The Bill will not help to deal with the problem that only a small number of sex offenders are caught, and that most are free and will not be affected by the Bill. We are only beginning to uncover the problem in the United Kingdom. The young people whom I interviewed, who are now in their thirties, were sexually abused while in state care when they were aged 14. Such abuse at that age has destroyed their lives. I have five of those young people in my constituency. All have served prison sentences.

It is extremely moving to hear those young people talking about their experiences. I am surprised that they can talk about them at all, but they find it easier to talk to women. When they speak about their experiences, they say the same thing over and over again: they are not after compensation. I must refute recent claims that those who now give witness to what happened to them when they were teenagers are after compensation. The majority want to know why it was done to them, why it took so long for the abuse to be uncovered and why no one ever said to them, "I'm sorry."

5.56 pm

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): That was a moving speech from the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd). I strongly welcome the Bill. I support the measures in part II which allow the prosecution in the United Kingdom of British citizens who go abroad to abuse small children in foreign countries.

I was present for the first Adjournment debate in the small hours of the night four years ago, when we discussed the matter, and I was privileged to serve on the private Member's Bill last year and to support pleas from my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) and others for a more far-reaching measure to be introduced. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Minister of State, who took so much trouble to listen to our arguments then, has introduced such a measure in part II of the Bill.

None the less, as time is short and many hon. Members want to speak, I shall focus on part I. Earlier speakers have dealt with individual details of the Bill. Instead, I shall focus on the only strong argument that has been put forward against the Bill—the argument advanced in an article by Matthew Parris, which has been alluded to several times. It is important that the article is answered strongly, for two reasons: first, because of Norman Tebbit's famous dictum that the worst legislation that goes through Parliament is usually the legislation that everyone in the House agrees with and which is therefore not properly scrutinised—not the case with this Bill, but

there is some truth in the observation—and secondly, because if the argument is not properly answered in this place, we may have difficulties in another place, and as we are so close to an election, the Bill is particularly vulnerable.

Mr. Parris claimed that "the central principle" of the Bill is

"that a great swathe of offenders who have served their sentences and returned—disgraced at the workplace, disgraced with landlords, disgraced among their families and their friends, and almost certainly unemployed—to try to begin their lives again, should now be bound to the 20th-century equivalent of the leper's bell. This"—

he says—

"is primitive nonsense. Will nobody say so?"

His views may well by echoed by the legal establishment—for example, let us look at the way in which it has resisted many of Mr. Pigot's recommendations. Curiously, Mr. Parris outlines the skeleton of the opposing argument in a subsequent paragraph. He says:

"Apologists for the Home Secretary will object that although sex offenders are victims, they create victims of their own."

Most people would not accept that sex offenders are victims, although they certainly create victims. He continues:

"Are these not our first concern? There is a clear answer to this. If we judge a person so dangerous that his neighbours must be warned about him, he should not be allowed back into the community."

Many people would say, "Amen to that." The danger to which Mr. Parris refers can be measured in two ways: the nature of the danger and its numerical extent.

First, many hon. Members have pointed to the horrendous primary damage caused by the sexual abuse of children, but two secondary forms of damage have scarcely been mentioned. The first is the fact that the increased number of AIDS cases in this country heightens the risk of children catching serious sexually transmitted diseases that may affect their health for the rest of their lives. In AIDS cases, they are likely to result in death.

The second form of secondary abuse to which the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) referred—I pay tribute to her tireless pursuit of this cause—is the abuse that continues in the criminal justice system after the primary offence. In seven or eight speeches and ten-minute Bills in this place, I have referred to cases of untrained or unvigilant judges allowing lawyers to abuse grossly their powers in court. I have described the way in which children are sometimes treated in court. A whole range of organisations point to the secondary abuse of children in court that may continue for a year or a year and a half after the original offence.

Children are deliberately tormented again and again by being forced to wait hours—sometimes days—before they take the witness stand. Children as young as 11 or 12 are sneered at and often face allegations that they encouraged their attackers. That kind of treatment, which goes far beyond the bounds of normal cross-examination, can make the original abuse much worse. That is why, even when there is an overwhelming case against a sex offender, the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and social services feel compelled—even before the parents intervene—to abandon proceedings.

That brings me to the second danger: the numerical incidence of sex offences. According to the overwhelming body of academic evidence, only rarely does a convicted paedophile cease offending. The hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) called for more treatment for sex offenders. The problem is that I have seen no academic work—I have examined a number of studies—that shows that a course of treatment for paedophiles has had anything more than the most modest success rate. The danger of re-offending is numerically very high.

Mr. Thurnham: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the work of the Faithful Foundation. It has produced evidence—which others have accepted—of a substantial reduction in sex offences of 60 per cent. or more.

Mr. Brazier: I shall look at that study. The evidence points to a large number of repeat offences, and the danger is both grave and frequent.

My answer to Mr. Parris's article and to those outside Parliament who will continue to claim that the measures in the Bill are too draconian—when many hon. Members believe that they should go much further—is that, when dealing with threats to children, the tiny proportion of offenders who are caught and convicted deserve to be placed on an offenders register. I believe that that register should be made publicly available because parents have a right to know when a convicted paedophile moves into their area. The rights of children—the most vulnerable group in our society—must come before those of convicted criminals.

The most important single service that the House can perform for the victims of sexual offences is to pass the legislation before the election. Therefore, I would not move any troublesome amendments if I were selected to serve on the Committee to consider the Bill. Let us pass the legislation quickly and put the provisions on the statute book.

6.4 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I shall try to be brief. I am concerned that, although hon. Members appear to be enthusiastic about the legislation, they are not granting it the means of success. Page ii of the explanatory and financial memorandum states:

"There will not be any significant financial burden on public expenditure arising from the Bill. Any additional costs will be met from within existing resources."

We are kidding the nation if we try to claim that we will resolve the situation by changing the law without providing extra resources.

As to part II of the Bill, I believe that we should do everything we can to halt sexual tourism. However, I do not believe that we will achieve that simply by changing the law. The only way to stop sexual tourism is by changing the law and ensuring that we secure a series of high profile prosecutions. We must make it absolutely clear that a civilised society will not tolerate such behaviour. That will cost money, so we should not pass legislation unless we are prepared to make the necessary finances available. I add the caveat that we must be aware that the provision may encourage entrapment and blackmail in some cases. I believe that the change is worth while, but that we must find the money to pay for it.

I have many more reservations about part I of the Bill. How useful would a register be? The evidence from the United States suggests that such a register does not work. The Government tell my constituents that they will have

[Mr. Andrew F. Bennett]

to pay for the register, which will result in fewer resources for the police. There will be fewer policemen on the beat—despite the calls for an increased police presence on our streets at every meeting that I attend in my constituency. Fewer resources will be allocated to pursuing breaches of probation—a low-priority activity for the police—to witness protection and so on. The Minister has said that there will be no extra resources. Therefore, the police must reduce their efforts in other areas and relinquish some of their resources in order to make the register work.

Mr. Maclean: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way—although it makes it more difficult for me to say that he is talking nonsense in his latter point. The expensive resources are there: the updates to the police national computer system and to the police national database, which links every police force in the country with digital communications equipment to each other and to the PNC, are the essential resource. The only extra work for the police will involve transmitting the new information to the PNC when a person turns up at a police station and provides his name and address. We have already allocated the resources required.

Mr. Bennett: I am not convinced that the resources are available, but I want to develop the argument. It will take police time to process new information, and people will turn up at police stations only if the police take action against those who do not bother to show. That involves enforcement. A voluntary register will not work: the register will work only if it is enforced, and that will involve extra resources.

What is the purpose of the register? If it is merely to show that Big Brother is watching, there is some point to it. However, there is an implication that it will go further and identify suitable and unsuitable residential areas. What will happen if someone who has been convicted of offences against young children registers, giving an address that is adjacent to a children's playground or day nursery? Do the Government expect the police to do nothing about that? If they do nothing and there is an incident involving that person, there will be a public outcry.

The police will have limited powers and some of the convicted will still be subject to various forms of supervision. It would be possible for the police to say, "That is not a suitable place. What should we do?" If registration merely means providing a name and a place and nothing more, there will be many unhappy people in our communities.

When registration takes place, confidentiality ensues. There is a danger that information will get out, as it were, and that people in local communities will take action. Where will registration take place? My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) took up the issue. I am concerned about people who do not have a regular home. The phrase in the Bill, which is pretty vague, is "regularly visits".

I am conscious of problems in my constituency. Men who are registered and live in bed-sits in my constituency sometimes spend little time at those addresses and most of their time in someone else's household. They often mislead the person in the other household about their past record. They are often a serious threat to the young children in that other household. Registration will relate to the bed-sit where occasionally such people will be found rather than the address where they are living fairly permanently. The Government must take that on board.

It seems that we are changing the nature of cautions. Originally, someone was given a caution if he committed an offence that was out of character and one that he was unlikely to recommit. If that is the nature of a caution, paedophiles should not be entered on a register. If the nature of a caution is being changed to include people who are likely to recommit an offence, they should not be cautioned. Surely they should be prosecuted. That is unless a deal has been made, stitched up by the police and the individual, on the basis that he would not like the nasty publicity of going to court and, perhaps, pleading guilty. That is an unsatisfactory use of a caution and something that we should examine.

My main message to the House is that it is extremely dangerous to enact legislation unless we are prepared to find money to make it work.

6.11 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I find myself in the sad position of raising a slightly dissenting voice. I wish to sound a note of caution on the registering of sex offenders. I wrote to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary about the matter in early November 1996. I set out my concerns, which were reinforced in an article in *The Times* on Friday.

I am concerned with justice and the freedom of the individual. I believe that all men must be capable of redemption. I find it strange, however, to hear myself arguing for more civil liberties. It is not normally a position in which I find myself.

I would never describe myself as a liberal. God forbid. Nor am I a lawyer. I was unhappy about the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. Employers and others should be able to ascertain the background of those whom they wish to employ. Indeed, a year or two ago, I was entirely opposed to the reduction of the age of consent for homosexuals. Matthew Parris and I might part company on that one. I believe that the state should not send such a message to young people who may be confused about their sexuality.

I voted for hanging. I would most certainly hang paedophiles who kill children such as Hughes, who was mentioned in the Sophie Hook case. I might vote for corporal punishment. I might vote also for chemical castration, which I believe is practised in some parts of the United States. I do not know a great deal about it. A register for sexual offenders gives me cause for concern, however, on the ground of justice.

There is a revulsion for some sex crimes. A man who exposes himself in a park commits a sex crime, but that is no more revolting than a mugger who beats up an old lady and leaves her for dead, or someone who sells drugs to children. Indeed, children who are on drugs are often tempted to engage in prostitution. Organised drug syndicates and their bullies commit awful crimes. The same can be said of muggers who use knives or other forms of gratuitous violence. I have a revulsion for all violent crime, including sex crimes against children and others.

We are faced with a huge paradox. Over the past 40 years, we have seen much more sexual licence. Sexual activity used to be confined largely to marriage. Sexual activity outside marriage did not meet with approval. The breakdown of the family that we have seen over the past 40 years has led to many more children being brought up in children's homes. We often see child abuse in step-families.

Since the early 1960s, we have encouraged everyone, including children, to consider casual sex as almost an ordinary part of life. At the same time, homosexuality has been given almost official sanction. About two years ago, we came close to reducing the age of consent to 16 years. Labour Members who voted for that reduction in the age of consent should understand that if a man has consensual sex with a boy of 15 or perhaps 17—my right hon. Friend the Minister might correct me—that act will be punishable within the terms of the sexual offenders register, for at least five years. That is my understanding.

The Sun, which passes for a newspaper, titillates its readers with pictures of girls aged 16 wearing school socks. I have never bought *The Sun*, but I have read it. It contains captions such as, "Look at little Tracy in her school uniform. I would like to teach her a thing or two." What passes for an editorial is called "The Sun Says". In contrived outrage, this so-called editorial states that *The Sun* would like sex offenders to be hanged, drawn and quartered, and castrated for good measure. Those who have read "Howard's End" will know "only connect", meaning that we will see the connection even if it kills us. Some guilt lies there, and those who shout loudest often wish to shift the guilt on to others.

I should like my right hon. Friend the Minister to discuss reoffending rates. I understand from Home Office figures that sexual offenders have a reoffending rate, or reconviction rate, which is different, of only 16 per cent., compared with a reoffending rate of 17 per cent. for burglary. I do not pretend to be an authority on paedophilia and I have learnt much about the subject during the debate. I am interested, however, when others say, "These people are paedophiles and these people are not." I suspect that the issue is more complicated than that.

My right hon. Friend described paedophiles as clever and manipulative. Surely cleverness and the ability to manipulate are skills that are not linked to paedophiles alone. I am aware, of course, that there are some vile individuals. I would lock them up until they were no longer a threat to anyone. Myra Hindley has been mentioned during the debate. She and her friend, Brady, should have been hanged back in 1966.

I fear that a sexual offenders register may catch pathetic old men who have flashed in the park. One of my constituents is ostracised in his village. As I understand it, he has never been convicted of anything. He says, however, that a former police officer accused him of something unmentionable. Bricks are thrown through my constituent's windows. I do not know whether he is a dirty old man. Similarly, I do not know what he has done in the past. Perhaps he should be treated with caution, but surely the House should be prepared to treat him and others with some pity. As I said, he accuses a former police officer of having spread information about him that has led to hostility.

I remember the death of my hon. Friend Stephen Milligan, who represented Eastleigh. The press reports of the time stated that each Metropolitan police station had a police officer in the pay of newspapers. I do not know whether that is true, but I am aware that the police are not renowned for being entirely secure with their information.

Matthew Parris's article about a "baying mob" at Garrets Green in Birmingham described a man who was forced to flee. Yesterday, I asked a colleague why he would want to know that a convicted sex offender had moved in next to him. He replied, "I would want to get him out." Surely that only moves the problem along.

We must, of course, protect children from vile paedophiles, vile pornography and other evil things. Let us have a central computer, so that we might ensure that convicted paedophiles cannot get jobs with children. Let us keep an eye on them. I fear, however, that the Bill is akin to branding them on the forehead. In effect, the Bill states that prison cannot rehabilitate, that there is no cure and that there is no chance of rehabilitation. I cannot accept that. I was taught that when a person has been punished and the punishment is finished, he has paid his debt to society and the slate should be wiped clean. That is not to say that we should forget everything, but we should keep that in mind. I expect that I shall be pilloried in tomorrow's tabloids—the comics that pass as newspapers: the same ones that have such a prurient interest in our sex lives and the sex lives of everyone else.

My son is seven weeks old. If anyone should harm him, I, like any parent, would want to harm that person. Of course, we must protect children, but there must also be justice, and I do not think that this measure will prevent children from being harmed. The register may lead to mob rule. Under the Bill, for having sex with a girl aged 15 years and 364 days—an offence that may be worth a caution—a boy aged 20 years and one day will be placed on the sex offenders register and will have to report to the police for five years. Will the police differentiate between him and others on the register, or will he be merely an offender? Will not people who find out think that he is an offender and a threat to their children?

Do hon. Members remember Mr. Diggle, the rapist in a kilt? He was the rather pathetic man who committed rape after a highland ball in London. As a rapist, he will go on the sexual offenders register. That is fine, but do we really think that he will reoffend? The case caused hoots of laughter: it was a sad, pathetic case, particularly for the woman. He will be on the sexual offenders register for an indefinite period, and I am not sure that that is just.

I doubt whether the measure will serve justice well. Criminals who have finished their sentence also have rights. Above all else, we should protect the innocent, but I hope that my right hon. Friend will consider very carefully how the measure will work in practice, and whether its effects will be just.

6.21 pm

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): Like other hon. Members who have spoken in the debate, I intend to be brief. Unlike the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), I do not follow his line of argument. My hon. Friends and I broadly welcome the Bill, and we welcome the Government's change of heart about introducing it in Government time.

All of us have read about the hideous and appalling crimes that have recently been committed against children. I was horrified by two cases in particular—as

[Mr. John Hutton]

were my constituents and everyone in the country. The appalling murder of Sophie Hook and the hideous crime committed against Daniel Handley have increased public concern about the activities of paedophiles. The whole country is looking to the House to find ways to increase the protection offered to the public against the criminal activities of sex offenders, and to enable the police to keep a better eye on the movement of such people.

If the Bill is to be effective, it must be practical. It is reasonable for the Bill to define those who are to be covered by the notification requirements. I think that the hon. Member for Blaby was wrong: the rapist to whom he referred will not be covered by the notification requirements. Extending the retrospective application of the Bill could cause significant practical problems for the police, by imposing difficult burdens on them. I do not think that loading the police with additional administrative burdens will help them to offer greater protection to the public.

In all these cases, a reasonable line must be drawn between the type of offences that will be on the register and the people who will be covered by the notification requirement. In the context of the observations of my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael), I think that the lines drawn by the Bill are, in broad terms, about right.

As many hon. Members have said, we must reconcile the requirement to protect our important civil liberties with the need to provide greater protection to the public and to help the police to pursue sex offenders. I accept that it is difficult to draw that line. The Government are right to include in the terms of the Bill persons who have been cautioned for committing certain sexual offences. That is the right balance to strike. If there is a trade-off to be made between protecting the public, helping the police and protecting civil liberties, I am in doubt about where that line should be drawn. It should always be drawn in favour of protecting the innocent, protecting children and helping the police.

Some of these people have committed foul and hideous crimes against innocent children, such as Sophie Hook, whose family come from my constituency, and Daniel Handley. If it is a choice between protecting the innocent—indeed, the lives of those children—and protecting civil liberties, in my book there is no difficulty about where that line should be drawn.

I welcome the Government's inclusion of cautions in the Bill. We must operate along the lines of a precautionary principle. If someone is evidencing behaviour that gives rise to serious concern that he may offend against innocent children and others, he should be on the register: we should know where such people are, and the police should know about their movements.

Many hon. Members have spoken about the need for wider access to the register. The right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) drew the House's attention to the need for the Bill to extend access, and for members of the public to be notified of the whereabouts of paedophiles. This is a difficult area, and we must exercise caution and common sense about where we draw the line.

I have four young children, and many of my constituents have young families. A reasonable question that we could all ask ourselves is: would we want to know that we were living next door or in close proximity to a person who had been convicted of a serious sex offence against a child? If we were honest with ourselves, our answer would be, "Yes, of course we would want to know that."

I am not saying that the Bill is defective because it does not extend the principle of public access—we shall return to that issue in Committee. Have the Government considered widening public access not to every offence included in schedule 1, but to certain offences in that schedule? We must be careful, but in the case of sex offenders, particularly those who have committed sex offences against children, we should seriously examine our normal concerns about protecting civil liberties.

I have a number of specific concerns about the Bill, to which I want to draw the House's attention. Clause 2(2) is an example of poor parliamentary drafting. We appreciate that parliamentary drafting is not a precise art: some problems emerge only through litigation in the courts; some problems hit us right between the eyes when we look at the Bill. This is an example of an obvious problem. I know that this is a Committee point, but it is not clear whether the present drafting of the Bill properly covers the case of a known sex offender who changes his or her address during the period after conviction.

The Bill provides that the person is under a duty to notify the police if there is any change that would falsify the original notification details. What a convoluted provision. What a load of gobbledegook. Why does not the Bill simply provide that a person is required to notify the police if he changes his address? The Bill does not do that: it imposes a duty to notify the police if a subsequent event occurs that may falsify the original entry in the register. I do not understand why the Government have chosen that wording. That is an obvious problem. Some people may argue that they are not required to notify the police, even if they change their address. That would strike at the purpose of the Bill, which is to keep offenders under proper observation.

The other obvious problem with the Bill is that it refers to the list of offences in schedule 1. Hon. Members have referred to the fact that, as the Bill stands, there is no obligation on a person who comes to live in this country and has committed a sex crime against people abroad to notify the police of his address and details. That is an obvious mistake.

A more obvious mistake is that the schedule does not include persons who, in this country, have been convicted of a crime under the Sexual Offences (Conspiracy and Incitement) Act 1996. I know that there are problems about how we would define offences in foreign jurisdictions, and make them broadly compatible with the list of offences in schedule 1, but we are talking about offences that a person would commit under that law, which would be dealt with in an English court. Why are they not included in the list? We are discussing people in this country who have conspired with others to commit sex crimes against children abroad. They are paedophiles, however we define that word: they have committed serious sex crimes against children.

I trust that the Bill will do two things. I believe that it will help the police to monitor sex offenders; I also believe that it will reassure the public that the police are taking such offences seriously, and are developing new information systems to ensure that we know where the

offenders are. It is a modest Bill, and I do not think that it will stop the commission of offences overnight, but I think that it takes us in broadly the right direction. It should be welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House, and I am sure that it will be broadly welcomed by our constituents as well.

6.30 pm

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Along with everyone else who has spoken, I welcome the Bill as a substantial step forward in protecting children from the vilest of offenders, who prey on their innocence and ruin their lives.

I am particularly grateful because, when my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) and the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) and I went to see Ministers some two or three years ago, I can only say that we encountered polite interest but were given little hope of immediate action. It is praiseworthy that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and the Home Office team did listen and allowed themselves to be persuaded to act, and I thank them.

We should also compliment my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), whose Sexual Offences (Conspiracy and Incitement) Act 1996 started the track followed by this Bill by giving our courts jurisdiction over the organisers of sexual tourism abroad. The Bill constitutes the next stage of that Act, which was inherently flawed. Clearly, many cases will be brought under this rather than the earlier legislation.

I welcome the Opposition's support for the Bill, but I think it a little churlish of them to criticise the Government for not leaping on to the Bill proposed by the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson). We keep talking about speedy Bills that are bad law, and it was plainly sensible for the Government to consult, take soundings and obtain research before producing their White Paper and, subsequently, the Bill. Consensus naturally prevailed, and has produced a good result.

Our revulsion has been generated by the astonishing number of offences against children. In the United Kingdom, a newspaper headline in December 1996 read: "15 forces hunt child abusers". According to the accompanying report,

> "A third of Britain's police forces are now investigating allegations of abuse in children's homes".

These are astonishing revelations to most of us, who lead ordinary, decent lives.

The same applies to offences committed abroad. A recent article in *The Criminal Law Review* refers to

> "Paedophile murders of children in Belgium",

which are currently being investigated. It states:

> "In July 1996 Stephen Mitchell, a British sexual tourist, was convicted and imprisoned for 17 years in the Philippines for paedophile acts. In October 1996 a British tour organiser . . . was sentenced to . . . 16 years for promoting child prostitution in the Philippines."

Also in October 1996, a Dutch court jailed a man

> "for having sex with six young girls, some of whom were aged only 11. A senior diplomat . . . was convicted and imprisoned for the importation of videos depicting sex acts with children."

The former Australian ambassador to Cambodia is standing trial charged with abusing youths in that country.

We are learning horrifying details from the newspapers, and we feel that we must do something. Such crimes transcend international borders, which is why the Council of Europe, UNICEF—the United Nations Children's Fund—and the European Union, in its third pillar manifestations, have all published, or are publishing, views on what must be done. Because activity of this kind is so often international, we must be prepared to deal with it internationally. NCIS, the National Criminal Intelligence Service, is also compiling details of organised criminal gangs that go in for this sickening activity.

I do not want to confuse parts I and II of the Bill, but, just as there is a case for a sex offenders register for United Kingdom crime, there is obviously a case for including foreign paedophile offenders on our register when that is possible. My right hon. Friend the Minister's response that that is impracticable is roughly the same as the response that we received originally, when we went to see my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary two or three years ago to ask about the kind of legislation that we are now passing.

The fact is that we must do all we can. Not every paedophile conviction in foreign countries will be notified to us, but a few will, and measures such as this will ensure that that is more likely to happen. We may be able to stop some hideous offenders getting away with it by extending the register to some of those overseas offenders.

The question that so many of us have been considering during today's interesting debate—a question asked by, in particular, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor)—is, what more can we do to deal with the horrors of paedophilia? My right hon. and learned Friend suggested action after danger manifested itself, but before conviction. That is a tempting thought, but the trouble is that, in our legal system, a person can be punished only after he has committed a crime and that crime has been proved by evidence. Suspicion and rumour are not enough; nor are failed prosecutions. We cannot punish people without strict proof, or we shall find ourselves punishing the unpopular as well as the innocent.

Perhaps we should not despair. I am not sure that the gap is all that great between all the provisions that are now being made available and those that we would in our hearts like to see. Some deviants do seek help and submit to treatment; others are caught, tried, convicted and sentenced, and are then treated in one way or another. Under the Crime (Sentences) Bill, they can be subjected to more supervision—in some circumstances, for up to a lifetime.

Under the same Bill, even those who commit trivial offences, and are therefore cautioned, will appear on the register. Those who are convicted a second time may, thanks to the Government's courageous action—which, even now, is probably being attacked in the other place—be removed from circulation for life, or for as long as it is considered a matter of public safety for them to remain in custody.

Those who have been convicted once will now be on the register, and some of those who have not yet attacked—stalkers—can perhaps be brought within the ambit of the Protection from Harassment Bill, if a child is the target. Perhaps my right hon. Friend will examine the possibility of extending the register to such offences. Can anything be done about those who are merely suspected? I do not think that we would be realistic if we

[Sir Ivan Lawrence]

thought that the local police did not put such people on an unofficial list, and watch them very closely. They watch them as potential offenders waiting to be caught and they ensure that as much attention as local resources will allow is directed there.

I have professional experience of one such case. A very serious alleged child offender, who was charged with murdering children, was watched and watched and watched and finally caught and convicted. He is now serving a long sentence, so the fact that the names do not appear on the official register does not mean that the local police will not watch anyone against whom suspicion is strong.

There are other suggestions for strengthening the law. In some states in America, communities are informed when paedophiles move into the district. Should that happen here? My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney asked why ordinary people did not have the right to know what police officers know. The problem is vigilantism: people seeking to take the law into their own hands and getting it wrong. Most of us in the House, however angry we are, might hesitate to encourage that behaviour because the evil could be even greater than that of a possible paedophile who is at large and is being watched.

It has been suggested that there should be a criminal offence for convicted sex offenders to seek jobs that give them access to children. What has happened to that proposal? Has it been discarded? Has it been discussed with the police and other involved parties? What conclusions have my right hon. Friends come to? It would be better to have that weapon in the armoury than one that incites vigilantism.

I conclude, as many have concluded, with a hearty welcome for the Bill and with a desire to find out what more can be done in Committee or elsewhere. However, may I end on this slightly different note? Several hon. Gentlemen have said that paedophilia is not susceptible to cure. I doubt that. In Britain, there is evidence, which is growing, that some paedophilia can be cured.

The hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) said that a scheme in an area that he knows has been successful, and I have met some of the organisers. We must be prepared to spend some resources on treatment in prison and some on treatment after prison. Treatment must also be a part of our weaponry against this most detestable of all offences, towards the control of which the Bill takes a substantial step.

6.42 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): I follow the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) in saying, with a lawyer's hat on, that there are problems in relation to the dissemination of the names on the register, access to it and the information that it holds, but I will briefly comment on part I.

I hope that the Government will, on consideration, ensure that there is some means of including the list of offenders who have been prosecuted abroad. That is clearly a loophole, and inclusion would be a deterrent. Relatively few cases would be brought to the Government's attention by our embassies and by the network of non-governmental organisations. I hope that all addresses where offenders habitually reside will be on that register. I would like the Government to consider carefully access to our register by some outside organisations if, for example, they suspect an individual who operates in his own country. I hope that people who seek to leave the United Kingdom to avoid registration will nevertheless be obliged to register with British embassies overseas and that that will be considered.

I welcome part II, for the same reasons given by the hon. and learned Member for Burton. Clearly, one must have a consistent and co-ordinated attack on exploitation of children across the board. There must be co-operation among police authorities and an attack on corruption. We must be prepared to assist NGOs in this sector, particularly the consortium of NGOs working on behalf of street children in developing countries.

I was therefore particularly unhappy with the Government's response on 14 January to my parliamentary question. They claimed that their promise on 27 February 1995 in the *Official Report*, at column 689, was "an unfortunate error." They admitted that, since February 1995, they had provided only £46,000 to the consortium. I hope that they will reconsider that and provide more adequate means for the NGOs, which are doing a magnificent job overseas.

6.45 pm

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): The contributions of hon. Members on both sides of the House demonstrate their loathing and disgust for people who abuse children. The Bill will provide extra protection for children, but, for it to achieve its objectives, underpinning the legislation, there must be a comprehensive package to improve the reporting, detection and conviction of people who sexually abuse children. A widespread criticism of Government machinery is the failure to deliver a coherent and consistent policy across the various Departments. The agencies that are responsible for the protection of children—local authorities, the police, probation and health departments, which have achieved much at local level—must be supported by a coherent policy nationally.

I would be interested to hear from the Minister what discussion he has had with his colleagues with responsibility for health and education. Both Departments keep lists. The Department for Education and Employment maintains a list of people who are barred from employment by a local education authority, school or further education establishment, as a teacher or in any other capacity that involves contact with children or young people up to the age of 18. The Secretary of State for the Home Department may also bar people on the ground of misconduct or on medical grounds. Anyone convicted after October 1995 of a sexual offence against a child under 16 years is barred automatically. That is list 99. Employers must check that list.

The Department of Health operates on an advisory basis a consultancy service that applies to England and Wales, whereby local authorities and private and voluntary agencies can check—it is not mandatory—the suitability of people they wish to employ in a child care post. On 26 July 1995, in a letter to my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn), pointing out the differences between list 99 and the Department of Health consultancy service, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment said that the latter was to alert

employers to people whose applications they should consider with particular care, but that it was up to the prospective employer to decide whether the person was suitable for appointment in each case.

The difference is clear. If someone commits an offence against a child under the age of 16, he can never teach as long as he remains on the Department for Employment and Education's list 99. However, that same person is not barred from working with children in children's homes, in a foster home or in other settings. As the Minister said, it is a matter for the prospective employer.

I am sure that no responsible employer would dream of employing such a person, although, in 1995, the social services inspectorate study into small registrable homes discovered criminal convictions among owners of such homes, including a sexual offence. However, that is not the point. The point is that both lists are kept to protect children and should have the same status in terms both of mandatory consultation by employers and of barring employment. If the Secretary of State for Education and Employment can decide that a person is not fit to teach a child, the Department of Health should decide that the person is not fit to have access to children in a caring situation.

Although agencies' access to information on the national register is not being determined by the Bill, it would make sense if the additional information provided by the register in updating addresses and the use of other names were also available to other Departments that keep lists with the aim of protecting children. The determination of paedophiles to gain access to children must be matched by a determination to stop them. I hope that, in Committee, the Minister will be able to clarify how the national register will operate with those other lists.

I am interested in the Minister's discussions with his colleagues in the Department of Health, which has major responsibilities for child protection. Under section 47 of the Children Act 1989, local authorities have a duty to investigate allegations of abuse, including sexual abuse. However, there seems to have been a shift in the Department of Health's approach to child protection following the publication of the document entitled "Messages from Research". There is widespread promotion of a lighter touch, and although I can understand that approach in relation to the debate on smacking, I am not sure how it will operate in terms of allegations of sexual abuse, or how a new severity criterion might operate, especially as, alongside that, messages seem to be emanating from the Department of Health about introducing a substantiation criterion.

The document "Messages from Research" notes that some types of allegation are rarely substantiated and suggests that they might be pursued or dealt with under the "in need" rather than the child protection procedures. The most common form of unsubstantiated allegation is sexual abuse. Perpetrators are fully aware of the difficulty of proving that sexual abuse has taken place. Indeed, some paedophiles target lone women with small children for that very reason.

Irrespective of the message from the Department of Health, the Children Act continues to place a duty on local authorities to investigate. To enable a lighter touch, there would need to be changes to that Act. I warn the Government against any attempt, arising from an ideological war with local authorities, to weaken child protection procedures in the area of sexual abuse. The losers would be children and the gainers would be the abusers.

What discussions have Home Office Ministers had with colleagues in the Department of Health to ensure departmental consistency? There is little point in a Home Office Bill to increase protection for children if Ministers in another Department undermine the procedures that detect that abuse, enable convictions and protect the public by a national register.

We welcome the Bill's principles and its aim of giving children better protection from those who would sexually abuse them, but it can be effective only as one of a number of measures. A commitment to the protection of children cannot be judged solely on fine words. In every aspect of government and in every Department there must be effective legislation and procedures.

6.51 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope): I am pleased that we have had an opportunity to discuss the Bill, and I am encouraged by the commitment of hon. Members in all parts of the House to the need for firm and effective action to tackle the scourge of sex offending, particularly that involving children.

Those who spoke in the debate included my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor); my right hon. Friends the Members for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) and for Selby (Mr. Alison); my hon. Friends the Members for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) and for Blaby (Mr. Robathan); and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence). Opposition Members who spoke included the hon. Members for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham), for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) and for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson). The number of hon. Members who spoke shows the great interest that the debate engendered. I am sure that the Bill will continue to engender such interest as it proceeds.

Nothing could be more hateful than sexual offences against the most innocent and vulnerable members of our or any other society, and the Bill contains important provisions for tackling the problem. It responds to widespread public concern. Many will be watching our proceedings with interest, and the lives of many others will benefit from the Bill's provisions. Its enactment will mean that the police will have up-to-date information on the whereabouts of convicted sex offenders and will be able to use it for the investigation and prevention of crime.

The registration requirement will also be a powerful deterrent. Offenders will be aware from the moment they register a change of address that the police know about them and have them in their sights. Those who are tempted not to register should know that that would result in the commission of a further significant criminal offence.

The provisions are tough, and we make no apology for that. They will place some offenders under an obligation to report their movements for the rest of their lives, and that is

[Mr. Timothy Kirkhope]

right. Any measure that strengthens the power of the police in tackling the scourge of sex offending, particularly against children, is to be applauded.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Kirkhope: I am sorry, but time is too short to give way.

Part II of the Bill is significant. As my right hon. Friend the Minister of State said in opening the debate, it was my privilege in August to represent the United Kingdom at the Stockholm world congress on the commercial sexual exploitation of children. I was moved by what I heard about such exploitation is some parts of the world and by the determination of everyone present to deal with the problem.

It was clear that we have much to teach others about the investigation of child sexual abuse and the care of child victims in the criminal justice system. I am especially pleased that the Bill will enable us to put in place a key further element in our response to the phenomenon of child sex tourism by extending the jurisdiction of our courts to cover offences that have been committed by Britons abroad.

There is not enough time available to reply to all the hon. Members who spoke. However, I should like to deal with one or two matters. In her winding-up speech, the hon. Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) specifically asked about co-ordination and liaison. Not only is there fully developed co-ordination between Departments but there is a good relationship between Departments of State and the non-governmental organisations which were mentioned by some hon. Members. That relationship is important, and since Stockholm I have been keen to encourage it. There will shortly be another meeting with members of the coalition against child prostitution who have worked hard to focus attention on issues relating to international child abuse. By such means we are able to take forward our plans.

I should like to make a slight correction to the comments of the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael). I mentioned in August the Government's decision to extend the jurisdiction of United Kingdom courts to allow trials in the United Kingdom of those committing child sexual abuse abroad. I gave a clear undertaking that the Government would make progress as soon as possible when a suitable vehicle was available. I do not want to trade words with the hon. Gentleman about who said what first, but we have always recognised the importance of these matters. I made that clear last summer, long before some of the dates to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

The hon. Members for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) and for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) asked whether it was possible to take account of convictions in foreign courts and to use them as a basis for registration here. To place an obligation on the authorities in respect of those who have been convicted abroad would undoubtedly imply recognition of the judgment of a foreign court. It would also assume that the sentences were compatible with the sentences that would have been imposed here and that the standards of evidence and procedure in the foreign courts were compatible with ours.

Such a recognition of foreign criminal judgments, passed anywhere in the world, would create precedent. Therefore, it is difficult for us to move down that path, although it might be regarded by many as worth considering. Perhaps it could be considered further in Committee. As the House knows, there is compatibility in our extradition arrangements and it is based on the concept of dual criminality. That removes the problems that might otherwise occur in the proposals that have been suggested.

There is insufficient time to deal with other matters that have been raised. Most hon. Members who spoke expressed the wish that the legislation should proceed as quickly as possible. I agree, and in Committee we shall be interested to hear their further thoughts on improving the legislation, because it is important that it reaches the statute book as soon as possible.

We have had an interesting and informed debate. We have also heard of the determination of all hon. Members who have spoken in this debate to make a real impact on the terrible problem of sex offending. The Bill is an important contribution to efforts in dealing with the problem, and I hope that it will very quickly reach the statute book.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Education Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Ordered,

That the Education Bill, as amended, be considered in the following order, namely, New Clauses 3 and 4, New Clauses 8 to 11, New Clauses 1 and 2, New Clauses 12 and 13, other New Clauses, amendments relating to Clause 1, Schedule 1, Clauses 2 to 12, Schedule 2, Clauses 13 to 24, Schedule 3, Clauses 25 to 28, Schedule 4, Clauses 29 and 30, Schedule 5, Clauses 31 to 36, Schedule 6, Clauses 37 to 42, Schedule 7, Clauses 43 to 57, Schedule 8, Clauses 58 to 71, Schedules 9 and 10, Clause 72, new Schedules.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

New clause 3

RELAXATION OF CONTROLS ON ENLARGEMENT OF PREMISES

'. After section 259 of the Education Act 1996 there shall be inserted—

"Significant enlargements for the purposes of section 259

259A.—(1) For the purposes of section 259 an enlargement of the premises of a grant–maintained school is a significant enlargement of those premises if (and only if) the effect of the enlargement, taken with all previous enlargements (if any) taking place since the appropriate date, would increase the school's capacity by more than 50 per cent. or 30 pupils (whichever is the greater) as compared with—

(a) its capacity on the appropriate date; or

(b) if at any time after that date its capacity was lower than its capacity on that date, its lowest capacity at any such time.

(2) An enlargement of the premises of a grant–maintained school is accordingly not a significant enlargement of those premises for the purposes of section 259 if its effect, taken with all such previous enlargements (if any), would not be to produce such an increase in the school's capacity.

(3) In subsection (1) "the appropriate date" means whichever is the latest of the following dates—

(a) the date falling four years before the date on which the governing body form the intention to make the enlargement concerned,

(b) the date when the school was established,

(c) where any proposals for a significant enlargement of the premises of the school have been approved by the Secretary of State under—

(i) section 261 below or section 98 of the Education Act 1993, or

(ii) section 37 or 43 above or section 12 or 13 of the Education Act 1980,

the date (or latest date) on which any such proposals were implemented, and

(d) where the local education authority have determined to implement any proposals for a significant enlargement of the premises of the school under section 38 above or section 12(7) of the Education Act 1980, the date (or latest date) on which any such proposals were implemented.

(4) The Secretary of State may by regulations prescribe the method for determining a school's capacity for the purposes of this section; and in this section references to a school's capacity are references to its capacity to accommodate pupils.

(5) Nothing in this section applies to a school requiring special measures to be taken.".'.—*[Mr. Forth.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

7 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Some hon. Members will recognise this clause as an old friend—which almost survived a number of attempts in Committee to spoil its clarity and simplicity. In re-introducing it, we have felt the need to change only one word in new section 259A, and that change is purely technical.

New clause 3 makes an important contribution to the deregulation of controls over the expansion of grant-maintained schools, by enabling GM schools to enlarge their premises by up to 50 per cent. without the need to publish statutory proposals. The provision is not entirely new, as non-significant enlargements can already be made to all schools without the need for publishing statutory proposals. Under current legislation, changes would normally be regarded as non-significant—and therefore not require statutory proposals—if they increased the size of a school by less than 25 per cent., or fewer than 30 places.

New section 259A(1), which is introduced by the new clause, would effectively change the definition of "significant enlargement" for grant-maintained schools to one in which the capacity of the premises is increased by more than 50 per cent. Similarly to current provision, schools would be able to add 30 places without publishing proposals, even when such a change would increase the size of premises by more than 50 per cent. To avoid very rapid cumulative increases occurring, schools would be required to examine the previous four-year period to assess whether a change is significant.

The increased freedom provided by the new clause would enable grant-maintained schools to respond to the wishes of parents and to decide for themselves what size of school will most usefully serve their specific area. Such changes will not necessarily require investment of additional public funds, because putting decisions more directly into the hands of schools will increase incentives for governors to explore other ways in which to finance necessary capital work. That is not freedom without responsibility, because—as we made clear in Committee—the Bill requires governors who propose to make enlargements to decide who has an interest, and to consult them about the proposals before making a decision to proceed.

Some hon. Members may be concerned that the change is limited to the grant-maintained sector, but we believe that it is appropriate for GM schools to take the lead in this matter. Not only are many GM schools popular with pupils and parents, but they are in the best position to investigate innovative approaches to funding additional provision. New clause 3 should enable them to expand to meet demand. I realise that, in some cases, expansion will occur in areas where there are surplus places, but there are ways in which to remove those places if they are in schools that parents do not choose.

I also realise that many popular schools are outside the GM sector. Those schools will continue, in the normal manner, to be able to make proposals for significant enlargements. We have made it clear that there will be

[Mr. Eric Forth]

circumstances in which, in the interests of increasing choice and diversity, we will be willing to approve increases in places, even when surplus places exist in the area, and especially when subsequent removal of unsatisfactory provision is likely.

I hope that hon. Members will therefore understand that new clause 3 is a useful measure in increasing the autonomy and responsibility of GM schools and in giving them an opportunity to respond imaginatively to parents' wishes. It is an integral part of the Bill, and I hope that the House will approve it.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): As we have already fully deployed our arguments in Committee on new clause 3—on 3 December 1996—and it was lost by the Government, there is little or no point in revisiting them; they have been reported in *Hansard*. I believe that we should move to a vote on the new clause.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 272, Noes 273.

Division No. 52] **[7.3 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Body, Sir Richard
Boreor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Egger, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hat'fd)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Gummer, John
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howell, David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Onslow, Sir Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Scott, Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs Gillian
Shephard, Sir Colin *(Hersf'd)*
Shephard, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*

Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, William
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wiltshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Gyles Brandreth and
Mr. Anthony Coombs.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashton, Joseph
Austin–Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, D N
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Davies, Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd–on–A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Ilsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stret'd)*
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian *(Makerf'd)*
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
Oakes, Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs B *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Robert
Shore, Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms R *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Sir Harold
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N

Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan (Swansea W)
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Greg Pope and
Mr. Joe Benton.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In view of the consequential measures dependent on the new clause and given that the Bill is now severely damaged, will the Government withdraw the measure and come back to us so that we can form a consensus on those parts of the Bill on which the whole House agrees?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): That is not a matter for the Chair.

Ms Estelle Morris (Birmingham, Yardley): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I seek clarification. The clause was lost in Committee, but we went on to consider further clauses that related to it on the understanding that the Government would bring it back on Report. The Government have failed to carry this important new clause, on which later clauses depend. Can we have your guidance on what will happen to clauses that refer to the new clause that has been lost?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We must proceed with the Bill. The Government will no doubt take note of the points that have been made.

Mr. Blunkett: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would not dream of challenging your decision, but as it was ruled in Committee that the deletion of the clause would have consequential results on the remainder of the Bill, it is difficult to see how the Government can proceed with the Bill in its present form. They said in Committee that they could not.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have nothing to add to what I have said. We must carry on with consideration of the Bill. I have no doubt that the Government will take note of what the hon. Gentleman has said.

New clause 4

POWER OF MEMBERS OF STAFF TO RESTRAIN PUPILS

'. After section 550 of the Education Act 1996 there shall be inserted—

"Power to restrain pupils

Power of members of staff to restrain pupils

550A.—(1) A member of the staff of a school may use, in relation to any pupil at the school, such force as is reasonable in the circumstances for the purpose of preventing the pupil from doing (or continuing to do) any of the following, namely—

(a) committing any offence,

(b) causing personal injury to, or damage to the property of, any person (including the pupil himself), or

(c) engaging in any behaviour prejudicial to the maintenance of good order and discipline at the school or among any of its pupils, whether that behaviour occurs during a teaching session or otherwise.

(2) Subsection (1) applies where a member of the staff of a school is—

(a) on the premises of the school, or

(b) elsewhere at a time when, as a member of its staff, he has lawful control or charge of the pupil concerned;

but it does not authorise anything to be done in relation to a pupil which constitutes the giving of corporal punishment within the meaning of section 548.

(3) Subsection (1) shall not be taken to prevent any person from relying on any defence available to him otherwise than by virtue of this section.

(4) In this section—

"member of the staff", in relation to a school, means any teacher who works at the school and any other person who, with the authority of the head teacher, has lawful control or charge of pupils at the school;

"offence" includes anything that would be an offence but for the operation of any presumption that a person under a particular age is incapable of committing an offence.".'.—*[Mr. Forth.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Forth: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 12 and 40.

Mr. Forth: The new clause is intended to help teachers. I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will welcome it, as the teachers' unions have. It will codify and clarify teachers' powers to restrain disruptive pupils. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Will hon. Members leaving the Chamber please leave quietly, and will those remaining please give the Minister a fair hearing?

Mr. Forth: Teachers and other staff authorised by the head teacher will have the—

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): Will my hon. Friend help me and other hon. Members? Does the new clause have any implications for any new clauses, which we may debate later, that relate specifically to corporal punishment?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend will be aware that the wording of part of the new clause bears directly on the point that he has raised. To help my hon. Friend, I shall quote the new clause. It says that the clause

"does not authorise anything to be done in relation to a pupil which constitutes the giving of corporal punishment within the meaning of section 548."

My hon. Friend will agree that, in framing this important provision, which has the support of teachers and their unions, we have been conscious of the fact that others see such matters from a different perspective and might have shared my hon. Friend's worry that it might overlap with any possible provisions for corporal punishment. That is why—I hope that my hon. Friend accepts the validity of this—we have taken the trouble to put into the new clause a specific form of words to clarify beyond doubt the fact that the ability of a teacher to use reasonable restraint in

trying to keep order in the classroom cannot and will not be construed as giving any sort of authority for the reintroduction of corporal punishment.

Mr. Pawsey: My hon. Friend might acknowledge that there is a fine line between restraint—preventing a pupil from hurting or injuring another pupil—and the use of corporal punishment. It might be construed that corporal punishment is being used in restraining a child. That is a fine point. I should be grateful if my hon. Friend could spend a little time—for my benefit if for no one else's—explaining the distinction.

Mr. Forth: I understand my hon. Friend's point, which is important. He will remember that, in Committee—I think that it was when we were debating his new clause—similar points were raised about the confusion that might arise in the definition of corporal punishment. I understand why my hon. Friend is bringing a similar argument to bear on the possible definitional problems that might exist on restraint in the classroom. I have two reassurances for him, which I hope he will accept. First, there will inevitably be guidelines which, after due consultation, my Department will issue the better to give guidance to teachers, heads and others on how to interpret the clause and to put the issue beyond doubt. Secondly, any reasonable person reading the new clause, knowing its context, and understanding the motivation behind it, would have difficulty confusing reasonable restraint by a teacher with the administration of corporal punishment. I accept that my hon. Friend's argument might apply in extreme cases, but I doubt whether they would arise.

Mr. Pawsey: I apologise for continuing to interrupt my hon. Friend's speech. I understand that he is developing the theme. Does he intend to refer to the European perspective? He will know that there have been some erroneous claims that the European Court has ruled against the United Kingdom on the use of corporal punishment in schools.

Mr. Forth *indicated assent.*

Mr. Pawsey: Clearly my hon. Friend agrees that those claims are erroneous. Will he confirm that the new clause does not fall foul of the European Court of Justice?

Mr. Forth: I am confident that there is no danger of our falling foul of the European Court of Human Rights on this because the measure is designed not only to protect teachers—rightly—against what are often said to be unfair and unfounded accusations, but to protect pupils. It will apply when a teacher restrains a pupil who may be fighting or in conflict with another. One of the important motivations behind the new clause—I am glad that my hon. Friend has given me the opportunity to explain this—is to provide additional protection to pupils. At a cursory reading, it may seem to be all about protecting teachers, but my hon. Friend, with his enormous knowledge and understanding of such matters, will know that one of the other purposes of the new clause is to provide real protection to pupils. We are giving teachers the power to restrain pupils who are harming one another—or even, as might occasionally happen, harming themselves—or causing disruption in the classroom.

Existing common law principles allow teachers to take reasonable steps to restrain seriously disruptive pupils, but many people seem not to understand that, perhaps because those principles are derived from 19th century case law.

Mr. Pawsey: I am following my hon. Friend's argument closely. When a teacher intervenes in a classroom brawl or, more likely, a playground brawl, is there a risk of that teacher falling foul of insurance provision? Can my hon. Friend assure me that there will be adequate insurance for teachers, and that any teacher who might be injured as a result of intervening in some disagreement between pupils will be covered by terms of insurance?

7.30 pm

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend has raised an interesting and relevant point; I should like to take further advice on it. My initial reaction is that I do not believe that the new clause would materially affect the position either of teachers or of schools. Ever cautious, however, about giving an off-the-cuff response to an important and substantive point, I should like, if my hon. Friend will allow me, to consider the point and let him know my conclusions. I am, however, fairly confident that the advice I am giving is sound.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): My right hon. Friend may be aware that I and a number of other hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett), have explored insurance in some detail. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the position of the teaching unions is significant in this regard? It is clear to all my hon. Friends that many teachers join the teaching unions when they first qualify simply to get insurance. Their membership is then regarded by the often militant political leadership of those unions as in some way being support for their political policies. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be a good thing if insurance cover was separate from union membership—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the Minister replies, I must remind all hon. Members that interventions are supposed to be brief and to the point. We seem to be straying away from the new clause.

Mr. Forth: With your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to say to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) that he makes an interesting point which should, perhaps, be pursued. Many, however, would say that it is unlikely that people as perceptive and worldly wise as teachers would sign up to something as important as a trade union for something in a sense as trivial as the obtaining of insurance cover. Were that to be the case, it could give rise to some rather worrying aspects. The matter should, perhaps, be pursued but not necessarily within the confines of our debate on the new clause.

There have been cases of teachers being investigated by social services departments or the police for trivial instances of restraint of pupils. That is absurd and it is one of the main reasons why we tabled the new clause.

Mr. Pawsey: I apologise to my right hon. Friend for failing to congratulate him on the signal honour he has

[Mr. Pawsey]

received. I am sure that all Conservative Members join me in warmly welcoming his membership of the Privy Council.

I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to proposed subsection (1)(c), which refers to

"engaging in any behaviour prejudicial to the maintenance of good order and discipline at the school".

My right hon. Friend will recall that our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister recently referred to the cadet corps in schools. Does he believe that the phrase I quoted has some significance to school cadets?

Mr. Forth: I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees that the view that our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and other colleagues have taken is that the development of the ethos that exists in the cadet corps can be a force for good only if it is offered to more and more pupils in schools for the good reason, which my hon. Friend and other Conservative Members well understand, that the team spirit and self-discipline that exist in the cadet corps sit comfortably with the objectives of the new clause. My hon. Friend makes a good and effective point.

Mr. Hawkins: I join in the congratulations that have already been given to my right hon. Friend on his membership of the Privy Council. Does he agree that one of the interesting things about the way in which the recent suggestion about voluntary service in the cadet force has been portrayed is that the leaders of the teaching unions have deliberately misrepresented it as a plan to make cadet service compulsory? The whole point is that our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was talking about voluntary service. There was deliberate misconstruction which the media—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have already drawn it to the attention of hon. Members, especially the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) that interventions are supposed to be brief and to the point. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman heard me; I made that point only a couple of seconds ago, and my voice has not gone at all.

Mr. Forth: Regrettably, my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South is right. We find so often that misinformation is spread, often deliberately, by people who wish to misrepresent what the Government intend to do. In that way, they spread unnecessary fears among teachers and, occasionally, among parents. Surely we all understand that membership of the cadet corps has always been voluntary and will continue to be so. We are saying that membership should be encouraged.

Mr. Kilfoyle: Does the Minister accept that there is virtually no disagreement about the new clause? Does he also accept that his hon. Friends do not need to filibuster? Will he accept the Opposition's advice, and let us get on with the more substantive points of difference between the two sides of the House?

Mr. Pawsey: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) to suggest that Conservative Members are filibustering when we are—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If the Chair had thought that there was filibustering or tedious repetition, the Chair would have intervened. So far, the debate has been in order.

Mr. Forth: I hope that, in the same spirit in which the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) was able to accept the brevity of the previous debate, he will allow that the House occasionally wishes to explore in a little more detail the provisions of a rather more complicated new clause. In deference to his request, however, I shall try to make progress.

I was arguing, was I not, that there had been cases of teachers being investigated by social services departments and the police. There has been at least one well-publicised case of a teacher being arrested after intervening to break up a playground fight. That cannot be right. Teachers and appropriate other staff in schools, such as lunchtime supervisors, should be allowed, without fear of prosecution, to use moderate physical restraint where it is necessary to stop pupils fighting. Occasionally, where a pupil is damaging school property or indulging in persistent, defiant disruption which is causing a complete breakdown in good order and discipline in the classroom, there may be nothing for it but for the teacher to lead that pupil away by the arm even though the pupil is not necessarily causing injury to himself or others, or would not be guilty of an offence because he is under the age of criminal responsibility.

Keeping discipline is a key part of a teacher's responsibilities. The teachers' unique position with regard to the youngsters in their charge and the classroom environment justifies setting out in a single statutory provision that they may lawfully use reasonable force in certain closely specified circumstances. I stress again that that has nothing to do with corporal punishment, which remains largely illegal. Prevention and punishment are two very different things.

I also emphasise that where a teacher has to restrain a pupil, he or she may use only such force as is reasonable in the circumstances. Ultimately, of course, it will be for the courts to determine what constitutes reasonable force, but I expect that a court would decide that the new clause would not authorise the use of force to restrain a pupil from committing trivial misdemeanours. Force should be used only as a last resort to prevent seriously bad behaviour and, in any event, any force used should be proportionate to the misbehaviour. My Department will issue detailed guidance on the use of physical restraint after consulting the relevant interests. I am sure that Opposition Members and my hon. Friends would expect no less of the Department.

Mr. David Jamieson (Plymouth, Devonport): Can the Minister clarify a point? As one who has pulled apart warring pupils on many occasions, I thought that it was

within the law at the moment that reasonable force could be used to restrain a child who was doing damage to himself or someone else. Would it be deemed a serious misdemeanour if a child was not trying to inflict damage on someone else or on property, but was trying to leave the room without the teacher's permission? Could that be deemed an occasion on which such restraint could be used?

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman may—inadvertently, I am sure—be trying to draw me into a matter of detail, albeit an important detail, in advance of the consultation that we want to conduct before we issue guidance. My initial reaction is that an incident such as he describes would probably be more of a disciplinary matter than one that justified the sort of restraint that we are discussing in the new clause. That point probably illustrates better than any other the fact that all reasonable people, especially teachers in the classroom, can readily identify the cases that require this exceptional restraint to be used and the great majority of cases in which there would be no question of its being used.

Mr. Jamieson: I am grateful to the Minister for clarifying that point. I raised it because I believe that the cases that have been investigated are more to do with the teacher using restraint because a child has disobeyed an order than preventing a child doing damage to themselves or property. It would be helpful if that matter was clarified because, as the Minister will appreciate, there is a great difference between that type of incident and others. In my view, the only circumstance in which a teacher should use that type of restraint is when there is immediate danger to the child, some other person, or property.

Mr. Forth: I am sure that the guidance, when it is issued after consultation, will reflect that point, although I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees that there is always a limit to the extent to which guidance issued in good faith from my Department can, or should seek to, detail every conceivable circumstance that might arise in the classroom. A balance has to be struck between giving teachers reasonable guidance, reassurance and examples of best practice, and seeking to set out in black and white every conceivable circumstance that might arise and what can be done in black and white. However, I accept the spirit of the hon. Gentleman's point and I am sure that we will endeavour to ensure that the guidance that will follow consultation, should the new clause be accepted by the House, will strike that balance.

The new clause would introduce a special provision for teachers, and it should have no effect on the ability of other professional groups, or indeed the public, to rely on defences currently available under the general law when they are prosecuted or sued for damages for assault.

Amendments Nos. 12 and 40 simply insert the new clause in the Education Act 1996 immediately after the sections concerning corporal punishment and before the new clause concerning detention. I hope that I have been able to satisfy the House, including my hon. Friends, about the intention behind the new clause. The Opposition spokesman has indicated his general support and I hope that the House will also be able to support the new clause.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I wish only that the Minister had been as willing to consider the consequences of the defeat of new clause 3 as he was to debate the consequences of new clause 4 for new clause 5, tabled by the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey). They went on ad nauseam about that, but the Minister does not appear to have an opinion on the effect on the Bill of the elimination of new clause 3. Nevertheless, the Minister is correct to say that there is agreement; the broad intention of new clause 4 is both welcome and unproblematic for the Opposition. It seeks to place on the statute book what is in effect the common law.

The Secretary of State clearly recognises—as, I know, does the Minister—the importance of teachers and others placed in charge of pupils having a measure of protection against physical attacks by pupils, from accusations by parents and from mischievous claims of assault. While fully acknowledging the importance of protecting children from abuse, authorities such as the Council of Local Education Authorities and others have recently undertaken work with a range of other agencies, including the teachers' associations, to develop guidelines on practice and procedures for head teachers and teachers involved in allegations of sexual or physical abuse. The intention of the Secretary of State in tabling the new clause appears to be in broadly the same spirit.

7.45 pm

Mr. Pawsey: I am not seeking to be mischievous, but does the hon. Gentleman agree that if better discipline were maintained in the nation's classrooms, there would be less risk of fighting in playgrounds and therefore less risk to teachers intervening in fights?

Mr. Kilfoyle: That is self-evident, but I posit the question that I put to the hon. Member in Committee: does he see the distinction between discipline, which is interiorised, and order, which is imposed? That question goes to the core of the quality of teaching, parenting and many other issues.

Notwithstanding the apparently helpful intentions of the Secretary of State, there may be grounds for the expression of some caution in respect of the proposed subsection (1)(c)—which the Minister mentioned—because it is broadly worded. The hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth also intervened on the point. Proposed subsections (1)(a) and (b) are more specifically defined, but I wish to seek reassurance that the phrase

"engaging in any behaviour prejudicial to the maintenance of good order and discipline at the school"

will not generate a loophole that sanctions the use of physical restraint in circumstances that require some other, more appropriate, action from a teacher to diffuse the tension of a potential disciplinary or behavioural problem. For example, if two pupils were engaged in a disruptive verbal dispute, might proposed subsection (1)(c) legitimise the hasty use of physical force to place them at a distance from each other when a verbal reprimand or use of the detention would be sufficient?

I hope that the Minister will expand on his earlier comments and clarify the issue I have raised. I also hope that his assurance on the matter will be covered by the guidelines that will emerge from the consultations that he announced. The Minister announced so many consultations in Committee that he earned the nickname of the Minister for consultations, but the vital point about

[Mr. Kilfoyle]

consultation is that the Government should take notice of the conclusions of consultations and apply them when they draft legislation or set out guidelines.

Mr. Forth: Like the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) has posed a reasonable question and I can give him a preliminary answer. Good order—which is, I think, at the core of his question—could be defined as when pupils' education is not being seriously or persistently disrupted. When the guidelines emerge, I suspect that words such as "seriously" and "persistently" will provide the key to the question. We are not expecting teachers to use physical restraint to deal with trivial or, dare I say, routine classroom difficulties of the kind that one expects in a roomful of boisterous, eight, 10 or 12-year-olds, but if there is serious or persistent disruption, whether fighting or abuse of property or people, the new clause could possibly come into effect. If the disruption were not serious or persistent, we would not expect the measures to be used.

We have a broad basis on which to proceed, but we will want to fill in the detail after consultation. I know that the hon. Member for Walton is not suggesting that we should not consult, but I am conscious of the number of times that I have undertaken to consult. I hope that we can all agree that that is the right way forward. Through my own experience in the Department, I have learnt that consulting is not only wise but usually fruitful and I am sure that a much better set of guidelines will emerge after consultation than would emerge without it. With that justification, I hope that I have managed to answer the hon. Gentleman's point.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and addea to the Bill.

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could you tell us whether the Government intend to make a statement on how they will deal with clauses 4 and 5 as they are consequential on new clause 3, which was rejected by the House? Do they intend to amend or withdraw those clauses?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have no information whatever on what the Government intend to do.

New clause 8

LOCAL PUBLIC INQUIRIES

'(1) In section 36 of the Education Act 1996 the following shall be inserted after subsection (3)—

"(3A) Where an authority has—

(a) published proposals requiring the approval of the Secretary of State under section 37 below;

(b) received objections exceeding in number a minimum specified in regulations; or

(c) published proposals affecting more than a minimum number of educational institutions specified in regulations

it shall cause to take place a local public inquiry to be chaired by an independent person of suitable standing.

(3B) A local public inquiry under this section shall after hearing such evidence and representations as it considers appropriate, prepare and publish a report making recommendations as to the proposals".

(2) In section 37(5) of the Education Act 1996 after the first "he" the following words shall be inserted—"shall have regard to the recommendations of any local public inquiry established under section 36(3A) and".'.—*[Mr. Kilfoyle.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The purpose of new clause 8 is to require local public inquiries to be held when an authority proposes new schools, significant changes in their character or enlargement. It is consistent with the view that the House expressed earlier that planning should take place for the provision and character of school places. I am sure that once again the Government will agree with the Opposition.

Changes to schools always arouse public interest. Any hon. Member with experience of proposals to close schools will know that they invariably meet resistance. Indeed, in a recent attempt to remove surplus places in the authority in my constituency, I experienced both ends of the spectrum. As we all know and agree, the prudent use of public resources demands that the availability of school places should be kept in step with need. Therefore, where there are too many, some must be removed. At some point, removing surplus places must mean closing schools. Although everyone accepts the rationality of that argument, people very often find it hard to accept that their school should be closed.

In long and involved debates in Committee about the optimum number of surplus places that ought to be held in a given authority, the Minister and I did not disagree that the figure should be around the 10 per cent. mark. Nevertheless, national figures show that there are wide variations and large fluctuations between authorities and between primary and secondary sectors, which must be viewed rationally by the Government of the day and the local authority responsible.

Present procedures for deciding which schools need to be closed, and how, quite properly require public consultation—there we go, mentioning public consultation again. The present law requires local authorities to publish notices of their intention, to invite comment from interested parties and, after consideration of the consultation, to submit final proposals to the Secretary of State. Having taken into account any further representations, the Secretary of State must determine whether the proposal should go ahead or be modified, which was the essence of our argument against new clause 3, and against clause 3 in Committee. I make no apology for repeating that the House saw fit to remove the clause from the Bill.

The procedure is open, but because a local authority proposes the original plans and conducts the consultation and review process, it is open to the charge of being a judge in its own court or of being partial. Although the final decision rests with the Secretary of State, objectors sometimes suspect that the process is a sham because the outcome has been determined in advance. I am sure that LEAs are open and responsible public bodies and that such suspicion is invariably without foundation, but the structure of the process lends itself to such an interpretation. That is despite the fact that the lengthy process could require publication of the plans, consultation, revision of the plans and further

consideration, as well as the Secretary of State being bound to give further careful consideration to the final plans that are submitted.

It is normally expected that the Secretary of State will require about six months to consider such proposals; on occasions, no doubt for good reasons, consideration by the Department for Education and Employment can extend considerably beyond that period. The new clause's purpose, therefore, is to address such a flaw in the present system. The substitution of a formal local public inquiry under the control of an independent person for the local authority's consideration of comments on its original proposals will enable objectors to feel that they have been given a fair hearing—certainly fairer than they feel they have now.

If the inquiry comes down in favour of the LEA's original proposals or if the authority accepts recommendations made to the inquiry, it is likely that further objection will be much reduced, if not removed completely. Such a process would not preclude the LEA from rejecting all or part of the inquiry's findings, but, if it chose to do so, that fact would be all the more obvious.

The procedure would benefit the Secretary of State. Given that she is rather beleaguered these days, I think that she would welcome that. Instead of employing central Government officials to cover ground that had already been trodden locally in the review of the proposals and any complaints or objections, the Secretary of State would have to hand a separately published report from an independent source with the evidence recorded, analysed and set out. It is likely that that would save the time of DFEE officials and facilitate the Secretary of State's decision-making process.

When the open process of public inquiry had reached a conclusion and the authority was willing to act on it, the Secretary of State could give approval with some confidence. On the other hand, if there were conflict, it would be clear that the Secretary of State would need to consider carefully how any outstanding differences should be resolved.

The new clause makes it clear that the expense of a local public inquiry should be incurred only when the scope and seriousness of the proposed changes were of sufficient magnitude to warrant it. The Secretary of State's regulatory power to determine and modify in the light of experience what the threshold should be before an inquiry were triggered would afford some flexibility. It would be open to a local authority to invoke the procedure voluntarily if it believed that the seriousness of the case justified its doing so.

There is a legal precedent for the holding of public inquiries on school planning issues. It was introduced by the Education Act 1993, and it now forms section 503 of the Education Act 1996. I know that the Minister will be au fait with the details, line by line and word by word. The section provides for a public inquiry where the Secretary of State has proposed rationalisation or reorganisation against which objections have been laid. The new clause draws on that precedent and extends the value of the mechanism to more general cases.

In answer to those who may question whether a public inquiry would increase the cost—both in money and time—of the process of reorganisation, I would argue that it need not be so. First, the inquiry will be triggered only where there is a major reorganisation in prospect. Secondly, the cost of the proceedings would be offset against the cost of undertaking the internal consultation process currently required of LEAs, and would yield savings by avoiding repetition of the process by central Government officials. Although costs will obviously be incurred in supporting the new procedure, they should be offset by the savings in time of public officials and in the overall time taken to progress rationalisation.

Mr. Forth: I should say straight away that we are as concerned as anyone that, where statutory proposals are made by local education authorities, they should be considered with the greatest care and that the decisions made should take full account of the views of parents and other schools in the area. We are also conscious of the need for proposals to be dealt with as quickly as possible to avoid unnecessary uncertainty. That is surely particularly important where a school is proposed for closure, although since closure proposals require approval under section 169 of the Education Act 1996, and not section 37, they would not be affected by the proposed new clause. The proposals affected would therefore be those that are less controversial.

In our view, the existing statutory procedures ensure that full consideration is given to each proposal. LEAs are required to consult all interested parties before they bring forward proposals. There is then a two-month period, during which local people, other schools in the area, the Funding Agency for Schools and the Further Education Funding Council may submit objections to the LEA. There is a further statutory period of one month for those objections to be passed to the Secretary of State with the LEA's comments.

In considering the proposals, the Department has available not only the statutory notice but a detailed statement of case, any objections that have been made, the LEA's comments on those objections and any other comments or letters of support that may be sent to the Secretary of State. Specialist advice is then sought from Her Majesty's inspectorate. Where appropriate, Ministers may also receive delegations from opponents of a particular proposal. All the evidence is carefully considered before the Secretary of State reaches a decision.

Let me emphasise again that, through the existing procedures, all the concerned parties have an opportunity to make their views known at the consultation stage and, if they are still not satisfied, by objecting to the proposals.

In our view, the establishment of a public inquiry to deal with some proposals would be unnecessarily expensive, would duplicate the work done by the LEA at the consultation stage and would seriously delay consideration of the proposals. At the end of the day, the decision would still rest with the Secretary of State. For those reasons we do not consider that the new clause should be accepted.

8 pm

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Minister missed the point completely. I do not doubt one iota of what he said about the current procedures, but the point of the new clause is to lighten the load that those procedures create, not only for local authorities but for central Government. We believed that the Minister was an advocate of far less bureaucracy than currently obtains, and the new clause

[Mr. Kilfoyle]

would facilitate the removal of bureaucracy—it would certainly facilitate the removal of the repetition within the current process. Nevertheless, given that the Minister has chosen to retain the current powers, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New clause 9

EXCLUSION OF BASELINE ASSESSMENT SCHEME FROM SELECTION

'( )—(1) No baseline assessment scheme designed or adopted in accordance with sections 31–34 shall be used for the purposes of the selection of pupils as to school admissions whether by reference to ability or aptitude or otherwise.

(2) The duty on a school governing body to adopt a scheme under section 32(1) and the duty to carry out assessment under such a scheme under section 33(1) shall be undertaken soley for the purposes for which the scheme was designed in accordance with section 31.'.—*[Ms Estelle Morris.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Ms Estelle Morris: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 50, in clause 31, page 27, line 16, at end insert

'and no assessment under such a scheme shall be used for the purposes of selection as to school admissions whether by reference to ability or aptitude or otherwise.'.

Government amendment No. 65.

No. 51, in clause 33, page 28, line 12, at end insert

'and such an assessment shall be undertaken solely for the purposes specified in section 31 above.'.

Ms Morris: I note that the group includes Government amendment No. 65, with which the Opposition have some sympathy, given that it was tabled in response to points made in Committee. I take this opportunity to thank the Minister for reflecting on the issues and to state our broad agreement with that amendment.

As we know, the main provisions of part I propose to extend selection in primary and secondary schools without the need to publish a statutory notice or to conduct the subsequent consultation. The proposal to expand selection in primary schools is a backward step that will find little support, but the purpose of the new clause is to ensure that baseline assessment is not used by schools as part of any selection process.

It is astonishing that, at a time when our primary schools face so many problems—class size, unfit and crumbling buildings, low literacy levels and poor teacher morale, to name but a few—the Government should find legislative time to introduce a measure that is irrelevant to primary pupils' needs. Currently, primary schools, like secondary schools, can select up to 15 per cent. of their intake without publishing a statutory notice. The Government intend to increase that limit to 20 per cent. It is strange that a party that spent its time in government in the 1970s closing more selective schools than any other Government in the history of this nation should reintroduce selection in its farewell piece of legislation in the 1990s.

Why is that happening? What is it all about? Can it be that Conservative Members have been bombarded with letters from parents clamouring for the introduction of a five-plus and a seven-plus? Are schools lobbying the Government, day in and day out, appealing to Ministers to allow them to select children at five or at seven? Is there new evidence to show that segregating pupils at five and seven will help to raise standards?

In Committee, the Minister could offer no evidence of any demand from anywhere for an extension of selection at primary level, but this part of the Bill is even more ill thought out. He admitted that he did not even know how many primary schools had used the existing power and had exercised their right to select. There we have it: a flagship piece of legislation—a half-a-flagship piece of legislation now—to establish a primary grammar school in every town, yet the Minister does not know whether parents or schools want it. He does not know how many primary schools already select or the effects—if any—of the selection that is already taking place. In Committee, he said:

"joyously, I might say—we do not know the answer."

He added:

"I am able to display a degree of indifference".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 26 November 1996; c. 94.]

We would not mind the Minister's indifference or joyous ignorance so much if the provisions of part I were only irrelevant, but the trouble is that they are potentially damaging. The arguments against selection are well known and well made: it weakens parental choice and preference; it institutionalises low expectations of children; and it labels too many of our young children as failures. All the arguments that are self-evident in respect of selection at the age of 11 are even more self-evident in respect of children aged five or seven. I do not believe that primary schools want to select but, as long as the provision exists in legislation, schools may choose to deal with the problem of demand for places exceeding supply by selecting on ability or aptitude. This part of the Bill cannot be ignored—it is irrelevant but has to be tackled because it is dangerous.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): There are many hon. Members in the Chamber who did not sit on the Committee. May I inquire whether, in Committee, the Government dealt with the inevitable knock-on effect of the exercise of this scheme in respect of a journey to school from the neighbouring area? What was the Minister's response—if any—to that most disruptive effect on parents and pupils within any neighbourhood or town?

Ms Morris: My hon. Friend's interest in education and matters of selection and his support for comprehensive education are well known. One of the problems we encountered in Committee was that the Government failed to understand that, if one school decides to select, that decision affects other schools. The legislation not only gives individual schools the right to select, but creates troublesome consequences for all the other schools in the area. My hon. Friend gave some examples of the difficulties that might be caused.

At primary level, the vast majority of parents choose to send their children to local schools. There is, in most communities, a strong notion of a primary school serving

its local neighbourhood. Children attend the same school as their brothers and sisters and their neighbours' children. They identify with the school in their community. The primary school is both parents' and pupils' introduction to the school system. That identity—that association of the primary school with its community—helps to give primary children stability. Selection at primary level threatens that. If schools select 20 per cent. of their intake through academic selection, the same number of children may be refused the right to attend their local school.

The 11-plus examination notoriously failed to predict accurately the academic potential of children. It often got it wrong and thousands of children paid the price. Why do Ministers think that a child's academic potential can be accurately predicted at the ages of five and seven, when we know that it cannot be done when the child is 11? What concerned us most in Committee was the Minister's suggestion that baseline assessment could be used by primary schools as the means of selecting pupils. That was worrying for two reasons. First, it will not work and, secondly and more seriously, it is a threat to the emerging consensus about the merits of baseline assessment.

There is a growing appreciation of the value of baseline assessment and the Minister knows that that part of the Bill was welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the Committee. Such assessment is a sensible approach to determining what a child knows and what the child can do when he or she starts school. It is useful for setting targets so that teachers can ensure that every pupil makes appropriate progress. In Labour-led local authorities where baseline assessment has been introduced and pioneered, it has already been shown that it can help to raise standards.

As far as I know, until the Minister spoke in Committee, no one had thought of using baseline assessment as a means of selecting children for primary school entry. The School Curriculum and Assessment Authority document makes it clear that it is not designed for that purpose. SCAA outlines four purposes of baseline assessment—to identify the child's strength and learning needs, to enable the teacher to plan appropriate teaching and learning activities, to identify the child's individual learning needs, including special educational needs, and to provide information that will inform future discussion with parents about their child's learning process. It is clear from the SCAA consultation document that none of the purposes of baseline assessment is fit for use as entrance tests at primary level.

The Minister must understand—he did not do so in Committee—that there is a vast difference between a technique, such as baseline assessment, that can identify a child's strengths and needs at a specific moment, and an assessment that can guess what his or her future academic achievement or potential might be.

I, for one, do not believe that it is possible to develop an effective five-plus or seven-plus assessment. I believe that it would be damaging to do so. It would not be welcomed by parents or schools. However, in many ways, that is not the purpose of new clause 9. The Minister has caused a serious problem: he has muddied the waters on baseline assessment and he has risked damaging the consensus that has been constructed around its introduction. It cannot be a way of diagnostically assessing a pupil and a predictor of academic ability.

New clause 9 would make clear once and for all what many of us believed—that baseline assessment should not be used as a means of selecting pupils at primary level. As baseline assessment is good for schools, good for children and good for parents, the Government should take no more risks with it. They should ensure that they take the opportunity to make it clear that baseline assessment was never intended to be used, and never will be used, as a way of allowing primary schools to select their pupils for intake at the age of five or seven.

Mr. Jamieson: In Committee, the Minister of State said that he felt that much of the legislation that had passed through the House in recent years had been concerned, not with raising the standards of children's education, but with tinkering with systems of education. We have before us tonight a proposal to introduce more selection in both primary and secondary schools—another example of the Government not finding ways to improve children's education, but tinkering with the system at the edges.

Mr. Spearing: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I apologise for not raising the matter immediately, but I was taken by surprise. Is it not the custom of the House that when an amendment is moved, we receive an initial indication from the Government side of the House? Unless we do, some of the speeches that you may wish to hear from us will be bereft of the knowledge of the Government's point of view.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I cannot help that. It is entirely up to Ministers to attempt to catch my eye. If they do not do so, they do not get called.

Mr. Jamieson: Perhaps I may help my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing). It would seem that, after the Division a few minutes ago, some of the steam has gone out of Ministers and there is a reluctance to speak about matters, except—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Cheryl Gillan): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To clarify the matter for the House and for yourself, I fully intend to speak towards the end of the debate, if I have the opportunity to catch your eye.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There is the explanation.

Mr. Jamieson: I thought that my well-chosen comments might bring the Minister to her feet to explain her silence and her Trappist appearance on the Front Bench. We look forward to hearing the Minister answer the excellent points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris), but I noticed, during the passage of the Nursery Education and Grant-Maintained Schools Act 1996, when the Bill before us was discussed in Committee, and in many debates, that the Minister is sometimes reluctant to expose her views to the debates that we have in such Committees. I am sad that we have not had the benefit of the Minister's thoughts on these important matters as a prelude to our discussions.

When the Bill was introduced, we understood that selection would apply to the secondary sector. I seem to remember that even the Secretary of State looked taken aback when it was suggested that the proposals in this legislation might also apply to primary schools.

8.15 pm

I suspect that many of the Members who are, sadly, absent from the Conservative Benches tonight—

Mr. Pawsey: We are here.

Mr. Jamieson: I am glad to hear that the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) is here. Perhaps later he might go and rally some of his troops and get them into the Lobby to vote on some of these matters. Very few Conservative Members are present, and we saw earlier that the Government could not even rally the troops for a vote on a vital clause. They have lost not once but twice. To lose a vote once is unfortunate, but twice is sheer carelessness. *[Interruption.]* I hope that the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth, who is barracking from a sedentary position, will go and use his barrack-room tactics on some of his hon. Friends, who were not in the Lobby to vote on what was thought to be a vital clause for the Government.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): In view of the clause being lost twice, it seems to me that the House has expressed its view on new clause 3 extremely firmly. It does not want it. It did not want it in Committee. The whole House does not want it. It cannot possibly be re-introduced in the Lords because we would then have the Government encouraging the Lords to overrule the Commons. Does my hon. Friend agree that that clearly would be completely out of order, constitutionally?

Mr. Pawsey: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I seek your advice? You have heard what Labour Members have said. Would I, however, be right in saying that there would be no objection to that new clause being introduced in another place, and that if it were carried in another place it could be introduced in this place, under the general heading of Lords amendments?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I am not going to rule on hypothetical suggestions.

Mr. Jamieson: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. With your usual wisdom, you put the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth firmly back in his place. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) has raised an interesting constitutional issue. A vital part of a Bill has failed to pass through Committee and has failed to pass through the House tonight, and the Government may have to ask those in another place to amend something that we in this place have decided that we do not want. We look forward to that.

Mr. Pawsey *rose—*

Mr. Jamieson: I see that the hon. Gentleman wants to intervene. I look forward to his explanation on this important matter.

Mr. Pawsey: The hon. Gentleman mentioned constitutional reform. Am I not right in saying that the Labour party wished to reform the other place? Given the circumstances of today's debate, do I take it that he, at least, will no longer support the constitutional proposals being advanced by his leader?

Mr. Jamieson: Madam Deputy Speaker, if I answered the hon. Gentleman, you would rightly draw me to order for speaking out of order on new clause 9.

Mr. Pawsey: That is a hypothetical case; try.

Mr. Jamieson: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that we shall have a reform in this place, and that will be that we shall shortly be sitting on the Government Benches, and those Conservative Members that are left—the rump, and possibly not the hon. Gentleman—will be sitting on the Opposition Benches.

Mr. David Evennett (Erith and Crayford): Keep dreaming.

Mr. Jamieson: There are various questions about selection which Conservative Members really must answer. The first concerns a point that emerged clearly when the Bill was given its Second Reading—it was made by a number of Conservative Members too. Let us consider an area where the secondary school serves a local population and there are no other schools nearby. What happens if that school is oversubscribed and then decides to select—in the case of an LEA school, up to 20 per cent. of its intake? Will large numbers of local children be rejected in favour of children from well outside the area whose parents can afford the transport?

Before Christmas, the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment visited the excellent Tavistock college in Devon, where she saw the wonderful language unit and learned how popular the college is. It is a comprehensive school for 11 to 19-year-olds, and it achieves better results than were gained in the old days, when there were grammar schools and secondary moderns in the town. What would happen if a school like that, without consulting local people or the council, chose to run its own tests and set up a grammar stream? Could local parents be prevented from using their local school for their children? *[Interruption.]* The hon. Lady is deep in conversation with her ministerial colleagues on this vital point; I am glad that she is listening to their views.

The problem becomes even more serious in the context of primary schools. If an infant school operated some form of selection, that could have far reaching consequences for parents and children in the locality. It is quite reasonable to expect a child at secondary school to travel one or two miles—in rural areas, as much as 10 or 20 miles—but it would be outrageous if a primary school chose to go selective and ruled out a number of children from the neighbourhood.

How would the admissions criteria work when such a school decided to take some children via the selective procedure? What criteria would the school then use to turn down other children?

Listening to my hon. Friend the Member for Yardley it was clear to me that there is no enthusiasm on the part of parents for further selective education. The Minister may recall that, 15 years ago or thereabouts, there were attempts in Solihull to return to selection. When parents realised that their local comprehensives could suddenly

again become grammar schools or secondary moderns, they spoke out loud and clear. Further selection was roundly turned down—*[Interruption.]* I see that the hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) has arrived in the Chamber. I hope that he will give us the benefit of his enormous wisdom and experience. He and I served on Solihull council together. In fact, everything he knows he learned at my feet. He sat just in front of me in the council chamber and used to turn to me for advice and assistance. Being the generous person that I am, I helped him a great deal—and look where he is today. He will remember how parents in the area reacted. The good people of Knowle and Dorridge—hardly socialist enclaves, although we may have got a few votes from them—rose up to a man, or woman, and rejected the idea of more selection. They had had a taste of the old system and they did not like it or want to return to it.

The hon. Member for Solihull will know of the excellent Arden school, and of my old school, Tudor Grange, which now gets better examination results as a comprehensive than it did as a grammar school. The hon. Gentleman will know that more than 80 per cent. of the children at those two schools achieve five or more GCSEs at A to C grades. Parents there do not want to return to selection.

Mr. Pawsey: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that his argument is a powerful one in favour of added choice and diversity in schools? He will recall that, in Rugby, we have maintained grammar schools; we have Rugby high school for girls and Laurence Sheriff grammar school for boys, both of which have an enviable reputation in the town for providing high quality education. Does he agree that the quality of education rests to a great extent on the quality of the primary schools in Rugby? The fact is that the very existence of an 11-plus ensures a tendency to teach up to that examination, thereby enhancing all secondary education across the borough.

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Gentleman says that he believes in choice. We too believe in choice, but with a difference. Conservative Members believe that choice lies with the school—to choose its pupils. We believe that pupils and parents should choose the school. Selection means that the school selects the children, and there is no parental choice. If the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that all parents, regardless of the ability of their children, can choose to send the latter to grammar school, he is wrong. Children who do not pass the test end up in secondary moderns—there is no choice about that.

Real choice comes when parents can choose a good comprehensive on its merits from among several in the vicinity. That is real choice: not taking an examination and failing.

Mr. Pawsey: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his courtesy in giving way to me a third time. The principle of selection was discredited in some quarters because we failed to put adequate funds into what were known as secondary moderns and junior technical schools. Does the hon. Gentleman agree with that? The mistake was not giving them an adequate share of resources between the 1940s and 1960s; had they received an adequate share, the tripartite system that worked so well in Germany would have worked equally well here.

Mr. Jamieson: There could be a great deal of truth in what the hon. Gentleman says, in some authorities' areas. It may have been true of Warwickshire. In the 1950s, secondary modern schools were often built without libraries because it was not thought that children who were going to leave at 15 would need them. The idea was that the girls would learn cookery and sewing and get married, and the boys would go off to learn a trade.

The problem is that the hon. Gentleman is arguing against a return to selection. Selection means that we hold some children in higher esteem than others—that is what was wrong with the bipartite system. Pupils who went to secondary moderns felt that they were receiving an inferior education. In Warwickshire—I have seen the papers to prove this—a few months after the 11-plus children received a piece of paper saying, "You have passed. You will be going to X or Y grammar school," or a different piece of paper saying, "You have failed. You will now go to the local secondary modern school." That is why those schools were not held in the same esteem in the public eye, and why we say that we need a fully comprehensive system. Selection is not appropriate because, unlike the hon. Gentleman, we do not want to return to the bad old days of the 1950s and 1960s.

8.30 pm

Mr. Pawsey: I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman for giving way yet again. Does he accept that in Warwickshire, we have a safety net, as it is called? That means that young people who go to the high schools can transfer at age 16 to the sixth form in a grammar school. *[Interruption.]* I cannot give way to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris) as this is an intervention, but if she wants to intervene in the speech by the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) and take up the point, I shall be interested to hear her comments. She taught in Warwickshire schools, so she knows that pupils can transfer from a high school to a grammar school. The safety net operates in my county.

Mr. Jamieson: I wondered for a moment who the hon. Gentleman was intervening on—me or my hon. Friend the Member for Yardley. We must move on to baseline assessment.

Mr. Spearing: Those who read our debates or extracts from them may be puzzled. I cannot find the word "selection" in the Bill, or any implication that the Bill will be used for the selection of pupils into primary schools. The only words in the Bill which suggest that are the reference to

"assisting the future planning of their education"

and

"where the pupils in question transfer to other schools".

Can my hon. Friend tell me the legal basis for the apparent purpose of the Government in giving schools the power to select pupils for entrance to primary schools?

Mr. Jamieson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the thoroughness with which he always tackles such matters. The Minister made it clear during Committee that an early clause of the Bill allowed primary schools to select their pupils. That was admitted by the Secretary of State on Second Reading. It would be interesting if my hon. Friend took up the point with the Minister later in the debate.

[Mr. Jamieson]

Other parts of the Bill are falling apart, and with his great knowledge of such matters, perhaps my hon. Friend has noticed a fundamental flaw in the Bill.

We are pleased that the Government have been persuaded by our arguments on the important matter of baseline assessment, which allows teachers and parents to make an assessment of the progress of individual children, and the value added to their education by the school. We must test not just children's absolute achievement, but the progress that they have made from one stage to the next.

I was delighted to note that in a recent Ofsted report on a school in my constituency that takes some children from your constituency, Madam Deputy Speaker—the John Kitto community college—the Ofsted inspectors took into consideration true added value. They noted that 24 per cent. of the pupils at age 16 passed five or more GCSEs at grades A to C, which is about half the national average, but they commented that, according to the tests that the children had taken at age 11 to predict their performance at 16, only 12 per cent. would pass 5 GCSEs at grades A to C. Ofsted therefore recognised that although the school attained only half the national average in exam results, it has a huge added value for the children who attend it. The report also noted that 60 to 70 pupils per year out of 270 are selected to go to the local grammar school and do not attend the community college. I am pleased that Ofsted is now using a type of baseline assessment to measure the standards that are being value added to schools.

If baseline tests were used as a form of selection, that would be disastrous for two reasons. First, the tests should be used primarily not as summative tests, but as formative tests, to predict the sort of education that a child needs and the progress that he or she will make, and over a number of years to measure the progress that the child has made, and most of all, the effectiveness of the teaching and the education in the school. That is what baseline assessment should be about.

Secondly, parents' confidence in the process could be undermined, if they felt that a baseline test would be used in a selective way to rule their children out of a school, rather than being used by the teacher and the school as a means of assisting children in their education. If a baseline test were used to rule children out, many parents would object to their children taking the test, in case it was used to put their children on the fringes of the school. Using baseline tests for the purpose of selection could have a serious effect on parents' confidence in the system.

When the Minister sums up, perhaps she could answer a further point. If a child entered in the pre-compulsory year sector of a school—the nursery school—could the school use baseline tests at the end of the nursery stage to weed out those children that it did not want to take in the later stages? There is a danger that, used in that way, baseline testing could fragment children's education. Choice would rest with schools, rather than with parents.

Earlier in the debate we heard comments on recent announcements concerning matters such as cadets and the royal yacht Britannia. The Government thought that they had struck a popular vein, but they are profoundly out of touch with public opinion. On selection, and especially selection for primary schools, the Government are way out of touch with parents.

Mr. Pawsey: I again thank the hon. Gentleman for the courtesy that he has shown me this evening. It is out of character, but it is deeply appreciated none the less. I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the fact that the poll conducted by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers shows support for selection. The hon. Gentleman is assiduous in these matters and will be aware of the poll. He will know that the majority of parents supported selection. I suggest to him gently that that undermines his entire case. He and his party would deny parents what they want in their children's education.

Mr. Jamieson: The wonderful thing about giving way to the hon. Gentleman is that he puts his foot in his mouth so much that he makes the Opposition case and destroys the Government's arguments. He has done it yet again. The hon. Gentleman misquotes the responses. When parents were asked whether they wanted grammar schools, many said yes. When parents were asked whether they wanted selection, they were not so happy. A very low percentage of parents wanted their children to attend secondary modern schools. I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that the Government could use some of the funds that have mysteriously flowed to the Conservative party to test their focus groups. They could ask parents, "Do you want your child to attend a secondary modern school?", and I make a modest wager with the hon. Gentleman that less than 5 per cent. of parents would say yes.

Mr. Warren Hawksley (Halesowen and Stourbridge): I served on the Shropshire county council education committee in the days when we had selection. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that parents might be so ambitious for their children as to believe that they would be successful and attend grammar schools? That might be why parents responded in the way that the hon. Gentleman claims.

Mr. Jamieson: If the hon. Gentleman had been present earlier, he would have heard the exchange involving the hon. Member for Solihull. Parents do not want their children to fail at school, and parents in that area did not want to return to a selective system because they knew full well that, under that system, four fifths of children fail at age 11. Selection does not have a great resonance for parents.

I shall be happy to give way to the hon. Gentleman if he wishes to intervene again. Will he tell us, honestly and frankly, how many parents in his constituency have written or spoken to him or petitioned him saying that they want their local comprehensive school split into a grammar school and a secondary modern school? How many letters of that type has the hon. Gentleman received? How many parents' groups has he met which demand the return of selection in his area so that children may take the 11-plus test?

Mr. Hawksley: That is not an issue in my constituency. The argument in Halesowen and Stourbridge is whether we should have grant-maintained schools. The local branch of the Labour party is doing everything it can to ensure that parents in my constituency are deprived of that opportunity. They are pressurised not to have grant-maintained schools. I believe that the Labour party is applying similar pressure in Dudley.

Mr. Jamieson: I have hit another rich vein, as another Conservative Member makes points for our side. The hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Hawksley) claims that parents in his area, first, do not want selection and the 11-plus test; and, secondly, despite all the bribes, cannot be enticed to vote for schools to go grant maintained. Both of the Government's policies have failed. I did not intend to mention the Government's failed grant-maintained policy and the fact that just over 1,000 schools have opted out. The hon. Gentleman has confirmed that both of those policies have failed in his constituency not because of local Labour politicians or events in this House, but because perceptive parents who want the best for their children have roundly rejected those ideas.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North) *rose—*

Mr. Jamieson: Having said that we had hit a rich vein of failure, I willingly give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Marlow: If the grant-maintained policy has failed, why do "perceptive"—to use the hon. Gentleman's word—Labour Front Benchers move heaven and earth to ensure that their children attend grant-maintained schools?

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Gentleman will have to do a little better than that. Labour Members have no problems with parents sending their children to grant-maintained or any other schools. There is a grant-maintained Catholic boys school in my constituency. If parents who have profound and deeply held views about a particular religion—in this case, it is the Catholic Church—and who believe in single-sex education were to ask me which school they should send their children to, I would tell them to send their children to the school of their choice, whether or not it is grant maintained. I am surprised not that the hon. Gentleman should enter the argument—as so many of his hon. Friends have done—by referring to hon. Members' children, but that his Front-Bench colleagues should do so also.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): If the hon. Gentleman seeks evidence that grant-maintained status has failed, he need look no further than the fact that only 0.5 per cent. of eligible schools bothered to seek grant-maintained status in the past 12 months. Does that not illustrate that the parents and governors of eligible schools know that it is a failed policy?

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. In many areas—such as Cornwall—there are no grant-maintained schools and there have been scarcely any ballots. There is no enthusiasm among parents to hold such ballots, even though no pressure is applied. The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) will know that the pressure on schools is not to go grant maintained or selective but to improve standards. Parents are seeing their children in larger classes, they see a lack of resources and they see depressed and demoralised teachers. Those are the issues that concern parents, and parents will bear them in mind when they cast their votes in the general election. They will make a genuine assessment of where the parties stand on those issues.

8.45 pm

The Prime Minister said that he wanted to see a grammar school in every town. He has since backed away from that statement, but I assure him that parents do not want to see a grammar school in every town—and they certainly do not want to see a grammar primary school in every town. They know that selection is a means of denying their children the school of their choice. Parents know that they will not be able to choose a school for their children. I urge hon. Members to join us in the Lobby tonight in voting for a new clause that is not just profound common sense but is in touch with the wishes of parents.

Mr. Don Foster: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Can you advise the House whether it is appropriate for us to consider any amendments to the Bill, given that it appears to be flawed? I draw your attention to clause 6(2)(a), in which direct reference is made to "section 259A". You will be aware that that proposed new section was the subject of the new clause that the Government sought to insert. We are interested to know how it is possible to bring a Bill to the House that refers to a proposed new section whose insertion the House has not approved.

Madam Deputy Speaker: As I understand it, it is open to the Government to make any necessary changes—either at a later stage here or possibly elsewhere.

Mr. Foster: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am grateful to you for your guidance. My point is that I fail to understand how the Government can bring to the House a Bill that refers to a proposed new section that the House has not agreed should be inserted in the Bill. New clause 3, which we debated earlier, attempted to insert proposed new section 259A. The legislation before us refers to that proposed new section, but the House has not approved it.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I think that my point must remain the same.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): As we are near an election, I suppose that party bashing is the flavour of the month. However, this evening I hope to persuade hon. Members to vote against the new clause and to persuade the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) that he is wholly wrong. I contend that the Labour party is supporting proposals that damage the working class.

Anyone who is familiar with grammar schools and the selection system will be aware that, in boroughs and towns that do not have the grammar school escape route, people are educated—as the hon. Gentleman must know—according to class segregation. If he doubts that, he should look at the figures that were published in the *Evening Standard* tonight. The schools that are low achievers when it comes to the teaching of reading and writing are not in Labour constituencies, or Tory constituencies—it is a class issue. Hon. Members must know that, if there is no grammar school system, people are educated according to where they live.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I ask the hon. Gentleman a simple question: if we accept his prognosis that the way to

[Mr. Kilfoyle]

demolish class barriers is to take 20 per cent. of our young people, irrespective of their social class, and hive them off through selective education into one type of school, what does that offer the other 80 per cent., who by definition will be denied access to that type of school?

Sir Teddy Taylor: I am not questioning the integrity of Opposition Members. I am pleading with them to understand the option. Let us consider achievement. I wonder whether the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle), the Opposition spokesman, knows the best part of Britain for A-level examinations. Is it the south-east of England, where there is much wealth and large houses? Is it the north-east of England? The place that is streets ahead of everywhere else in the United Kingdom is a place called Northern Ireland, where there is massive poverty. That is accompanied by considerable unemployment and a great deal of misery.

Why should Northern Ireland do so well? Whether a child is in a Catholic or non-Catholic school, there is a basic 25 per cent. selection for grammar schools. If Opposition Members doubt that, let them see what happens in Northern Ireland.

In my constituency, there is a great deal of unemployment. That is accompanied by much poverty, sadness and unhappiness. Why is it, however, that A-level and GCSE examination results in Southend-on-Sea are streets ahead of the average for Essex, which is a prosperous county and streets ahead of the average for the nation? The answer is that Southend has a system of 25 per cent. selection, which means that one child in four goes to one of four large grammar schools. Opposition Members may not like that, but it happens to be true.

Mr. Spearing: I do not dispute the hon. Gentleman's figures, but surely he faces a logical dilemma. An equal and perhaps even a greater explanation of what I might call the Southend phenomenon is the quality, dedication and resources that are available to the schools that take the 75 per cent. Is not that just as likely an explanation as the process of selection, which the hon. Gentleman advances?

Sir Teddy Taylor: I should like to think that achievement in Southend reflects the Government's kindness in the allocation of finance, but that is not the case. There is no sign that it is. Perhaps Opposition Members will reflect on my own case. I am now an old man; I have been in this place for 33 years. I came from what was loosely described as a poor home in Glasgow. I managed, through a test, to get into a school called the Glasgow high school for boys. I went there along with other kids. That school was closed by the Labour council. The council scrapped it.

What happened then? The Glasgow high school for boys became a private school. It is now called the Glasgow high school. I shall speak at one of its dinners in a few weeks' time. Unless one can afford a fortune in fees, a child cannot go there.

The children of wealthy Members—the up-market group of society—have no problems. Their parents can send the kids to a fee-paying school. But what about able kids with caring parents who live in working-class areas, perhaps on income support? Perhaps they have no money at all. Opposition Members must think about the situation in cities where there is no selection. There are no grammar schools. We all know that such people will do all that they can to move into "nice" areas.

If Opposition Members doubt that, let them reflect on Glasgow, and the constituency that I used to represent. There was a massive housing scheme called Castlemilk. Allegedly, it was the largest council scheme in Europe. A short distance from that scheme was a small owner-occupied area, part of which was called King's Park, where there were modest but quite expensive small properties. There were many decent and honourable people in Castlemilk. If their kids in secondary schools obtained any sort of qualification—that is, any GCSE or any O-level, as the examination was then—they were doing well. Just down the road, about a mile away in King's Park, if a kid did not get to university, he was not doing well. That is tragic. It is appalling.

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Gentleman is saying that some children have an escape route that enables them to get into a grammar school. It is a curious argument. Does it not mean that children who are poor and go to a secondary modern school face double jeopardy?

Sir Teddy Taylor: That is wrong.

If a quarter of the kids are selected, are the three quarters worse off than they would be otherwise? The answer is no. It is plain that someone must be top of the class. Someone has to be a prefect. Someone has to be an achiever. If 25 per cent. of children are removed, there is not the slightest proof or sign that the remaining children are thereby worse off.

I have tried desperately hard not to become involved in party politics, much of which is sick. Much of the propaganda that is being presented makes me almost ill. Hon. Members are well aware of their friends and supporters and they know of people who are deliberately conspiring to move their kids away from the areas in which they live to other areas where they think that there are nicer or higher-achieving schools. I am sure that that applies to both parties. I am sure that it even applies to Liberal Democrats, nice people though they are.

Ms Hodge: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we all wish to have the highest standards for all our children in all our schools, and that the real and proper way forward is not to provide only some good schools that offer opportunities for a few children? Does he agree instead that we should focus our attention on raising standards in all our schools, so that children can go to their neighbourhood school and receive a high-quality education? Does he further agree that they should not have to move house or face a system whereby three quarters of children are relegated to the dustbin in secondary modern schools?

Sir Teddy Taylor: To refer to secondary modern schools as dustbins is an insult. I should like to take the hon. Lady to what she would describe as dustbins. There is no sense in what she says. Basically, she is talking of high-achieving schools. I could take her to them.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Is my hon. Friend aware that the hon. Member for Bath

(Mr. Foster), who leads this evening for the Liberal Democrats, took the trouble to go all the way to Lancaster to attend school? He is the only Liberal we have turned out. Does my hon. Friend agree that super, high-achieving schools set an example to other schools and give them something to aim at? That is certainly the position in the area that I represent.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I hope that that would be the case. What is being said is what we should all love to see. The hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) knows, however, that it cannot and does not happen. When we are in opposition, we sometimes feel that problems will fade away and disappear with the election of a new Government. That is codswallop. I am sure that there are many honourable and sincere members of the Labour party who realise that the problems that we are discussing cannot be resolved by the election of a new Government.

Let us take a town where there are 50,000 people and one school. The social mix would be achieved there, which is good. In a large borough or town, however, it is not possible to get a good social mix in schools, and it does not happen. We all know that and it is something that we must face.

Mr. Kilfoyle: Does the hon. Gentleman agree with the Prime Minister that, for the top 20 per cent., an education is on offer in this country that matches anything in the world? Does he further agree that the challenge, in terms of economic prosperity and social cohesion, is to deal properly with the other 80 per cent.? If that is so, how will grammar schools assist those children to make their mark in life?

Sir Teddy Taylor: The hon. Gentleman should consider the position in Southend and in Northern Ireland. All kids achieve better when there is a grammar school input. I also appeal to him to go to areas such as Tower Hamlets—I do not say this contemptuously—which has been run on the agreeable principles of socialism for years, and where achievement is a national scandal. Of course it would be wonderful to have high achievement in such places, but the fact is that we do not and we cannot. It is tragic and a disaster. If the hon. Gentleman doubts that, he should look at the figures that have just been published on the standards of reading and writing for seven-year-olds. What is happening in those boroughs is tragic.

9 pm

Mr. Hawksley: Does my hon. Friend agree that the language of dustbins to describe education for 80 per cent. of children is a disgrace? It is the assumption that those schools will be failures that is the problem. There is no reason why they cannot be good schools. We used to have such schools in Shropshire.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I wish that Labour Members would be really interested in this subject. They should come to Southend and see the great achievements of our comprehensive schools—which are in the area where I live—such as Shoeburyness county high school and Cecil Jones high school.

Mrs. Gillan: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way in a powerful and moving speech. Has he had a chance to look at the 1996 performance tables? They show that 15-year-olds in LEA areas with selective schools achieve a higher proportion of five or more GCSEs at grades A to C. Those areas achieve 44.8 per cent., and LEAs without selective schools achieve 40.4 per cent. Does that add to his argument?

Sir Teddy Taylor: It does add to the argument. When I started out in politics—I mean this in all sincerity—I genuinely found that Labour people tended to be nicer, more meaningful people who were committed to a principle. By comparison, people from other parties did not have that commitment. That applied to education and housing. The tragedy is that those good people in Glasgow introduced policies which, although well intentioned, were damaging to the working class.

Ms Estelle Morris: How does the hon. Gentleman explain the fact that, since the introduction of comprehensive schools, the number of children achieving five or more passes at GCSE with good grades has gone up from 15 per cent. to more than 40 per cent.? Does he think that that is because of a lowering in the standards of examinations? Does he not realise that that is a sign of real improvement in the standards of so many children who have been educated in the comprehensive system?

Sir Teddy Taylor: I accept that there has been a gradual rise in overall standards, but I hope that the hon. Lady will examine areas' relative performance, and think about the position of parents and children in some of the worst parts of our cities. This is not a problem for small towns: it is a problem for our cities, and it will not go away. We are denying people opportunities.

In Southend, we have four grammar schools. Some kids, such as those who live in Shoeburyness, have a long bus journey to school. The Lib-Lab group in the county council—some of whom are my best friends—had a plan to stop free transport for grammar school children. People in Shoeburyness on lower incomes and on income support can no longer send their children to those schools, whereas people who live in big houses find it easier to do so. That is wrong, and terribly unfair.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): I listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman, and it seems to me that he is generalising from specific situations. I was brought up in a coal-mining valley and was the youngest of 12 children. I went to a grammar school, but my older siblings were not able to do so because my parents could not afford it. The standards in the grammar school were such that many people went on to Oxford and Cambridge, became highly qualified and moved up in the professions.

Many years later, in the same community, with the same people and with the same dedication to education, the comprehensive schools send the same number of children, or even more, to Oxford and Cambridge. I venture to suggest that it is not the type of school or its structure that counts, but parental background, the willingness of people to get involved and the dedication of teachers. If financial support and help is provided, kids will achieve, whatever the system.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I am encouraged by what the hon. Gentleman said about the schools in his constituency. It is lucky to have him as its Member of Parliament, and

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

I hope that the children will continue to prosper in that way. He described a success story, but I hope that he will consider the deprived areas of Manchester, Birmingham and London, where standards of attainment are appalling, and where children do not have an opportunity to escape.

If people are in an up-market group, their children can escape, because they can pay for transport to take their children outside the area and thus take advantage of the choices that the Government have provided. But think of the people who simply cannot escape.

My kids went to council schools in Southend-on-Sea. They were lucky: they went on to grammar schools. They had the advantage of a social mix. It should be remembered that the secondary schools chosen by those living in up-market areas do not have such a social mix. One of the greatest tragedies that I encountered in Glasgow was the existence of what could almost be called ghettos in areas with council housing. That is an appalling situation. People cannot escape from such ghettos, either because of council housing—which, sadly, prevents them from escaping—or because of the lack of educational ability of some kind, in regard to which society is desperately unfair. People may wonder why things are going wrong in so many areas; it is because, unfortunately, a large and increasing number of people are imprisoned in such ghettos, and we must fight that.

I have spoken for far too long, and I apologise, but Labour Members should think of the children in those ghetto areas. Are we offering them any hope? Labour Members may say, "We will spend a little more, and will organise some special inquiry." The plain fact is, however, that they know that—because of housing policy and the ghettos to which I have referred—they will achieve nothing unless they can give such people some kind of hope. I suggest that giving some of those children the opportunity to go to grammar school gives them hope.

Mr. Don Foster: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I know that he is anxious to finish his speech, to which I have listened with considerable interest.

The hon. Gentleman clearly cares passionately about this issue, but I am confused about one point. He has referred to "inner-city ghetto areas" from which the majority of children are not able to move to the leafy suburbs and the so-called better schools. How can the removal of the 25 per cent. most able pupils from a school in a ghetto area benefit the remaining 75 per cent.? I simply do not see how the 75 per cent. can benefit.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I am sorry that I have spoken for so long. Perhaps I should not have given way, but I believe that we should think about this important issue.

Such action can help enormously. There is no hope for anyone if everyone is imprisoned in a school that is in a ghetto. If 25 per cent., 10 per cent. or even 5 per cent. of kids can escape, entirely new circumstances are created: at least some will be able to escape to grammar schools. A stable society is one where there is opportunity; without opportunity, the situation is appalling.

The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) seems to think that he is an expert. I am sure that he is, because he wears glasses and looks very wise. If he knows a family living in Tower Hamlets, what will he say to that family? Will he say, "We are going to give you 10 per cent. more money, and we shall try to give you an extra teacher"? He must know that, unless he can provide some of those people with the opportunity of escape, they will continue to have a ghetto mentality.

I care about these things, because I came from a poor home and went to a school in which many people were in the position that I have described. As I said, when I started out in politics, Labour Members seem to care about things and believe in them, but, tragically, some of the things in which they believe are extremely stupid and damaging for the working class. The working class suffers, and no one gains.

I am sorry that I have spoken for so long, but I hope that I have persuaded one or two hon. Members to think again, and to realise that what they propose is wrong—that it is bad for the working class, and bad for overall achievement.

Ms Hodge: I hope that the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) will sit through my speech. We listened to his, which was delivered with passion and, I think, sincerity, and I trust that he will listen to Opposition arguments against selection.

I believe that there is a purpose behind tonight's debate which unites the political parties. We all want to raise educational standards for the children of today, who will become the community and the work force of tomorrow; and we all want to provide opportunity. Where we divide is on the steps that we think are most appropriate to achieve that objective. That is where I part from the hon. Member for Southend, East, but I hope that he will listen to my argument.

The Government believe that the route to raising standards is through selection. That is where we fundamentally disagree. We are not driven by good intentions alone. We are driven by pragmatic good sense; the Government's approach is driven by dogma and ideology. Because it is so driven, it will fail, even to provide opportunity for more children.

The Bill misses another opportunity to raise educational standards. I feel sorry for the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. Her professional background is that of a teacher. She spent a large part of her professional working life promoting comprehensive education and closing grammar schools. When she was a member of Norfolk county council, nine grammar schools were closed—the rest of the grammar schools in Norfolk—and she played an active role in the campaign to close the King Edward VII grammar school there. When she became Secretary of State, she spoke to local teachers at a meeting of the National Union of Teachers. When teachers asked her about selection, she said that nothing would change while she was in charge.

I do not believe that the Secretary of State ever wanted or meant to change the Government's stance on selection. It was forced on her by the Prime Minister. I feel sorry for her, because when she reflects on her period of office

as Secretary of State, in a few weeks from now we hope, she will think that she was responsible for introducing nursery vouchers, which have been a complete flop, for bringing back selection—grammar schools—and for introducing selection at the age of five. There is not a lot of which she can be proud in her old age.

The education issue for Britain is not, as the hon. Member for Southend, East suggested, our failure to achieve high standards for the best pupils; the issue was set out not only by Labour Members, but by members of a Conservative education authority from which the Government Front Bench team sought to distance itself. We had more sense from the authority in its submissions to the Government on both the White Paper and the Bill than we have had from all Ministers during debates in Committee. The authority said:

"England's long-standing problem is the long tale of under-achievement with the less able."

We need to pose the question: will selection at 11, or indeed at five, help us to raise standards, not for those who succeed anyway, but for all children, including those working-class children about whom the hon. Member for Southend, East feels so passionately?

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): May I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the fact—this must be something of a paradox in the light of what the Government seem to want to do—that it was their own Prime Minister who, a year or two ago, said that we did very well by more able pupils, but that we were failing 80 per cent. of those who attended schools? That is what we must tackle, not the question of the able.

Ms Hodge: I completely agree. I say to the hon. Member for Southend, East that my children are in inner-city comprehensive schools and are achieving well. They would whatever the structure and irrespective of whether there was selection. When we talk about introducing selection, I remain primarily concerned not for them, because their background and my support as a parent more readily ensures their future, but for precisely those children for whom the hon. Member for Southend, East has expressed concern. Will selection help to deal with that long tale of under-achievement that is often associated with class? No; nor will it increase parental choice, improve schools or raise standards. We know that from information in the league tables that are produced by the Government from GCSE results. I hope that Conservative Members will listen carefully to this. We must learn from those league tables about the impact of selection at 11 so that we may understand what could happen if we introduced selection, as proposed, at the age of five.

Let us consider the impact of grammar schools on children in one locality to assess how their revival would affect the nation's children. Unfortunately, grammar schools still exist in some areas, enabling us to make a proper informed analysis based on the facts. I gave an example in Committee and shall do so again. The counties of Kent and Hampshire are large and have many secondary schools. Kent has 149 secondary schools and Hampshire has 122. The socio-economic profiles of the two counties are similar.

9.15 pm

The hon. Member for Southend, East shakes his head, but I direct him to the statistics in the Library which show that I am correct. Both counties offer children about the same access to pre-school education, which is often taken as an important ingredient when considering later performance. Hampshire organises its secondary education through comprehensives while Kent has a mixture of grammar schools and schools which inevitably become secondary modern as the brightest children are creamed off along what the hon. Member for Southend, East described as an escape route to grammar schools.

As the Minister has said, both counties performed fairly well in the league tables—as they should, given their socio-economic intake—but the difference in outcome between the two counties is stark. Hampshire, with its comprehensive schools, only eight schools had 25 per cent. or fewer pupils gaining five GCSEs at grades A to C, taking that as the level below which we would not want to drop. In Kent, which has a mixture of grammar and secondary modern schools, 49 schools had 25 per cent. or fewer pupils gaining five GCSEs at grades A to C. The children come from similar backgrounds and the areas are similar, but in Kent a third of the schools perform badly while in Hampshire only 6.5 per cent. of the schools have a poor outcome. That cannot be explained by saying that Kent children are less able, nor can it be said that the teachers are less committed or competent. The only difference between the two counties is that Kent has grammar schools while Hampshire does not.

The story told by the league tables goes on. Six schools in Kent, two of which, interestingly enough, are grant maintained, have worse results than the Ridings school. Seven schools produce worse results than the worst school in Hackney, and 11 have results that are worse than the worst school in Islington. In 25 schools, the results are worse than the worst school in my constituency of Barking. The Government's own league tables show that selective education not only fails to improve standards, but may damage overall standards.

Mrs. Gillan: Is the hon. Lady able to state the percentages of statemented children or those requiring special educational needs in those schools?

Ms Hodge: During the Bill's Committee stage, the Minister of State quite properly said that children's backgrounds should not be relevant to their results at 16. Our goal should be for all children, whatever their background, to achieve certain levels. I agree with the Minister of State that we should not expect children from a particular background, who start with particular skills and qualifications, to achieve better results than others. We want all our children to achieve.

The hon. Member for Southend, East needs to appreciate that the character of one school will affect the character of other schools in an area. Very able pupils do well in both of the counties that I mentioned, but excluded students suffer where grammar schools exist. The impact of creaming off a few children to a few schools has an enormous impact on other schools.

We are not driven by dogma, we are driven by the facts provided by the Government. We ignore those facts at our peril. Selection closes doors. It does not open them, as

[Ms Hodge]

Conservative Members have said in this debate. Selection entrenches failure, and it does not encourage success. Selection lessens opportunity; it does not enhance it.

Mr. Spearing: Does my hon. Friend realise that many people who have taught in both grammar and comprehensive schools are acutely aware that, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, bad grammar schools concentrated only on the notionally top third of pupils and that the remaining pupils suffered and were effectively sacrificed? In comprehensive schools, however, staff attempt to fit the education that they can provide to all the needs of all the pupils. I think that my hon. Friend will agree that the Prime Minister would agree with that analysis and description.

Ms Hodge: The Prime Minister might indeed agree with that analysis. My hon. Friend raises another important issue, which is that within schools people are assessed as failures or successes. Even within grammar schools—as those of us who attended them know—children at the bottom are written off. Let us think about that practice, because that is what new clause 9 is about. Let us think about what we would be doing to children at five if we started to classify them as failures because they did not pass a test to get them into the school of their choice. Is that a sensible way in which to make progress? Can we really select children at five according to their ability? Are we really going to write off little children at the very start of their statutory school career because they have failed to pass an initial test?

Mr. Gunnell: Does my hon. Friend agree that we will be writing off children under the age of five years if we do not exclude baseline assessment—which is the purpose of the new clause? Unless we exclude baseline assessments, we will be writing off children when they are in nursery school, and a selection process will be introduced almost as children first encounter the educational system. The test is meant to be diagnostic and to indicate children's potential, perhaps their aptitude and something about them; it should certainly not be used to penalise them in later life. The new clause has been designed to remove that penalty.

Ms Hodge: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention, because I had planned to deal with just that point. As hon. Members may or may not know, I have taken a particular interest in early years education and in the development of the nursery voucher scheme. I have also been extremely critical of the desirable outcomes that were set as standards—which have become a curriculum, despite the original intention—and which children are expected to achieve by the time they finish their education under the voucher scheme.

Two school settings failed to meet the criteria for the pilot stage of the nursery voucher scheme. One was a Rudolf Steiner school. Rudolf Steiner schools do not teach words or mathematical concepts, and practise the philosophy that it is wrong to teach children numeracy or literacy skills before the age of six. I do not agree with that view, but those schools are perfectly entitled to it. Children who attend Rudolf Steiner schools often perform as well as other children later on.

The children at the Rudolf Steiner school failed to produce the desirable outcome that the Government had set as a mechanism for assessing whether schools should be included in the nursery voucher scheme, so those children were deemed to have failed. That is absurd. In no way could that test judge whether the children had potential, were bright or were able to cope with a sophisticated curriculum and achieve better results than children from elsewhere, and it demonstrates the absurdity of any test at five to start selecting children and placing them in a selective primary grammar school. Let us be clear: that is what the Government mean when they talk about selection.

The Government have been eager to proclaim that all their reforms extend choice. Opposition Members have consistently said that the choice is for the school and not for the child. I remind the House of one fact that reinforces our thesis that the Government's reforms provide limited choice—the increased number of appeals. In 1989-90, there were 21,000 appeals by parents against the places that their children were given. By 1994-95, the figure had more than doubled to 54,400 because fewer parents were getting the choice that they wanted.

Standards in education are a central concern of all politicians and employers; they are an obsession for most of us who are parents of school-age children. We all worry. The notion that our child might gain access to better opportunities in a school that selects may seem superficially attractive, but never has an education debate been based on so much political prejudice and so little objective evidence.

Labour is right to focus on standards. We cannot run away from the challenge, and we cannot admit defeat before we have tried. Britain is wrong to have neglected standards for so long. We all want comprehensive primary and secondary schools that are so good that no parent would deny their child the privilege of attending them. The answer does not lie in bringing back selection, but in a single-minded determination to raise standards in all our schools for all our children.

Mr. Spearing: Most teachers, whatever their political persuasion, would agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) has just said, but I should like briefly to refer to the speech of the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor).

All hon. Members, whatever their political persuasion or their views on a particular matter, respect the hon. Gentleman for a variety of personal reasons, but his better nature was forgotten, perhaps unconsciously, in the thesis of his speech. The hon. Gentleman, perhaps from personal experience or from observing certain parts of the country—not Tower Hamlets, to which I shall refer in a minute—spoke about escape. He justified the existence of a system of selection as the means of escape, implying that without it there would be no escape—prisoners would be in chains; families would be in chains. His imagery gave away the misapprehension from which he suffers.

Despite his political viewpoint, I think that the hon. Gentleman agrees that we do not want social prisons—we do not want ghettos or areas of deprivation. We want to stop the spread of such areas and, if possible, to eliminate them. What about those who do not escape the prison? He might look to the legislation and philosophy of his party. Unfortunately, most of the legislation of the past

13 years—which he, alas, has supported—has increased the size of the social enclaves, or prisons, that he described and made it much more difficult for anybody to operate in them, thereby making the problem worse. His solution was to enable some people to escape from a predicament in which they should not be in the first place.

9.30 pm

I represent a constituency adjacent to the London borough of Tower Hamlets. I openly invite the hon. Gentleman to come to any of the secondary comprehensive schools in my constituency, just a mile or two from Tower Hamlets. We have multi-cultural education of a high standard—although no doubt the buildings could be better. I invite him to come to any of the four schools in my constituency, because I think that he would then revise the speech that he has just made.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I have great respect for the hon. Gentleman and I am sure that his local schools are very good. Does he not think that it makes a difference to the morale of a whole street if one or two children are attending a grammar school? People have a chance to say, "Look, there is one of the kids along the road who has broken out. My kid could do the same."

Mr. Spearing: The philosophy is not one of breaking out from an enclosed prison, but of making use of the facilities that the teachers and the community, as well as the borough council, if it is allowed, make available. The hon. Gentleman's assumption may have been true 10, 20 or 30 years ago, particularly in east London, but that situation is now much diminished—I believe that it has largely disappeared.

We have a rather strange debate. I should like to refer to the precise wording of the Bill. I see that the Under-Secretary has departed. I inform the Minister of State, who has now arrived—I am pleased to see that the Secretary of State herself has also arrived at this interesting stage of the debate—that at the beginning of this important debate on selection the Under-Secretary declined to give the Government point of view in resisting the new clause. The new clause negates and limits the purposes of the clauses that relate to the issues that we are considering.

The explanatory memorandum of the Bill as published for Second Reading—not the Bill as we now have it—said:

"Clauses 32 to 35 provide for the introduction of compulsory baseline assessment of children at primary schools. That assessment is to be carried out in accordance with an accredited baseline assessment scheme."

Anybody reading that—I think that I must include myself—thought, "Oh. This is a tightening up of what we have already got about assessment of pupils and how they are getting on and centralising it to a much greater degree." The words "selection" and "admission" do not appear in the alleged explanatory and financial memorandum.

I suggest, therefore, that the absence of those words and the inclusion of what the Secretary of State was alleged to have said on Second Reading about selection for entry to primary school by assessment show that the Government were being not just economical with the truth in the explanatory memorandum but downright misleading. I am sorry that the Secretary of State is doing exactly what the former right hon. Member for Finchley used to do. When a good point was being made by an Opposition Member, she engaged herself in conversation and pretended not to listen. I am sorry that the Secretary of State is displaying uncustomary discourtesy on this point. Perhaps she will read our debate in *Hansard*; I commend that point to her.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): My hon. Friend might as well talk to a rice pudding.

Mr. Spearing: I am not sure about a rice pudding; the Bill is certainly not very wholesome.

I now refer to clause 31 and I may get some enlightenment from the Secretary of State as I quote it. I would be glad if she intervened on this point. Clause 31 says:

"'baseline assessment scheme' means a scheme designed to enable pupils at a maintained primary school to be assessed for the purpose of assisting the future planning of their education".

As my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) said earlier, the scheme appears to be diagnostic. It is a means, albeit compulsory, whereby the needs of the pupil will be assessed

"for the purpose of assisting the future planning of their education".

Any decent school and any decent education system does that all the time. Indeed, it is one of the primary jobs of a teacher to assess the needs of pupils.

We then come to the most extraordinary part of clause 31. As the Secretary of State has, unfortunately, departed, I hope that the Minister of State will stand in for her and answer my question. Clause 31 refers to

"the future planning of their education and the measurement of their future educational achievements".

That phrase is extraordinary. The Bill refers to children's future achievements.

The word "achievements" may include GCSEs or other examinations; the achievements may be non-examinable, but some non-examinable achievements are important. As an ex-teacher, I used to say to people, "What does the O-level say? What does the GCSE say? It says that you are good at passing O-levels or GCSEs, but it does not tell you very much more."

Mrs. Gillan: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has had an opportunity to read the report of the Bill's Committee stage. I draw his attention especially to column 554, where the use of the word "future" was discussed at some length as a result of an amendment moved by the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge). I hope that that will assist the hon. Gentleman in his search for the meaning of the word "future".

Mr. Spearing: Alas, it does not. The Committee debate assists me in understanding the illogicality and educational naivety of the Conservative party. It is clear that my hon. Friend the Member for Barking—she may wish to contribute to this brief and useful exchange—tabled an amendment to try to clarify the extraordinary statement about the measurement of future educational achievements. Perhaps the Minister means that the scheme may assist in predicting future educational achievements, but the Bill does not use the word "predict"; it uses the word "measurement". Measurement can refer only to what exists. I suggest to the Minister that

[Mr. Spearing]

the wording of the clause is nonsense. It cannot be sustained in fact or in educational criteria. What we have here is the basis of provision for entry to primary school by selection, and we had not heard very much on that subject until tonight. Unless one had heard the speeches tonight or the debate in Committee, one would not be able to take that meaning from reading the Bill, because the provisions of the Bill are gobbledegook. They do not make sense educationally or practically and I suggest to the Under-Secretary that she is starting something that is completely wrong.

I shall conclude on one fundamental point of educational philosophy with which I am sure the Under-Secretary, and any teacher who happens to be in the House, will agree. Primary schools have always been comprehensive schools that meet mainstream educational need for the whole local area. If the Under-Secretary does what she has said she will do, each primary school will be turned into a selective school—a competitive racetrack for the meritocratic stakes. That is not the purpose of education and it should not be included in the Bill.

Mr. Gunnell: I shall comment briefly. Government amendment No. 65 is clearly about selection for primary schools. In Committee, I asked the Minister of State whether he could name a reputable educational organisation or school that had told the Department that it wanted selection in primary schools. He could not do so. He said:

"In a sense, it does not matter how many schools have asked for the provision; we are giving them the opportunity, if they want to take it. Perhaps by giving them that opportunity, we may stimulate more interest—I do not know."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 26 November 1996; c. 102.]

He implied that there was not much interest in the issue any way.

The Minister was unable to name anyone, apart from members of the Conservative party, who had decided that selection in primary schools would aid them in the future. He could not name anybody who had requested it—certainly not anyone with an educational reputation. We ask, therefore, why the Government, having set out their stall on parental choice, are so anxious to remove parental choice of primary schools.

The reasons why people choose primary schools are different from the reasons why they want a say and a choice in secondary schools. Fundamentally, parents choose a primary school because of its location in relation to their homes. The reasons are geographical; proximity to their homes is important. I handled an appeal for parents whose choice of school was dictated by their responsibilities as parents of their other children and as working parents. Selection of primary schools is usually made on that basis.

It was not until the debate in Committee that we realised that the Government intended to use baseline assessment for selection. It is clear that they are trying to use baseline assessment for purposes for which it was not designed. They are trying to use it as a basis for diagnosing achievement or aptitude.

The hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), who sincerely expressed his anxiety that children from what he called a working-class ghetto should get on and get out, felt that such a selection system would help them. It would have absolutely the opposite effect because it would reduce the age at which a child was selected and make it almost certain that those who, to use his word, were ghettoised would not pass—since selection means pass in this instance—or be selected. If the background of such children is restricted, as he suggests, it is very unlikely that they will be selected.

I am greatly concerned about how selection will work. The most likely outcome is that parental influence will have a rapid effect on selection. Primary school children will be selected on the basis of the pressure that their parents are able to bring to bear.

I recognise that there is no time for further debate of the issue, but I hope that the Minister will cite some reputable organisation or school, not simply the Conservative party, from which pressure has come for selection at primary level. My hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) clearly and most elegantly described why selection is to the disadvantage of our children. Such selection is fundamentally wrong. If the Government are seriously proposing it as a way forward, it will be disastrous for our children.

9.45 pm

Mrs. Gillan: We have had an extremely long debate on this group of amendments, which I think has generated more heat than light. I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Hawksley), for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) and for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman), all of whom made timely and pertinent interventions. I particularly thank my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) who, as I think Members on both sides of the House would agree, made an extremely passionate speech based on his own experience.

The group of amendments includes a Government amendment. In Committee, I undertook to table an amendment to ensure that it is the head teacher who selects the baseline assessment scheme to be used by the school. Amendment No. 65 does that. I must emphasise that there is agreement with our prime aim to ensure that every school has access to and uses a baseline assessment scheme that meets the criteria of the proposed national framework.

Amendment No. 65 acknowledges that the decision on which baseline assessment scheme to select is a matter of professional expertise and views on the content and style of schemes likely to be available and appropriate for the school. Such expertise lies with the head teacher, who is thus best placed to judge which scheme will be most suitable.

The Government however recognise how helpful consultation can be when formulating a decision—hence the requirement for the head teacher to consult the governing body when considering which scheme to select. The governing body's role is formally to adopt the scheme selected by the head teacher. That is consistent with the existing division of responsibilities between the governing body and the head teacher on school-level policy decisions.

Amendment No. 65 also provides for the rare occasion when a head teacher is unable to select a scheme, perhaps because of illness. It adds a contingent provision for the governing body to carry out the duty if the head teacher is unable to select a scheme within a reasonable time.

The amendment puts back—with the agreement, I know, of Opposition Members—the requirement for schools maintained by a local education authority to consider the scheme selected by their authority before deciding which scheme to select for their own purposes. This recognises that LEAs have a role to play here, and that primary schools do look to their LEAs for advice. It reflects what I am sure will happen in practice, but it does no harm to provide for it on the statute book.

Turning to other matters, I strongly resist new clause 9 and amendments Nos. 50 and 51. We have designed baseline assessment to inform teachers about what children can do on entry to school. That information will enable teachers to match work to children's needs and abilities and, over time, will enable value added to be measured.

There has never been any intention that the information derived from baseline assessment could be used for selection purposes. The Bill provides explicitly that the assessment will take place after children have been enrolled at school. If a pupil then transfers to another school, his baseline assessment details will be transferred to the new school. However, that will not happen until after it is known to which school the pupil has transferred. Therefore, it will be impossible for schools to select—or deselect—pupils on the basis of baseline assessment.

There are a variety of uses to which information taken from the assessments might be put—I have already mentioned the example of measuring value added. Schools might want to use the information to target resources and, of course, it will indicate where further assessment of special educational needs might be required—an issue that was discussed in Committee. The professional use by teachers of baseline assessment information is not something that we should presume to prescribe or inhibit.

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Lady said that baseline assessment was not to be used by primary schools for selection, so why does she not accept the amendment?

Mrs. Gillan: I do not consider that it is necessary to put that on the face of the Bill. If the hon. Gentleman continues to listen to what I have to say, he will deduce my reasons for that.

The idea that statutory baseline assessment could be used for selection purposes is a red herring. The important need now is not to create confusion among teachers or parents. I can only hope that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris) now sees fit to withdraw new clause 9 and that she does not press the associated amendments Nos. 50 and 51.

Much has been made in the debate of the issue of primary selection. At present, the regime governing selective admissions is exactly the same for primary schools as it is for secondary schools. Admission authorities would have to publish statutory proposals if the proportion of pupils they wanted to admit by selection would amount to a significant change in character of the school. In the opinion of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, selecting up to 15 per cent. of a school's intake, whether the school is primary or secondary, does not constitute a significant change of character.

The Bill sets out a new statutory baseline of 20 per cent. for selective admissions. We believe that that should apply to primary as well as to secondary schools, but we do not believe that many primary schools will wish to select pupils by general ability. However, a few might want to select by aptitude for a particular subject, such as music. In any case, we believe that primary schools should have the option of selecting a proportion of their pupils without central approval, as they have now, and that the lowest of the new thresholds should therefore apply to them. That is what the Bill gives them.

It will continue to be for admission authorities to determine the method that they use to assess ability or aptitude. We do not intend to tie admission authorities' hands in that respect. Therefore, if an admission authority decided to use the statutory baseline assessment materials being produced by SCAA or assessments from accredited baseline assessment schemes for an earlier pre-entry assessment, there is nothing to prevent the authority from doing so.

I repeat: there has never been any intention that the information derived from statutory baseline assessment could be used for selection purposes. Statutory baseline assessment will take place after children have been enrolled at school.

Tonight, in debating these amendments again, we have heard the Opposition parties stand fair and square against selection; against choices for parents. Where will they stop? Will they abolish selection by religious commitment? What about selection by home-school agreement or selection by mortgage? Parents are prepared to pay a lot of money to live in the catchment areas of good schools. Would the Opposition prevent people from choosing where to live?

I reject all the arguments that have been made by the Opposition tonight. I commend Government amendment No. 65 and reject new clause 9.

Ms Estelle Morris: What a mess. One of the prime parts of the Bill before us is to extend primary selection, and the Under-Secretary of State has just said that she does not believe that anyone would use it anyway. I should have thought that, in the dying days of a Government, the Minister could have used legislative time to tackle some of the problems that confront primary school children and primary schools instead of passing a measure that, by her own admission, she does not believe that schools welcome, need or will want to use.

What a mess on baseline assessment. The only reason that the Opposition were forced to table amendments and new clauses today was that the Minister of State, the hon. Member for—

Mr. Forth: Mid-Worcestershire.

Ms Morris: The hon. Member for—at the moment—Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) was engaged in an exchange in Committee in which he made it quite clear that

> "the concept and practice of baseline assessment is now widely agreed as being achievable, practical and desirable. To the extent that this is so . . . a school should be able to make an assessment of a child, even at the age of five."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 26 November 1996; c. 95-96.]

That was in the context of my asking him whether he would say that under no circumstances would baseline investment be used as a means of allowing selective entry at primary school level. As a result of his inadequacy in

[Ms Morris]

explaining the Government position, his confusion and his inability to answer the question, "How will schools select?" we tabled new clause 9.

Let us get this straight: the Under-Secretary of State agrees with what new clause 9 says, but she refuses to vote for it. What sort of Government are prepared to leave legislation on the statute book that confuses parents and misleads teachers because of the remarks of the Minister of State, and ignore the opportunity to put the record straight? As a result of the confusion among Ministers, there is only one may of making it clear that baseline assessment must not and will not be used for selective admission of children to primary school, and that is to put new clause 9 and amendments Nos. 50 and 51 on the face of the Bill.

Mrs. Gillan *rose—*

Ms Morris: I am sorry; it is too late. The Under-Secretary of State had her chance and failed to make Government policy clear.

The new clause is important, not only because of what it does to clarify primary selection, but because it will save baseline assessment from the confusion that the Government have thrown it into. It is a good scheme—a good measure. It has the support of the Opposition parties, and it should never have been mixed up with techniques of primary selection. The Under-Secretary loses the chance to make the record clear.

I want to add some comments to those already made about the contribution by the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor). He spoke with passion and he is genuinely concerned about too many children in this country who do not achieve and who lose opportunity. However, the world has moved on from the days when we had the 11-plus. In those days, we had an economy that could run if we only developed the skills of the few. We now have an economy that needs all adults to raise their standards and reach their potential.

The problem with selection is that it labels children failures. Has anyone ever heard a child say, "I passed for secondary modern"? What happens with the 11-plus is that one passes for grammar school or fails the 11-plus. The 11-plus institutionalises those low expectations. I agree with the hon. Member for Southend, East that there is a real challenge to raise standards in some schools throughout the country; but returning to the days when we labelled children failures is not the way to meet that challenge. The way is to face up to the challenge of ensuring that every school raises every pupil's ability, so that we no longer have to rely on an escape route for the few.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 257, Noes 303.

Division No. 53] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'ty NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashton, Joseph
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A J
Benn, Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Colley, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Davies, Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Strat'd)*
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian *(Makerf'd)*
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice

Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
Oakes, Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond (Ogmore)
Prentice, Mrs B *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Robert
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew (Blaenau Gwent)
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Speller, John
Squire, Ms R *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Sir Harold
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Ms Angela Eagle and
Mr. John Cummings.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Egger, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Gummer, John
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howell, David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Matese, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael

Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'th'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Scott, Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'd)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bex'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'd)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Anthony Coombs.

Question accordingly negatived.

It being after Ten o'clock, further consideration of the Bill stood adjourned.

Bill, as amended (in the Standing Committee), to be further considered tomorrow.

FLOOD PREVENTION AND LAND DRAINAGE (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 94E (Scottish Grand Committee (Bills in relation to their principle)),

That the Bill be committed to a Scottish Standing Committee.—[*Mr. Carrington.*]

Question agreed to.

FLOOD PREVENTION AND LAND DRAINAGE (SCOTLAND) BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),

That for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Flood Prevention and Land Drainage (Scotland) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment.—[*Mr. Carrington.*]

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Road Traffic Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 4th December, be approved.

BROADCASTING

That the draft Broadcasting (Sign Language) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 10th December, be approved.—[*Mr. Carrington.*]

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Sexual Offenders (Rehabilitation Unit)

10.16 pm

Mrs. Jane Kennedy (Liverpool, Broadgreen): I am grateful to you, Madam Speaker, for granting me permission to present a petition on behalf of 3,000 of my constituents on the day when the House has been considering the Sex Offenders Bill, a measure which it is hoped will assist in the supervision of sex offenders, and thereby make life safer for our children.

The petition of the residents of Old Swan, Liverpool, declares that they have strong objections to the use of 5 Derby lane as a development unit for the rehabilitation of those convicted of sexual offences, on the ground of its proximity to six local schools and nurseries, a youth club and a public park.

The petitioners therefore call on the House of Commons to urge the Secretary of State for the Home Department to ensure that 5 Derby lane is not granted permission, either now or in the future, to be used for the above purpose.

To lie upon the Table.

PRC Homes (Southampton)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

10.17 pm

Mr. John Denham (Southampton, Itchen): Thank you, Madam Speaker for giving me the opportunity to raise an issue that affects at least nine of my constituents in Sholing, Southampton. I realise that that is a relatively small number of people to make the subject of an Adjournment debate, but their situation is a serious one, and one that I hope will be assisted by tonight's debate. Their homes are structurally unsound. They cannot be sold, and they could not be mortgaged. Yet there is no agreement about how they might be repaired, and there is no immediate prospect of any improvement in the situation.

I am speaking on behalf of innocent victims of a series of events outside their control. I hope that, by raising their plight tonight, through publicity and through seeking the support of my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford), who sits on the Opposition Front Bench, and that of the Minister, it will be possible to find a solution to their problems.

All my constituents who find themselves in the position that I have described have bought their homes from Southampton city council, some under the right-to-buy legislation and others under the voluntary sales policy that existed before the right to buy. All the homes are of pre-cast reinforced concrete. They are all of a particular model—"Wates".

Following widespread concern about the deterioration of PRC-built homes, the Government introduced the Housing Defects Act 1984. Under the Act, grants became available for the repair of properties and, in hardship cases, for re-purchase by local authorities.

Although there was little evidence of serious deterioration of homes formerly owned by the city council, the widespread bad publicity and the passing of the Act blighted all such homes, and most people took advantage of the repair grants. That is what my constituents did. It still grates on them that, shortly after their homes were supposedly repaired, there was a switch, and from then on most people used the grant money to have their homes rebuilt. My constituents were among the last in Southampton to have homes of this type repaired.

The homes were supposed to be repaired in 1990 and 1991. As the Minister knows, a licence and warranty arrangement was established to ensure that repairs to the defective houses were undertaken effectively, and that all repaired dwellings were mortgageable. That arrangement was set up and controlled by a subsidiary of the National House-Building Council called PRC Homes Ltd. The PRC Homes scheme involved the preparation and design of a series of repair schemes. The schemes were developed and had to be approved by a qualified appraiser, after which a licence was issued by PRC Homes to the designer of the repair scheme.

The repair scheme was usually also submitted to each relevant local authority for building regulations and planning approvals, and for grant assistance. That process made it possible to identify whether a licence needed to be amended to suit the particular condition in each local area. After that process, the work was usually tendered and a repairer—a builder—was appointed to do the work.

The reason for tonight's debate is quite simple. For my constituents in Sholing, that process broke down, and broke down badly. What is not in doubt is that the works that were carried out were not carried out to the licence. But there is some doubt whether the licence that was approved was suitable for the type of homes involved and for the working conditions that applied to my constituents' homes. What is at issue, and what I want to ask tonight, is what exactly is wrong, what now needs to be done to put it right, and who is responsible for carrying out and paying for the work.

I shall not go into great technical detail: I do not have the technical expertise to do so, and I shall limit the time that I take reading from other people's technical documents. The fundamental principle of the repair schemes seems to have been that the concrete panels, which were or could be defective, should no longer be load-bearing. Either they had to be removed and replaced, or additional structures had to be put in place that took the load instead.

In the case of the Southampton properties, those principles were breached in a major way. Concrete panels were left load-bearing, and replacement walls were built in such a way as to be incapable of providing a secure structure and a secure home.

To explain why I have asked for an Adjournment debate, I shall go over some of the history. PRC Homes had overall responsibility for the administration of the Housing Defects Act 1984. Michael Dyson Associates obtained the repair licence for the Wates homes in Sholing in Southampton. That company was the agent for thousands of different types of PRC homes up and down the country. The builders were S. J. Wickens. Incidentally, my constituents were refused a choice of builder by Michael Dyson Associates, even though work on other Wates properties in Southampton had been done by a different builder. The local authority was Southampton city council.

I shall not go into all the details, but I must point out that some variations to the normal licence were required to cope with the problem of Wates houses that had a party wall with a city council tenant rather than another home owner. That meant that all the work had to be carried out from one side of the party wall. The treatment of the party wall turned out later to be a significant problem.

The repairs in Sholing were in Coates road, Sullivan road and Parry road, and were carried out between 1990 and 1991. It is accepted that problems were identified during that time. It should be stressed that the problems were identified only because of the alertness and vigilance of some of the home owners. None were identified during the inspections of the properties. Indeed, Michael Dyson Associates signed off the properties as having had the works carried out to the licence conditions. It also issued inspection certificates, which were supposed to carry a 10-year guarantee that would satisfy a mortgage lender. I have one of those certificates, and it is quite worthless.

It is odd that an agent that had a financial interest in the progress of the work was able to approve work and release moneys to itself. A clear conflict of interest lies behind some of the problems. It was only because some of the home owners had some common sense and technical expertise and challenged what had been done to their homes, that the problems came to light.

[Mr. John Denham]

The city council took the view, consistent with Department of the Environment circulars, that the presentation of a certificate from Michael Dyson Associates was sufficient for it to release grant money. I should say for the record that I chaired the Southampton housing committee in 1990 and 1991. I have checked the records carefully, and I can say that none of the issues was presented to members during that period.

Only after some home owners objected did city council officers refuse to release some funds on some properties. I stress the history, because some people have tried to make my constituents seem unreasonable in what they have done since. The truth is that, throughout this sorry story, my constituents have received a series of reassurances which, on their challenge, turned out to be useless.

I cannot give a blow-by-blow account of what happened in 1990 and 1991, but those who had complained were asked to allow Wickens the builder back into their homes a number of times. Some did, as many as three times, but it became clear that any work being done was cosmetic, and was not dealing with the major structural problems. Given the home owners' disillusionment, it is not surprising that court action seemed to them the only way forward.

In 1991, PRC Homes received correspondence from my predecessor, Christopher Chope; then from one of the home owners; then from solicitors representing seven owners. In my view, it is deeply disappointing that no systematic inspection of the properties in Sholing was carried out by PRC Homes at that time. PRC Homes will say that that was because of the threat of legal action. Later—under pressure from me—it relented, although legal action was still a possibility. By that time, it must surely have been clear that there was potentially a real problem with a number of homes in Southampton, and that it would have been better to intervene.

I understand that, during 1991 and 1992, various discussions took place involving Michael Dyson Associates, the city council and some home owners regarding potential repairs. The tone of those discussions suggested that the owners were being unreasonable in not letting anyone back in to do the work, but they were understandably reluctant to trust the company that had so clearly approved the shoddy previous repairs, or the builder who had let them down so badly.

After my election, I was approached by two of the owners, Mrs. Conroy and Mr. Hampton. I felt that the priority was to find out what needed to be done, and that argument about who should do it should take place later. In December 1992, I sought help from PRC Homes. On this occasion, it did respond, and agreed to inspect properties—but only the properties of Mrs. Conroy and Mr. Hampton: it would not look at others that might be defective.

That was, I believe, a fundamental error. All the onus was being placed—as it had been from the beginning—on home owners to know that there was something wrong with their properties. At that time, I was gradually becoming aware of more and more owners with potential problems.

An inspection took place, and on, 20 May 1993, PRC Homes wrote to Southampton city council saying that the timber frame party wall was fundamentally defective. By that time, however, Wickens was in receivership. Over the summer of 1993, PRC Homes found out from the city council how much money had not yet been paid to the builder—a sum potentially to contribute to the cost of repairs. It was now being suggested that £10,000 would be needed to repair each home. That was far less than the home owners believed was necessary; rightly or wrongly, it reinforced the view that they would again be fobbed off.

For some home owners, it was now three and a half years since their homes should have been repaired. There was a fundamental breakdown of trust in relation to Michael Dyson Associates, the council and PRC Homes. There is no doubt that the situation had become complex, with some home owners seeking a negotiated solution, some taking or least threatening legal action and some supported in such action by legal aid. Access to the homes was not easy.

In February 1994, I again approached PRC Homes and suggested that we meet to discuss the position. I met Basil Bean, chairman of PRC Homes, here at the House of Commons. It was agreed that a new approach would be tried: PRC Homes would put together a repair scheme and offer it to the home owners, and the city council would provide "decant" accommodation. In June 1994, at Southampton civic centre, I chaired a meeting at which that approach was suggested.

By that time, I knew of nine affected home owners, far more than had contacted PRC Homes. PRC Homes had made no attempt to contact other people with similar property who had had work done by Michael Dyson Associates and Wickens.

By that time, some home owners had decided that the only way forward was either the complete demolition of their homes, and a rebuild, or for someone to re-purchase their homes. At the meeting in Southampton, some owners reserved their rights to press for those options. As those home owners knew, my hope was more modest. It was to achieve, through negotiation, repairs that would at least put people back where they thought they were going to be in the first place: with sound, mortgageable properties. None the less, the city council explored with the Department of the Environment whether the council could receive any extra funding to re-purchase the properties, but that was not possible under the Housing Defects Act.

Some owners were willing to consider repairs. In January 1995, PRC Homes wrote to all owners setting out its offer of repairs and the city council's offer of accommodation. I believed then that the problem was close to resolution, but, two years later, no work has started, although one home may be done in February. That is why I took up the issue again in the autumn.

One of the reasons for asking for this debate is that I could not obtain answers to my letters to PRC Homes. I have now had a reply, but I am sorry to say that we are not much nearer a solution. I accept that there has been a good deal of toing and froing with the owners, which has taken time. Not surprisingly, they want to be satisfied that the work to be done would do the job. I am sorry to say that the story is repeating itself.

Most fundamentally, each owner is being dealt with separately, although their problems are common. Those owners that have challenged the PRC Homes proposals have produced convincing evidence that the proposed repair scheme is inadequate. One of the owners,

Mr. Magee, has obtained, under legal aid, a structural survey of his property. That sets out clearly not only what was wrong with the original repairs, but what is wrong with the PRC Homes scheme.

Again, I stress that I am not technically qualified to assess the evidence, and all the properties are different, but I find the report persuasive. It confirms that a steel beam has been fixed to a concrete panel, a fundamental breach of the licence, and concludes:

"If the steel was severed from the concrete panel, as is required by the licence, we believe that the party wall framework would not be capable of carrying the imposed first floor and roof loading. The structural stability of the property would be seriously affected, resulting in potential partial collapse."

That confirms the concern about the party wall, but the report, alongside a lengthy list of poor workmanship and licence breaches, also finds a major breach in the treatment of the non-party walls involving the removal of linings.

Again, I quote from the survey:

"this item has resulted in general misunderstanding by the repairer and designer alike, leading to major constructional defects and problems on site and large scale deviations from the licence. In effect, the removal of internal linings completely revokes the licence which was prepared on the basis of linings remaining."

It goes on to say that a trial hole

"shows the fixing of the roof to the new blockwork to be structurally inadequate, the junction between external cavity wall and internal gable wall to be inadequately tied, and the walls to be poorly constructed. Large scale rebuilding works are urgently required to remedy these defects."

I could go on, but those quotes illustrate the scale of the problem on one property. They have not been reflected in the PRC Homes response to date. The PRC Homes proposals are in respect only of the party wall framework. As they stand, they will not rectify the other major constructional defects.

As I have mentioned, there was originally talk of £10,000 per property being needed. Some owners have been told that the cost in their case may reach £20,000. The structural engineer's survey on this one property estimated the repair cost at £37,000. Every estimate puts the repair cost closer to the cost of a rebuild.

I cannot stress too much that it is not right that the scale of the problem should be revealed only by the individual initiative of my constituents. In this case, it is the taxpayer, through legal aid, who has funded the survey. Another constituent has already spent nearly £8,000 on surveys and legal fees in obtaining her own independent advice—all that because there has not yet been a commitment to a comprehensive and inclusive solution to the problem.

Of course I welcome PRC Homes's general acceptance of the need to respond to the crisis faced by my constituents, but PRC Homes must move more speedily and comprehensively to a solution than it has done so far. It is now seven years since the first work was done, four and a half years since I first became involved, and two years since PRC Homes offered to undertake repairs. That time scale is not good enough. There is no sense yet of an organisation that is committed to finding, urgently, a comprehensive solution.

I ask the Minister to support me, because PRC Homes was and is responsible for implementing the Housing Defects Act, which is Government legislation. Others, such as Michael Dyson and the builders, Wickens, may bear responsibility for the original failure, but the ball is now in the court of PRC Homes. I ask the Minister to support my contention that PRC Homes must find a complete solution for all the properties. As part of that, it must satisfy itself that no other properties repaired by the same or similar people have hidden problems on this scale.

Given the distrust that now exists, a system of independent inspection or arbitration covering all the properties must be agreed and put speedily into place. Finally, PRC Homes should agree in advance to carry out the necessary remedial work, or to agree an alternative with the home owners. Any need to recoup funds from any other party to this sorry tale should be the responsibility of PRC Homes.

My concern is that my constituents, whose homes have been worthless for more than a decade, will be forced into a situation in which some will take an inadequate offer out of desperation, others will struggle to finance their own legal action, and yet others will have to be funded by the taxpayer through lengthy legal battles. That would be quite unfair, and I ask the Minister to use all his powers to press for a solution along the lines that I have outlined.

10.35 pm

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) and to the Minister for allowing me to speak briefly in the debate. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for raising this important subject, which affects a number of his constituents. He has rightly highlighted the disturbing implications for them of the manifest failure of schemes, and the way in which they were put into effect, that were supposed to resolve the problems in their homes.

Some wider issues of public concern ought to be addressed, and I hope that the Minister will attend to them, if not now at least in the near future. First, my hon. Friend the Member for Itchen made a reasonable case for the need for some kind of independent verification and inspection of the quality and validity of the work. Those involved in the process, whether PRC Homes or Michael Dyson Associates, all had a vested interest in the way in which the work was carried out. There seems to have been no proper mechanism to ensure independent scrutiny and inspection.

Secondly, there is the issue of public money. The works carried out to the defective homes under the relevant legislation involved the use of public money, and my hon. Friend has said that more public money is being spent on legal aid to try to enforce remedial works because of the failure of initial work. It is unsatisfactory for public money to be brought into use for a second time by a different route to enforce repair work that would not have been necessary if the original remedial action had been carried out properly.

Thirdly, there is the wider issue of the remedies that are available to home owners. The Minister will be aware of growing concern that the systems, supposedly designed to reassure those who buy new homes, that are operated through the National House-Building Council and other bodies have sometimes not proved entirely satisfactory. PRC Homes, a subsidiary of the NHBC, seems to have failed to provide a speedy and adequate response to the

[Mr. Nick Raynsford]

rightful concerns and grievances of home owners. I hope that the Minister will address those matters and ensure justice at long last for my hon. Friend's constituents, and that he will also address the wider issues.

10.37 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison): I appreciate the interest of the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) in this matter. Perhaps he and the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) will allow me to put these issues in the context of the housing defects scheme of assistance as a whole.

In the early 1980s, following discovery of cracking in the columns of an Airey house, the Building Research Establishment conducted a comprehensive investigation into all types of precast reinforced concrete houses built before 1960. The BRE discovered that, unfortunately, in a long-term chemical process known as carbonation, carbon dioxide interacted with the concrete to change its composition, so that the protection that it afforded to the steel reinforcement would eventually be lost, and in due course houses would become structurally unsound.

It is a slow process, and the BRE found that, in most cases, structural failure would not occur for some time. However, all dwellings of that type would eventually be affected, which meant that many former tenants—over 25,000 in England alone—had bought their homes at a valuation that did not accurately reflect the true likely dwelling life.

The homes had been sold in good faith by public sector landlords, in circumstances in which neither the vendor nor the purchaser could have been aware of the inherent defects. Therefore, with all-party support, we introduced the scheme of assistance embodied in the Housing Defects Act 1984. The scheme entailed that, over a 10-year period, owners would receive 90 per cent. grants, or 100 per cent. grants in cases of financial hardship, to reinstate their houses to the structural condition that their original valuation had assumed—the "defect-free" value.

Reinstating houses to that condition meant either removing and replacing the original PRC components or making them structurally redundant. In cases in which it was physically impossible to do so or it offered better value for money, or in hardship cases, the alternative form of assistance would be re-purchase. The primary form of assistance, however, would be through reinstatement.

It was a massive undertaking. In England alone, 22 different PRC house types were initially designated under the legislation as inherently defective, some of them with as many as 18 separate variants. Repair systems had to be designed for all of them that met the stringent standards on which lending institutions rightly insisted to accept houses as assets for mortgage purposes. Therefore, the National House-Building Council set up a subsidiary—PRC Homes Ltd.—to license repair systems that would meet the criteria, and repairers to carry out the work; to approve a list of inspectors to inspect the work; and to issue a 10-year warranty at completion.

PRC Homes Ltd. was fortunate in being able to call upon advice from technical experts from the local authorities, who were to administer the scheme, and from the lending institutions, BRE, and my Department. The assessment committee met regularly over a period of eight years to evaluate, line by line and drawing by drawing, the specifications for a total of 53 separate repair systems. As a result of their work, less than 1 per cent. of owners eligible under the scheme who have applied for assistance are still waiting for works to be completed, and we expect the vast majority of local authorities, including Southampton, to have completed their programmes by the end of this financial year.

Lending institutions have been supportive throughout. A survey of the largest building societies, conducted in 1986, suggested that almost all would consider on normal terms an application for mortgage on a repaired property, and that generally remains the case today. However, even the most watertight licence and inspection system is vulnerable to human frailty, and there is always a possibility of problems, which is why the PRC Homes Ltd. warranty makes provision for ensuring that defects or damage caused by failure to comply with workmanship, materials or design requirements of the repair system that are discovered in the first two years after completion are rectified by the repairer or—if the repairer becomes bankrupt—by PRC Homes Ltd. itself.

In the specific cases in Southampton which the hon. Member for Itchen has brought to our attention, the repairer did vary a detail from that shown in the licensed system. The variation was picked up by the inspector, however, who instructed the repairer to return to site to carry out remedial work—which he agreed to do, pending release of retention moneys. As I understand it, the variation in no way compromised the structural stability of the dwellings, but merely meant that the new works to render the existing party wall structurally redundant were not completely independent of the unrepaired property next door. A continuous beam linking the two properties had been left, rather than severed at the party wall, as required by the repair system. Until the matter was remedied, obviously the repair could not be accepted by a lending institution as conforming completely with the licensed repair system.

Unfortunately, it appears that at least some of the owners were unwilling to give the repairer access to their houses to carry out the work, and that, for the same reason, later attempts by PRC Homes Ltd. to carry out an independent inspection were also unsuccessful. A warning of legal action by six of the owners then meant that PRC Homes Ltd. did not feel that it could be further directly involved at that stage.

That state of affairs persisted until December 1992, when the hon. Member for Itchen wrote to PRC Homes Ltd. asking for their assistance as an "honest broker". A site meeting was arranged at three of the properties, in April 1993, to agree a schedule of works, but, in June 1993, PRC Homes Ltd. were advised that the repairer had ceased trading.

That meant that PRC Homes Ltd. was now directly involved under the terms of the insurance certificate. However, in October 1993, one of the owners telephoned PRC Homes Ltd. to advise the company that the owners did not want repairs done, and that she and three of the other owners were considering legal action against the

inspector. Nevertheless, PRC Homes Ltd. managed to obtain access to the properties to carry out inspections over the next three months.

In April 1994, one of the owners contacted an official in my Department, who advised her that the scheme of assistance was administered by local authorities, and that it therefore did not appear to be a matter in which the Department could become directly involved.

Southampton city council then wrote to my Department in October of that year in response to a request from the owners, inquiring whether it would be possible for the council to re-purchase the properties. It was pointed out that there was no provision in the legislation for assistance by re-purchase after an owner had already received assistance by way of reinstatement grant. That remains the case today, and, in any case, as I have already noted, re-purchase as a form of assistance is available under the legislation only in very specific circumstances, which Southampton city council had evidently decided in 1989 did not apply here.

Re-purchase is not a feasible solution to the owners' problems, and while I obviously sympathise with their desire not to undergo further disruption to their homes while remedial work is carried out, nevertheless the fact remains that the only viable way forward is that provided by the terms of the warranty.

Both Southampton city council and PRC Homes Ltd. are, I understand, in agreement on the works to be done. I also understand that the council has offered the use of an empty house as alternative accommodation while the work is carried out, and that PRC Homes Ltd. is prepared to meet storage and removal costs, even though the original works were carried out with the owners in residence.

I do not see what more the two parties can do to advance matters, and indeed I understand that one of the owners has already accepted that, and has even agreed that work can proceed while he remains in occupation. If the other owners signal their agreement, they too can join the contract, and put an end to seven years of frustration and uncertainty. I very much hope that that proves to be the case, and that, having heard what I have had to say, the hon. Gentleman agrees with me that it is the only practical outcome.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fourteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 28 January 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

IMPERIAL COLLEGE BILL

TAMAR BRIDGE BILL

Read a Second Time, and committed.

KING'S COLLEGE LONDON BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

Order for Third Reading read.

To be read the Third time on Tuesday 4 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SECURITY

Means-tested Benefit

1. **Mr. Berry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of people are currently dependent on means-tested benefits; and what were the figures for 1979. [11368]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Andrew Mitchell): The latest estimate is that 26.4 per cent. of the population live in households receiving income support, family credit, disability working allowance, housing benefit or council tax benefit. It is not possible to make a direct comparison with the position in 1979 since the present structure of the benefits did not exist then.

Mr. Berry: Can the Minister confirm that in 1979 one in 12 people were dependent on means-tested benefits and that today the figure has doubled to one in six? Is this not the result of what the Bishop of Liverpool recently described as the "running sores" of unemployment, low pay and poverty, all of which have increased dramatically under the Government?

Mr. Mitchell: I am surprised at the question that the hon. Gentleman has asked. He should know that unemployment benefit takes up about 10 per cent. of the Department of Social Security budget. He should condemn the Opposition Front Bench, which wants means testing to be extended. In the unlikely event of a Labour Government being returned after the next general election, I understand that Labour's proposals are to means-test both child benefit and the state pension, which would mean a significant increase in means testing.

The hon. Gentleman should be aware that two thirds of the growth in social security spending has been directed to helping the disabled. The Government have provided an enormous increase in support for them, as they have in helping the elderly. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will tell the House which part of that growth he would like to retract.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Does my hon. Friend agree that the best way to get people off means-tested benefits is to get them into work? Is it not important, therefore, to recognise that under this Government two jobs have been created every minute since 1992? That figure has not been disputed by the International Labour Organisation or even by the Labour party. The Government are creating jobs. Should not we take the words of the Bishop of Liverpool as endorsing the Government's policies?

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend is right. The Government's policy is dedicated to getting people back into work. It has been extremely successful, as my hon. Friend has pointed out. Since the general election, unemployment has fallen by more than 1 million. The United Kingdom has more of its citizens in work and fewer unemployed than any other major European country.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has announced the introduction of parent plus, which will be piloted from April. Parent plus will be the best scheme anywhere in the world for helping lone parents back into work. It is shortly to be piloted throughout the United Kingdom. The private sector will be involved as well as the public sector. The Government are taking decisive and effective action to help the unemployed, yet all we hear from the Opposition is meaningless waffle that is designed to con the electorate.

Mr. Wicks: Can the Minister explain why it is that one in three babies in Tory Britain are born to families that are dependent on the means test, compared with one in 10 in 1979? Will he help the House work out why it is that a Tory Government who in 1979 promised to get the state off people's backs have ended up creating a massive dependency state, one which includes a quarter of all households in Britain?

Mr. Mitchell: We all care about helping the people whom the hon. Gentleman has just described. The Labour party has a pretty strange definition of poverty: it means that when we increase income support levels, its measure of poverty also increases. The Government have a range of policies designed to help people back into work. In the lone parent area, the hon. Gentleman will know of the importance of the after-school kiddies clubs, which have been greatly expanded under the Government's programme. The Government have put £24 million on the table to help expand that form of after-school child care. I reject what the hon. Gentleman said, and underline the Government's success in helping people back into work.

Benefit Fraud

2. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has for avoiding fraud in the benefit system; and if he will make a statement. [11369]

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): Tackling fraud and abuse is my top priority. The Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill, which successfully completed its Committee stage this morning, will strengthen our ability to fight fraud, and will enable us to galvanise local authorities into tackling fraud in housing benefit.

Mr. Bellingham: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for outlining the action that the Government are taking. Will he join me in paying tribute to the staff in the King's Lynn benefits office, who work very hard to tackle fraud in Norfolk and elsewhere? Is he aware of a particular problem in Norfolk due to the recent arrival from eastern Europe of illegal immigrants who have sought work and, in some cases, benefits? Does he agree that such abuse must be tackled? What is he doing about it?

Mr. Lilley: I certainly join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to Benefits Agency staff in King's Lynn and throughout the country. They work with dedication and commitment to help those entitled to benefit and to ensure that money does not go to those who are not entitled to it.

I shall look into the problem in my hon. Friend's constituency of illegal immigrants and others who are not entitled to benefits claiming them in those circumstances.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Does the Secretary of State accept that the data-matching powers in the fraud Bill will prejudice privacy and confer unprecedented powers on the state? Will he give constructive consideration to the case for introducing into the Bill a code of practice to ensure that central and local government departments and contracted agencies comply with the best international standards for data protection?

Mr. Lilley: I do not accept that those powers are an infringement of civil liberties. We are not requiring any more information from individuals than is already taken. We are simply using the power to ensure that people are not, for example, working and claiming. We have said that we will consider the appropriateness of codes of practice, and we will discuss that matter with those responsible for data protection.

Mr. John Marshall: Can my right hon. Friend tell the House about the success of his fraud hotline, which has been warmly welcomed by the majority of taxpayers who work hard and do not see why their taxes should help fraudsters?

Mr. Lilley: I can tell my hon. Friend that the fraud hotline has been extremely successful. More than 100,000 calls have been received. They are still coming in at a rate of more than 5,000 a week, which is high such a long time after the original announcement. It shows that honest, upright individuals are incensed by the minority who try to rip off the system. We entirely uphold their opinions.

Housing Benefit Fraud

3. **Mrs. Jane Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on housing benefit fraud by landlords. [11370]

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Alistair Burt): We have a comprehensive strategy, which is strengthened by the current fraud Bill, to combat all housing benefit fraud, including landlord fraud. We support local authorities through an incentive scheme and, now, through challenge funding, £8 million of challenge funds were made available to authorities in 1996-97, and we will double that to £16 million in 1997-98. We are also setting up an inspectorate to help to ensure that all authorities tackle fraud effectively.

Mrs. Kennedy: Notwithstanding the Minister's answer, will he confirm that housing benefit fraud is currently estimated to cost us £2 billion a year, and that the largest part of that is recognised to be organised landlord fraud? Have not the Government missed an opportunity, during the passing of the fraud Bill, to introduce a new offence of landlord fraud, as the Opposition suggested? Does that not show the Government's commitment to a deregulated, private housing-for-rent market at all costs, including costs to the taxpayer?

Mr. Burt: I do not recognise all the figures given by the hon. Lady. Housing benefit fraud is estimated at about £1 billion, and landlord fraud constitutes about £150 million of that, so it is not the largest part.

The Bill that we are currently taking through the House substantially strengthens powers against all forms of fraud, including landlord fraud. All the measures involved—data matching, new powers of entry to landlords' premises, more ways of recovering overpaid housing benefit, and easier prosecution and stiffer penalties where false representations have been made for claims—including up to seven years' imprisonment for one offence—show that we deliver serious penalties for housing benefit and landlord fraud. For all that the hon. Lady says, it is we who introduced those measures, and we have brought the Opposition along with us.

Sir Donald Thompson: Will my hon. Friend ensure that he pursues landlord fraud vigorously in Liverpool, London or wherever it occurs? At the end of the day, it makes honest landlords less likely to let their properties and, consequently, makes honest people looking for property less likely to find any.

Mr. Burt: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. It is important for the private rented market to continue to expand; it is important to the integrity of benefit for it to be properly handled, and for fraud to be clamped down. We are prepared to consider ideas advanced by all kinds of authority, and, indeed, the local authority in the constituency of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy) has received a £140,000 challenge fund grant to help it to root out more landlord fraud.

My hon. Friend makes a fair point about the need to ensure that honest landlords are protected like everyone else.

Cold Weather Payments

4. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he received during the recent cold weather about cold weather payments. [11372]

10. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of his cold weather payments; and if he will make a statement. [11378]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Roger Evans): We received 88 letters about the cold weather payments scheme during the recent cold period.

The scheme works well, responding flexibly to target help where it is most needed. So far this winter, over 5 million payments, worth over £43 million, have been made to almost 3 million people.

Mr. Winnick: Is the Minister aware that when some of my hon. Friends and I went to No. 10 Downing street at the end of December to deliver a letter, although it had been extremely cold for some 10 days, no cold weather payments had been made during that time, causing untold misery and hardship to many pensioners on low incomes? Why are the Government so determined to oppose the measure that my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) wanted to introduce to deal with the chill factor? Does that not show that the Government do not care a damn about those in need?

Mr. Evans: No. According to paragraph 9.7 of the advice from the Meteorological Office that we took last summer and placed in the Library,

"In much of the country, the additional domestic heating requirements generated as a result of the effect of the exposure of houses to wind are too small and too highly variable to be included sensibly in such a scheme."

It is also clear that the Cold Weather Payments (Wind Chill Factor) Bill proposed by the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) did not explain how to take the chill factor into account in a sensible, workable or practicable fashion. It would have caused chaos.

The hon. Gentleman—or, if not the hon. Gentleman, his Front Bench—ought to answer this point. He may wish to spend more money, but the hon. Lady's Bill—vague though it is—would cost several hundred million pounds a year more during a winter as severe as last winter.

Mr. Jones: Will the Minister look at the undoubted anomalies in this system? For example, in my constituency of Deeside payments are dictated by readings at RAF Valley, 90 miles to the west and warmed by the Irish sea. When the polar wind blew, many pensioners' domestic budgets were blown to smithereens because they only had enough money to heat their homes. Will the Minister please be more generous, and review the system thoroughly?

Mr. Evans: Every summer we ask the Meteorological Office to review whether the linking of particular parts of constituencies with particular weather stations is appropriate. The greater part of the hon. Gentleman's constituency is dealt with from Crosby, which has triggered a cold weather payment once this winter.

Obviously, the detailed workings of the scheme are reviewed after every winter. Let me make it clear, however, that responding to Opposition calls to extend the payments to all pensioners, or to all people on income support, would cost between £200 million and £300 million a year more than was spent this year or last year. If the commitment of the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) to the control totals is to be believed, that is an expenditure commitment that must be met by a Labour cut.

Mr. Batiste: Does my hon. Friend realise that measurements taken in Leeds city centre are consistently some degrees warmer than those in the rural hinterland, which includes much of my constituency? When he speaks again to the Meteorological Office, will he ask it to review where it takes its measurements in various parts of west Yorkshire, because they are not limited just to Leeds, so that people's entitlement to this important benefit, which was introduced by the Government, relates to their experience at home?

Mr. Evans: The simple answer to my hon. Friend is yes. If he or any hon. Member wants to make specific points, as numerous hon. Members did last summer, they will of course all be referred to the Meteorological Office and the advice will be carefully considered.

Mrs. Peacock: I welcome what my hon. Friend has said about the number of payments and the amount of money that has been paid, but will he please take up the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) about the weather centre in the centre of Leeds? Taking measurements there is useless to people in my constituency who live on the hill. My hon. Friend the Minister knows that I have made representations on the matter. Will he please take it back to the Meteorological Office?

Mr. Evans: The simple answer is yes. My hon. Friend made the points last summer. The Meteorological Office was not persuaded, but I shall be happy to reconsider the matter if there is any further information or if there are any further arguments.

Mr. Thurnham: Will the Minister bear in mind the special needs of voluntary funded hostels such as Bolton's Salvation Army hostel, which faces higher heating charges in cold weather, but whose tenants are free to spend their supplements as they wish? Has he any encouraging message for voluntary fund raisers who have to raise the money to keep hostels going?

Mr. Evans: That is a separate issue from the cold weather payment scheme that we have been discussing.

Mr. McLeish: Will the Minister explain why, after the Secretary of State for Social Security has spent an extra £15 billion on welfare in the past four years, pensioners and poor families throughout Britain still have to make a choice between eating and heating? Does the Minister accept that cuts in home insulation and the imposition of value added tax on fuel have only worsened the plight of

the poorest people in society, especially in relation to fuel poverty? Does he agree that the deliberate sabotaging of the recent Cold Weather Payments (Wind Chill Factor) Bill and the failure to set up a trial project in Scotland only add insult to injury? Surely fuel poverty is a scandal in 1997. When will the Government start to take the matter seriously?

Mr. Evans: The House and the country will take the hon. Gentleman seriously when he tells us exactly what he is prepared to spend and on what. Since 1991, £350 million has been paid out for the home energy efficiency payment scheme and no less than 10 per cent. of the United Kingdom housing stock has had its insulation improved as a result of the scheme. I make it absolutely clear to the hon. Gentleman, and to anyone else who doubts it, that, if he wishes to extend the cold weather payment scheme to everyone on income support and to all pensioners, it will cost £250 million to £300 million a year more in a winter of last year's severity.

Benefits Spending

5. **Mr. Purchase:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the increase in spending on benefits since 1979. [11373]

Mr. Lilley: Since 1979, spending has increased by £40 billion in real terms. More than two thirds of that increased help is for the elderly, the long-term sick and, above all, disabled people.

Mr. Purchase: Does the Secretary of State realise that the growth in those benefits is almost twice the growth of annual average gross domestic product in Britain under Conservative rule? Does he not recognise that the figures that he has announced show that the Government's economic policy has failed? Most important, does he not understand that his Government have robbed young people of the understanding of the connection between work and welfare, and that the best welfare policy is to put young people back to work?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman was not listening to my answer. Two thirds of the extra help goes to disabled people, long-term sick and elderly people. Is he saying that it is a failure to increase help to disabled people and that Labour would undo it? Is he saying that it is a failure that there are more elderly people? The life expectancy of someone reaching retirement age now is more than two years higher than under Labour.

Mrs. Roe: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that his reforms, including his proposed reforms of family benefits, are essential to control the increase in social security spending? Is he aware that his planned reforms of family benefits would not be implemented by the Labour party? Has it told him where the money will come from to compensate for the lost savings?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. The reforms that we announced in the Budget will ultimately save about £500 million through equalising benefits for lone parents with those available to married couples, which is not only fair but makes it possible for us to improve benefits elsewhere. The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) has said that she will not implement the measures necessary to save that amount, but will live within the total budget. To increase benefits for lone parents by £500 million, she must take money either from married couples, single people who do not have children or elderly people. Can she tell us which?

Ms Harman: Will the Secretary of State confirm that the social security budget is £15 billion a year more than it was in 1992? Will he confirm that that means that, as Secretary of State, he has increased the social security budget by 20 per cent.? Will he admit that it is no good blaming the elderly? They account for only £1.5 billion of that £15 billion annual increase. Will he admit that it is no good blaming the disabled? They account for only £4 billion of the £15 billion increase. Will he admit that the main reason for the £15 billion increase is that one in five households are without work?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Lady's figures are wrong. That is the simple answer to her question. Perhaps she will answer my question and explain—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. As the right hon. Gentleman is aware, this is Question Time, when the Government answer questions.

Mr. Lilley: The simple answer to the hon. Lady's question is that her figures are wrong. Two thirds of the growth in social security spending in real terms since I took office has been spent on disabled, elderly and long-term sick people. That is fact, and I shall put the figures in the Library. I am sorry that the hon. Lady did not however use the privilege that the House offers to give us the answer that we want: where will she get the money?

Occupational Pensions

6. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of those retiring now are in receipt of occupational pensions; and what he estimates the proportion will be in 10 years' time. [11374]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Oliver Heald): It is estimated that in 1979, 55 per cent. of recently retired people were in receipt of an occupational pension, compared with 70 per cent. in 1994-95. This is projected to rise further to more than 75 per cent. in the next 10 years.

Sir David Knox: Does my hon. Friend agree that adequate occupational pensions have done a great deal to ease poverty and anxiety among retired people and that further extension of them is essential if retired people are to live fuller and more satisfying lives?

Mr. Heald: The Government's policy to maintain the value of the basic state pension, encourage more private provision and target help on those most in need has led to record rises in pensioners' incomes—rising almost as

much each year as they did during the whole of the last Labour Government's period in office. My hon. Friend is right; we must go further.

Mr. Frank Field: After 18 years of Conservative rule, will the Minister tell the House how many pensioners are still poor?

Mr. Heald: The hon. Gentleman asks a question that I am very happy to answer. Even the poorest pensioners have seen incomes rise by 28 per cent. since 1979.

Mr. Field: How many are in poverty?

Mr. Heald: It is all very well for the hon. Gentleman to ask that question, because he defines poverty in relation to the level of income support—so that, if one increases income support, one ends up with more poverty. It is nonsense. What is demonstrable is that, since 1979, under the Government, pensioners' incomes have increased dramatically—on average, by 60 per cent.—and that even the poorest pensioners have seen a 28 per cent. increase. That is very different from what happened under Labour, when pensioners were robbed of their savings through high inflation.

Mr. Dykes: There has been spectacular growth in private pensions—which have given the elderly new horizons and new freedoms, and are a matter of great pride for Conservative Members. None the less, is my hon. Friend satisfied that expenses and commissions on the new pension schemes are now under adequate control?

Mr. Heald: As my hon. Friend says, it is important to ensure that pension charges are kept to the minimum. The new disclosure rules are having that effect, and the Securities and Investments Board is meeting with pension providers to discuss those issues. The most important factor, however, is the yield on pensions. Since 1980, there has been a 9 per cent. annual real yield on private pensions in the United Kingdom. We also have more invested in pensions than all of Europe put together. The result is that, in 2030, when the UK's finances are in surplus, France and Germany will have a debt of 100 per cent. of GDP, and Japan's debt will be 300 per cent. of GDP.

State Earnings-related Pension Scheme

7. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to ensure that SERPS becomes a partially funded scheme. [11375]

Mr. Heald: We have no proposals to make SERPS a partially funded scheme. Our policy is to encourage private pension provision through the contracting out of SERPS.

Mr. Flynn: Does the Minister agree that the two most profitable pension schemes have been occupational pensions and SERPS? He failed to mention the 2 million people who face impoverishment in old age because of their money-purchased personal pension schemes, and that only 7,000 of them have been compensated. Does he realise that someone on average wages who has been in a SERPS pension since 1978 will now be receiving an additional £70 a week, doubling his or her pension? Why does not the Minister forget ideology and look anew at fresh pension schemes and at renewing and strengthening SERPS, so that it will be funded and run independently of the national insurance scheme and managed by independent managers?

Mr. Heald: I have examined the proposals to which the hon. Gentleman refers, and I believe that they make him the most expensive Labour Member. His wish list of extra DSS expenditure on pensions would cost more than £6.8 billion by 2000, and more than £65 billion by 2030. He is proof of the type of pressures that a Labour Government—were one, heaven forfend, elected—would face to increase public spending. His ideas would result in national insurance costs rising by a third.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: Does my hon. Friend agree that allowing people to opt out of SERPS is exactly what the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) wants—a move towards a funded income-related scheme and away from a pay-as-you-go state scheme? Until the Labour party understands that we are achieving what it now says it wants, it is unlikely that Labour will be fit to govern.

Mr. Heald: My hon. Friend is right. Contracting out of SERPS and encouraging the private sector are what have helped pension incomes to rise so fast since 1979. Let us not forget, however, that the Labour party is proposing equalising the state pension age at 60—

Ms Harman: That is not relevant.

Mr. Heald: It is relevant to SERPS, because Labour is talking about equalising the state pension age at 60, with a pension of £40 a week. With no income support, that would lead pensioners to destitution. It is risky—it is new Labour, new danger.

Income Support

8. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of pensioners entitled to income support who do not claim it. [11376]

Mr. Burt: The only way to determine the precise number not taking up their entitlement would be for them to come forward and make a claim. However, the most recent figures suggest that between 800,000 and 1.1 million pensioners have an unclaimed entitlement to income support.

Mr. Mitchell: Why are the Government so complacent about that extraordinarily high number of pensioners not claiming income support? The income of those million pensioners not claiming income support is £14 a week lower and they are not entitled to cold weather payments. Other estimates suggest that 800,000 of those pensioners are single women living on their own with no occupational pension and no savings. If the Government believe in targeted benefits, should they not be seeking out those people and ensuring that they get the money to which they are entitled, instead of wringing their hands and being complacent because they are saving money?

Mr. Burt: The Government are in no way complacent about those figures. It is the responsibility of the

Department to present information to the public about the availability of benefits. The Department's publicity budget for the past three years, including the current year, has been £84 million. Some £9 out of every £10 worth claiming is claimed and four out of five claimants are paid. Take-up campaigns must be properly targeted to be effective. We do that successfully with family credit. It is not possible to target a take-up campaign on pensioners in the way that the hon. Gentleman would like. However, there is a new Benefits Agency national awareness campaign, running from 13 to 26 January, entitled "Pensions and Benefits for Older People". It is our job constantly to put information before the public. If someone comes forward with a claim, we can, we will and we want to honour it.

Mr. Gallie: Will my hon. Friend give a commitment to maintain the level of old-age pensions above the rate of the rise in the cost of living, as the Conservatives have done over the past 18 years, unlike Labour, who allowed the value of pensions to plummet while they were in office?

Mr. Burt: I can make that commitment to maintain the value of the pension. I am sure that my hon. Friend and the House will be happy to learn that, while 31 per cent. of those in the lowest tenth by income of the population in 1979 were pensioners, today that figure is only 7 per cent. Our commitment to maintain the value of the pension in line with inflation is clear. We have not threatened to means-test it, as has been suggested by Opposition Members.

Mr. Denham: The Minister says that he is not complacent. Does he agree with the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, his hon. Friend the Member for North Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald), who told the Standing Committee considering the Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill in December:

"we do not know why certain pensioners do not take up income support"?—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 5 December 1996; c. 44.]

Is that not the Tory scandal? While the Secretary of State has pushed up the cost of Tory failure by £15 billion a year, the Government have not even had time to find out why 1 million pensioners go without £14 a week, why 1 million pensioners miss out on cold weather payments and why 1 million pensioners cannot even get their eyes checked for nothing.

Mr. Burt: I am more than happy to agree with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, who was entirely right. The hon. Gentleman's bluster would mean a great deal more if he committed himself and his colleagues to a take-up campaign that would deal with the problem that we face. No such commitment has been made, either while we were considering the Bill or since. It is all bluster and no money up front from Labour Members. We will continue to make sure that benefits are available to all who need them and to publicise them. The considerable advance in the position of pensioners under this Government is likely to continue only under the economic policies advocated by the Conservatives.

Mr. Devlin: Will my hon. Friend confirm that taking up benefits is not compulsory? There may be a variety of reasons why elderly people do not wish to claim income support or other benefits. The best way to target those people is to make them aware that benefits are available if they want them, not to sneak into records of their savings and other matters to find out whether they are entitled and to tell them that they must have the benefit.

Mr. Burt: My hon. Friend is correct. It is not possible to define in every circumstance why someone has not taken up a benefit. It may further reassure the House to know that local authorities are now under a general obligation, set out in our guidance, to use whatever information they have if it is suggested that someone might have a claim for benefit. We have also provided local authorities with the software to assist them in that task. The matter is much more complex than the Opposition suggest. If they are to work, take-up campaigns must be properly targeted. That was the case with family credit, and we increased the number of people claiming it. We shall continue our efforts to ensure that all those who need benefits get them.

Social Security Budget (Waste)

9. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the annual cost of waste in the social security budget. [11377]

Mr. Roger Evans: The largest losses to the social security budget are the result of fraud. Stamping out benefit fraud and abuse remains our top priority. We have achieved record savings year on year and are on course, with the new "spend to save" initiative set out in the Budget, to save some £7 billion over the next three years.

Mr. Gapes: My question was about waste in the social security budget, not loss. Is it not a waste that 600,000 young people under the age of 25 are not in work? Is it not a waste that that costs the country £10 billion through crime, the cost of unemployment and the loss of income to those involved? Is it not a disgrace that the Government are doing nothing for young people? Only the Labour party has a programme to put 250,000 young people into work.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman's question was about waste in the social security budget. If we did not divine the precise focus of his question, it was not for want of asking him in advance. The fact remains that unemployment is falling, and the Government have a series of schemes to promote youth employment.

Mr. David Shaw: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the biggest ever waste in social security spending occurred when unemployment doubled in five years under a Labour Government? Will he also confirm that, in 18 years, unemployment has not become double what it was in 1979?

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend makes powerful points, which I have no doubt are correct.

Cold Weather Payments

11. **Mrs. Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in Scotland have

received cold weather payments since December 1996; and how many of these received payments for more than one week. [11379]

Mr. Roger Evans: Since the beginning of last December, 195,000 people in Scotland have received cold weather payments. Of these, 188,000 received more than one payment.

Mrs. Ewing: Although we all appreciate that there have been changes in the trigger mechanisms for cold weather payments, which were very important in the recent very cold spells, does the Minister accept that we should be following the examples of countries such as Ireland which make automatic payments during the coldest months and weeks of winter to ensure that people on the lowest state benefits are guaranteed such payments? In Scotland, the excess winter death rate is 16 per cent., whereas in Finland, which has a good programme, it is 9 per cent.

Mr. Evans: The existing scheme is automatic in the sense that a person does not have to make a claim if he is in the qualifying group. A payment is made when the Meteorological Office records seven days at 0 deg or less or, much more important, when it forecasts that the temperature will be 0 deg or less for seven days. The prospect of that payment is widely advertised locally and people realise that it will be coming shortly thereafter.

In the hon. Lady's constituency, Aviemore triggered the payment six times this winter and Kinloss three times. Braemar, which is not very far from the hon. Lady's constituency, holds the UK record for triggering the payment seven times.

Mr. Bill Walker: My hon. Friend will be aware that our cold weather payments scheme quite properly takes account of the differences in temperature throughout the United Kingdom. Does he recall that southern Ireland—Eire—receives massive sums of our taxpayers' funds from Europe and is therefore spending our money?

Mr. Evans: I hear what my hon. Friend says about southern Ireland. On his first point, I welcome his support. The system is designed to target help where it is most needed when the weather is at its worst.

Pensions

12. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what new proposals he has to increase the level of the basic pension. [11380]

Mr. Lilley: The basic pension will be uprated by 2.1 per cent. from April, giving a standard rate pension of nearly £100 for a couple.

Mr. Banks: Is the Secretary of State aware that the British pensioner is treated worse than almost any other pensioner in the whole of the European Union in terms of basic pension rights? The Government have betrayed the British pensioners. Those who suffered and sacrificed during the last war have been betrayed by the Conservative Government. By breaking the link between pensions and wages, the Government have let the pensioners down and by gambling state earnings-related pension scheme money away on the stock market they have also let down the pensioners of tomorrow. The pensioners of this country will never forgive the Government.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Member is mistaken. I advise him to read the report by Watsons which showed that, because we have a flat-rate basic pension, those who have low pay during their working lives are—with the benefit of the basic pension plus other support—at least as well off as, and usually better off than, pensioners in most other countries in Europe. Because of our success in building up occupational pensions, those with average earnings also do as well as or better than their counterparts. Uprating the basic pension in line with earnings rather than prices would cost £7.5 billion a year, which is why we have repudiated it—as, I believe, have Opposition Front Benchers recently, at whom the hon. Gentleman's ire might be well directed.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 January. [11398]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Greenway: Will my right hon. Friend confirm the Government's continued support for successful schools? Will he sympathise with the head teachers and governors of St. Olave's and the London Oratory schools who will have difficulty in expanding their schools, even to accommodate more children of hypocritical Labour Front Benchers, if the Opposition have their way?

The Prime Minister: I can assure the House that we will press ahead with our plans to allow successful schools to expand, either before or after the general election. Last night, the Opposition voted to deny other parents the choice, and some children the opportunities, that they themselves enjoy. Our aim is to raise standards: they apparently peddle double standards.

Mr. Blair: I see now: it is now our fault that they cannot run a halfway competent Government. Why does the Prime Minister not simply call a halt to what is the fag end of a burnt-out Government? They have no legislative programme left and the country is tired of waiting: March—not March; May—not May. If they are so confident, why does not the Prime Minister, just for once, put a stop to the dithering, name the day and call a general election?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman clearly is not aware of the importance of the legislation that he has just dismissed. He clearly does not want the legislation against crime that we are proposing. He clearly

does not want the tougher sentences that we are proposing and he certainly does not want the educational choice for everyone that he himself has enjoyed.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Whenever the general election comes, will my right hon. Friend promise that, when he leads our party into it, he will not pledge to spend £30 billion more on public expenditure while at the same time saying that there will be no increase in taxation?

The Prime Minister: I can certainly confirm that we will not have £30 billion-worth of spending pledges. The Labour party is very keen to reassure people that it would not raise taxes, but it has not yet withdrawn the £30 billion-worth of spending pledges that make it inevitable that it will raise taxes, and it has not yet managed to school its Front-Bench spokesmen out of promising more expenditure on every occasion.

Q2. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 January. [11399]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Miller: I remind the Prime Minister of his words at Question Time on 28 January 1992, as this is the fifth anniversary of his pledge not to increase value added tax. Will he apologise to the millions of pensioners who this winter have had to pay the VAT that he imposed on their gas and electricity bills?

The Prime Minister: As the—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer"] I propose to answer.

The hon. Gentleman might bear it in mind that his windfall tax will impose just such a tax on utilities, on electricity and gas, and on pensioners, but the Labour party does not have the courage to say how much it will be. It says that it will raise and spend the money, but it does not say on whom it will be levied or how much it will be. If the hon. Gentleman is really concerned about VAT, perhaps he can stop what he knows to be the wholly untruthful smear campaign about our future plans on value added tax.

Mr. Marland: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that it is not, and never has been, his intention to impose VAT on Severn bridge tolls—*[Laughter.]*—and that, contrary to what the new Labour candidate for Forest of Dean says, it was not the Government's idea, but that of the European Transport Commissioner, who is a former leader of the British Labour party?

The Prime Minister: I can confirm that. Perhaps if Opposition Members had listened to my hon. Friend before they began scoffing, they would have seen the trap opening in front of them. It certainly remains our view that tolls are not subject to value added tax, and we are opposed to the European Commission's view that they should be—a view that I believe is held by Commissioner Kinnock.

Q3. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 January. [11400]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Winnick: Will the Prime Minister take this opportunity to congratulate the present right hon. Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott) on his honesty? He said in an interview on Friday that it was most unlikely that the Government would be re-elected. Is that not the real reason why the Prime Minister is so terrified of calling the general election and clings desperately to office day by day? Does he consider it dignified to carry on to the very last moment so that he can stay at No. 10?

The Prime Minister: I think that the hon. Gentleman has overlooked the fact that we have the most successful economy, with the highest growth and the best inward investment record, in western Europe. None of the socialist Governments in Europe can begin to match that record, which people are understanding more and more as day succeeds day.

Mr. Day: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the countries that form the United Kingdom—Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland—although proud entities in themselves, would count for nothing in the world as individual, separate nations? Will he therefore assure the House that his Government will never follow the lead of the Labour party in proposing constitutional changes that would lead to the break-up of this United Kingdom and provide the perfect scenario for our component countries to be nothing more than provinces in a federal Europe?

The Prime Minister: The shadow Foreign Secretary seems to think that we are heading for a Europe of the regions. I strongly disagree with that view. I believe that the United Kingdom is at its strongest while it remains united and I fear that the policies proposed by the Opposition parties—to be fair, not merely the Labour party but the Liberal Democrats as well—would lead to Scotland leaving the UK. Were that to happen, it would damage not only Scotland, but each of the other parts of the United Kingdom as well. It is a policy that should be opposed and we will oppose it.

Q4. **Mr. Rooney:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 January. [11401]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Rooney: Does the Prime Minister recall his pledge, which was apparently reiterated by the Secretary of State for Health yesterday, to phase out mixed-sex wards? What condolences will he give to my constituents

who have found that the Bradford Hospitals NHS trust has reopened and created two mixed-sex wards in the past month?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman recalls, it was this Government who, in 1995, gave patients the right to be told before admission if it was planned that they would be cared for in a mixed-sex ward. The Labour party did not seem to bother about that at all when in office. We decided to take action. We are monitoring the process. The health authorities will report back by the end of next month with individual timetable plans for separating male and female patients—timetable plans for action that the Opposition ignored for years.

Sir Roger Moate: On the vote last night on grant-maintained schools, does my right hon. Friend recall the remarks of the Labour education spokesman, who said:

"I am having no truck with left-wing, middle-class parents who preach one thing and send their children to another school outside the area"?

Should we check the Division list from last night, to find out whether the Leader of the Opposition voted in his own interests or those of his party?

The Prime Minister: I cannot imagine about whom the shadow education spokesman was speaking, but I gather that there was a miscount last night and the Government were not defeated in that Division. No doubt the usual channels are sorting out the position now. What is important is not Labour's student union ambush of last night, but what it shows about Labour party policy, which is that Labour Members will enjoy choice and opportunity for themselves, but will come together as an act of policy and vote against it for people who happen not to be Labour Members of Parliament.

Mr. Loyden: Instead of spending public money on building the proposed royal yacht, will the Prime Minister consider using that money to kick-start the shipyards of this country so that our shipyard workers can get back to work to build ships in which our unemployed merchant seamen can sail?

The Prime Minister: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman supports the decision, because the yacht will be built in a British shipyard.

Mr. Nicholls: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the policy of being able to see league tables is greatly popular with parents? What significance does he give to the fact that the National Association of Head Teachers recently launched a major test case to try to ensure that parents would not have that right? What significance should be attached to the fact that the barrister who vigorously prosecuted that case was the wife of the Leader of the Opposition? *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House will come to order.

The Prime Minister: The important element is the official policy of the Opposition, which has been to oppose greater information for parents and league tables—to oppose each and every one of the reforms that we have produced to give children and parents better choices and parents information about schools. We believe that parents should have information about schools; the Opposition policy is that they should not.

Highlands and Islands

Q6. **Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to pay an official visit to the highlands and islands. [11403]

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Mr. Kennedy: That being the case, may I invite the Prime Minister to take this opportunity to explain to local people a glaring inconsistency that emerged over the weekend and that they have difficulty comprehending? Why is it that, on a £60 million contract, public money is ruled in and private finance is completely ruled out; yet, on a contract of half that value and one that is fundamental to the interests of the people of the west coast of the highlands, the Isle of Skye and, indeed, the Western Isles constituency, which is one of the lowest-income parts of the country, the public sector is completely ruled out, private finance imposed and people now face the highest toll bridge charges, not only in Europe but probably in the world, for a future generation?

The Prime Minister: The reality is that tolls on the Skye bridge are going to be no higher than ferry fares in 1995. Without the private finance initiative project, Skye would not have had the bridge for another 20 years. I note that the Liberal Democrats are opposed to using private finance. I hope that, in all the constituencies up and down the country where private finance is providing better facilities, it will be clear that the Liberal Democrats oppose those projects.

Media Comment (Madam Speaker's Statement)

3.30 pm

Madam Speaker: I have a statement to make arising from the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) last Thursday. He contended that some parts of recent media comment on the conduct of Members gravely reflected on the good name of the House as a whole. As I hinted last Thursday, the hon. Member's remarks struck a chord with me. It is my impression that damaging comments—often highly generalised—have been common in newspapers, television and radio programmes, books and even learned articles. I believe that I owe it to the House to make some considered points of my own.

In my statement to the House on 14 October last, I said that I strongly believed that the matters under investigation should be resolved as soon as possible. Since then, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, with the enhanced resources with which he was speedily provided, as well as the Committee on Standards and Privileges, have been hard at work—work that is enormously time-consuming and painstaking—investigating the matters which stand referred to them. With the reputations of individual Members and others at stake, these investigations cannot be unduly hurried, but I repeat my view that they should be concluded at the earliest possible moment.

I should stress also that the Commissioner and the Committee are carrying out this quasi-judicial work under new arrangements which are little more than a year old. It is deplorable that many sections of the media have drawn only scant attention to the fact that, following the original work of Lord Nolan's committee, the House has made many far-reaching changes to its rules and mechanisms. The House as a whole, and I as its Speaker, are determined that these new arrangements should work effectively.

It should be noted that the first Nolan report stated:

"The great majority of men and women in British public life are honest and hard-working, and observe high ethical standards".

After a lifetime's experience in politics and nearly a quarter of a century as a Member of this House, I know that to be true. Members of this House have a responsibility to conduct themselves according to the high standards which the electorate rightly expect of them. The overwhelming majority of Members do so.

There can be no complaint about the role of the media in identifying cases where it appears that Members have fallen short of those standards. Indeed, in so doing, the media perform a public service. But it is reasonable to expect that the media do not repeat and pursue allegations in a way that prejudges their validity pending the outcome of investigations by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, to whom any new genuinely new evidence should be sent. Above all, they should not use individual allegations as the occasion for making highly generalised and unsubstantiated comments against Members of this House as a whole and against our parliamentary system.

The Nolan committee's first report also stated:

"We would prefer more acknowledgement from the media that the overwhelming majority of public servants work hard and have high standards. We would prefer more recognition of the value of our democratic mechanisms and the dangers of undermining them."

Again, I agree. It can hardly be a coincidence that it is to this House, above all others, that parliamentarians from all over the world come for consultations and advice.

I am determined that the new procedures and rules that the House has established should work in such a way as to bolster our democratic system. The media can play their part with fairer and better balanced coverage and comment. I also look to hon. Members in all parts of the House for constructive support for this historic institution to which our constituents have sent us, and which all of us have the honour to serve.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Thank you for your statement, Madam Speaker.

Airports and Aerodromes (Noise)

3.35 pm

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South–East): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to control the level of aircraft noise at airports and aerodromes; and for connected purposes.

This is a modest Bill which responds to concerns about noise levels expressed by those who live near airports. It cannot be a substitute for Government regulations, which many hon. Members have pressed the Government to introduce. The Bill is about research.

Governments across Europe are concerned about the effects of noise pollution. Aircraft landings and take-offs cause the greatest amount of noise—and at some airports there are landings every two to three minutes. The impact of aircraft engine emissions on the environment and on health should not be underestimated. Many residents complain of ill health, which they attribute to living near an airport or under a flight path. The disturbance to residents caused by night-time flying is well documented. Night-time flying is one of the most obvious causes of noise pollution—many hon. Members receive regular correspondence on that subject—and can cause a great deal of disturbance and inconvenience to sleeping residents.

This Bill enables the Civil Aviation Authority to carry out research into, first, the use of hushkits; and, secondly, technology, including aircraft computers and so on As well as examining ways of making hushkits more effective, it is important to conduct research into alternative forms of noise reduction.

In order to enable older aircraft to meet the chapter 2 standards, it was necessary to fit them with engine mufflers known as hushkits. They are relatively inexpensive, but they do not reduce the level of chemical emissions from aircraft engines. There is also a growing feeling in aviation that hushkits will not, by themselves, produce a satisfactory reduction in noise pollution.

Many aircraft that are currently classed as chapter 2 will be upgraded to chapter 3 by fitting them with hushkits. Unfortunately, many of the hushkits will provide only the bare minimum of noise reduction that is required in order to satisfy chapter 3 rules, while some of the new generation of aircraft are so far inside the restrictions that it almost makes a mockery of those rules.

Luton airport is currently developing a new computer system for aircraft that will enable pilots to monitor the level and direction of an aircraft's noise emissions, and allow them to alter the flight path so as to reduce the impact on residential areas.

Some companies replace old engines with modern ones which not only reduce noise pollution more effectively, but cut the amount of chemicals emitted. However, the fitting of new engines is more costly, and many companies prefer to use the cheaper hushkits. There is a significant difference between the level of emissions produced by planes that simply have hushkits fitted, and planes that have new engines. That has been acknowledged by the Civil Aviation Authority and the Department of Transport.

The Bill has two aims: first, to raise the basic level of chapter 3 standards, and secondly, to encourage new research to be carried out by the CAA and the Department of Transport into ways of reducing noise pollution.

It must be stressed that the Bill is a short-term measure only, designed to alleviate some of the problems that residents living near Britain's small airports face day and night from older aircraft with poor noise pollution controls. It is not and should not be a substitute for a Government Bill to deal with the problems of noise pollution around all Britain's airports.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Jim Cunningham, Mr. Brian David Jenkins, Mr. James Pawsey, Mr. Bill Olner, Mr. John Butcher, Mr. Robert Ainsworth, Mr. Jon Trickett, Mr. Stephen Timms, Mr. Jimmy Wray, Dr. Norman A. Godman, Mr. Geoffrey Robinson and Sir Dudley Smith.

AIRPORTS AND AERODROMES (NOISE)

Mr. Jim Cunningham accordingly presented a Bill to control the level of aircraft noise at airports and aerodromes; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 28 February, and to be printed [Bill 83].

Orders of the Day

Education Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), further considered.

3.43 pm

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The Government have had the opportunity overnight to consider the enormity of the loss last night of new clause 3 and its impact on the rest of the Bill, and the Clerks of the House have had a chance to ponder the ramifications of that loss. I seek your guidance again today on the effect that the loss of the new clause will have on clause 6 and paragraph 22 of schedule 9, both of which refer specifically to new section 259A of the Education Act 1996, which was struck out by the House last night. Other clauses, including clause 5, refer to the enlargement of premises, and one might reasonably argue that they, too, are impacted upon by the removal of new section 259A.

Madam Speaker: I note what the hon. Gentleman has said, but I am sure that he will understand that it is not for the Chair to take any action in the matter—that is entirely for the Government, whose legislation it is. The hon. Gentleman may well have heard that, during Prime Minister's Question Time, the matter was raised with the Prime Minister, who left the impression with the House that he believed that it was now being discussed with the usual channels. Certainly, it is not a matter for me at this stage. No doubt we shall hear more about it later.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Last night there seems to have been some confusion about the vote. There have been reports on the media today that the vote was other than as recorded in *Hansard*. Last night, I voted according to my principles and my conscience. Can you tell me why the Leader of the Opposition was not in the same Lobby as I was?

Madam Speaker: That is barely a point of order. No arguments. We have dealt with that. It is over and done with. Let us move on to the Bill, and take positive action with new clause 10.

New clause 10

GENERAL TEACHING COUNCIL

'( )—(1) The Secretary of State shall establish a body to be known as the General Teaching Council for England and Wales.

(2) A body established under this section shall have the functions of advising the Secretary of State as to the following—

(a) rules and guidance as to the professional conduct and discipline of teachers:

(b) the qualifications to be required of persons seeking to become or remain teachers:

(c) the professional development and appraisal of teachers:

(d) such matters, including matters relating to education or the employment of teachers or other persons connected with education as the Council may consider relevant to the promotion of good teaching in England and Wales; and

(e) any other matters the Secretary of State considers relevant.'.—*[Mr. Kilfoyle.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

In Committee, there was general agreement on the need to raise educational standards by improving the quality of work of individual classroom teachers. The Minister conceded that a general teaching council could make a contribution to raising the morale and status of the teaching profession. He raised a number of quibbles, which could easily be dealt with.

First, the Minister asked whether, given the widespread support for such a body, it needed to be set up by statute. The answer is clearly in the affirmative, for reasons that flow from the nature of the organisation and its necessary status and functions. If it is to police professional conduct and discipline, it must have universal coverage and the ability to apply sanctions. If it is to discharge its duty effectively, there can be no opportunity for the small number of teachers who may be subject to discipline to avoid it simply by opting out of the organisation.

There are already a number of professional associations that teachers can join on a voluntary basis. Although those bodies do much good work to promote better professional standards, they exist primarily to protect the interests of their members—long may that continue. It is significant that the teacher associations strongly support the establishment of a statutory general teaching council. They recognise that it would have to be a fundamentally different organisation.

There is already a voluntary GTC, which exists to promote the creation of a statutory general teaching council. It is widely supported by organisations representing teachers, their employers and the wider community. They recognise that their objectives cannot be achieved by an expansion of voluntary activity.

In Committee, the Minister asked whether the general teaching council would require public subsidy. The answer is emphatically no. That would be not only unnecessary but undesirable. Independent funding would help to guarantee the independence of the body.

There are approximately 500,000 teachers in Britain. If they were all required to pay a registration fee of just a few pounds a year, the GTC would quickly achieve an adequate budget for its relatively modest costs. The universal requirement for teachers to register would simultaneously keep the fee low and ensure that the organisation remained independent of Government, without resorting to mass voluntary membership. It could thereby be both professionally independent and rigorous on standards. That is another reason why it would require a statutory basis. Teachers have made it clear that they would willingly subscribe the small registration fee necessary for the benefits that would accrue—as they do in Scotland.

In Committee, the Minister asked how the general teaching council would relate to the Teacher Training Agency. A general teaching council would encroach on the territory of the Teacher Training Agency, but its role would be complementary rather than one of substitution. The Teacher Training Agency is charged with spending

public money on the recruitment, initial training and continuing professional development of teachers—a vital function. Since its inception, it has quite properly conducted wide consultation.

The general teaching council emphatically would not be a creature of Government and would not be concerned with spending decisions, but it would be an extremely useful source of consultation and would provide a mechanism for the dissemination of ideas and good practice throughout the teaching profession. It would also have sufficient breadth and legitimacy through its broad representation to gain respect for its work in upholding professional standards that a small appointed body, however well managed, would be hard pressed to emulate.

Finally, in Committee the Minister said that the general teaching council was an idea that had found its time, and he acknowledged that it had merit. However, he was worried about certain difficulties that he felt needed to be resolved before the matter could progress.

There may be matters of detail to be resolved, but new clause 10 deals only with the broad principle, which the Minister accepts. It will be for the Secretary of State—hope, a Labour Secretary of State—to determine its implementation. There are no serious obstacles. The proposal has greater support and fewer intrinsic problems than almost any of the educational innovations that the Government have forced through in recent years.

Why is the Minister so easily discouraged by such trivial difficulties? The truth is that he is not, and nor is the Secretary of State. According to a splash exclusive by Mr. Chris McLaughlin and Ms Alison Brace in *The Mail on Sunday*, a once-removed organ of the Conservative party, the centrepiece of education policy for the Conservative Government, if they were fortunate enough to win the next election, would be—surprise, surprise—a general teaching council. There has been a metamorphosis in attitudes if that is the true direction of Conservative party policy, because in 1993 the Government voted against the establishment of a general teaching council. We welcomed the Minister's semi-Pauline conversion in Committee towards the principle of a general teaching council.

The hon. Member for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton), Chairman of the Select Committee on Education and Employment, is also very much involved, and I believe that he will attempt to catch your eye later, Madam Speaker, to put a specific perspective on the notion of a GTC.

We make a very simple offer to the Government. If there is only a smidgen of truth in the story that was published as an exclusive in *The Mail on Sunday*—if, as I believe he does, the Chairman of the Select Committee represents the consensus that exists in the House on this vital issue for the further professionalisation of teaching—there is a very simple solution. That is for the Government to accept today the new clause, which we tabled in Committee and withdrew.

Whatever objections needed to be accommodated or changes made, we would be willing to meet in a cross-party consensus, which I believe exists among most Members of the House on the need for a general teaching council. We would meet the Government on that, and we would support those necessary, perhaps technical, amendments when the Bill went to another place. There will be no problem if there is agreement on principle.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I am seeking to follow the hon. Gentleman's arguments closely. Will he enlighten the House as to whether, at present, the teaching profession is the only liberal profession—if I may call it that—that has no professional council of this type, and, if that is the case, what does he believe is the historical reason for that?

Mr. Kilfoyle: I believe that it is the case, but I cannot be 100 per cent. sure—I am not an expert on other professional organisations. My experience as an ex-teacher is that, for a very long time, there has been a claim in the profession for such an organisation to represent teachers as a profession. The hon. Gentleman will know that, in 1918, a teachers registration council was set up, which fell by the wayside mainly because it was a voluntary organisation, which one had to subscribe to. It was not the type of organisation that we envisage today.

Regardless of history, if the Minister was right—I believe he was—in Committee when he said that this was an idea whose time had come, I believe that there may be cross-party agreement that could ensure that the measure was passed smoothly, with great expedition. I dare say that views are held on both sides of the House suggesting that that might not be as easily accomplished as I might like to hope, but at least we could establish the principle.

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): I have listened carefully to what my hon. Friend has said, and I accept that the reason why we do not have a GTC now is that the Government have continuously opposed it, at least since I entered the House in 1987.

I fully support a GTC, but I have a specific question to ask. Subsection (2)(a) of new clause 10 mentions

"rules and guidance as to the professional conduct and discipline of teachers".

Will my hon. Friend enlighten us about that? I would not want a general teaching council to become the watchdog of the teaching profession, and be obliged to take disciplinary action against its own members. If that were the intention of the new clause, I should be very worried.

Mr. Kilfoyle: There is absolutely no intention to subvert the legitimate rights of individual teachers to seek the support, for example, of their professional associations—quite the reverse. One of the objects of establishing a GTC is to ensure that professionalism is maintained. There may be ambiguities or uncertainties in the new clause. Our offer to proceed on the basis of a cross-party consensus is made on the understanding that we can then establish where there may be loopholes in the clause as it stands. We ask the Government to accept adjustments to the clause in another place.

Sir Malcolm Thornton (Crosby): I think that everyone in the House will be familiar with my support for a general teaching council, support that predates my entry to this place, and has remained consistent ever since. In the report of the Select Committee on Education and Employment in 1990 there were references to past recommendations for a GTC. The Committee referred to a

"century of aspiration followed by a generation of disappointed initiatives."

That shows that the idea of a GTC is by no means new. Indeed, the idea has been around for 100 years. As I wrote in an article that appeared in *The House Magazine*, I believe that the council's time has come. It is important to reflect on why that is so.

[Sir Malcolm Thornton]

Why has it not been possible to establish a GTC? One reason was insufficient unanimity among those who wished to form a GTC. That very dissension among those whom a GTC should have united was one of the early stumbling blocks. To a great extent, that dissension no longer exists, but it is present to some extent.

The House will know that I have exercised my right in the ballot of private Members to introduce a Bill that would, if enacted, lead to the introduction of a general teaching council. I have in my hand the Bill as published. The Bill would move us far away from the broad principles that are set out in the new clause. However, as I have made abundantly clear to right hon. and hon. Members, including Ministers, to the supporting forum, and to those who have agreed to sponsor the Bill—two sponsors are in the Chamber—the measure represents an attempt to establish a principle. We do not intend to push it towards enactment within this Parliament. There are good reasons for saying that.

It is perhaps important to reflect upon those things that have changed. A unique blend of people involved in education support the principle of a GTC. They are members of the supporting forum. Thirty-two organisations believe in the principle and recognise the value that the establishment of a GTC would have for the teaching profession. Over the years, every opinion poll has shown that teachers feel strongly about a perceived lack of esteem for the profession. Many of us who work in education feel that teachers deserve esteem, and that it is long overdue. That is the underpinning of my support for a GTC.

There is a unique alliance. As I wrote in an article with which right hon. and hon. Members will be familiar, it answers completely the Government's requirement of 1991 that a GTC should be one that

"emanates from, rather than is imposed on, the teaching profession."

This emanates from the teaching profession, teacher associations, higher and further education and all who are involved in education in any way. All their shoulders are behind the wheel.

Mr. Forman: My hon. Friend's words of wisdom are well worth heeding. He mentioned higher and further education. Does that imply that, in his mind, if such a council were to exist in future, it would include teachers in higher and further education, or would it be confined to teachers in schools?

4 pm

Sir Malcolm Thornton: My hon. Friend raises an important point. At this stage, there should not be over-prescription. The problem that my hon. Friend seeks to address is an outstanding issue and has still not been decided by the forum. It is the will of the people who work in those two important sectors to be part of the overall concept of a general teaching council. The council's remit would reflect the wider aspects of teaching and learning, and the way in which the whole teaching profession presents itself. Those matters still need to be discussed.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Since I qualified as a teacher, I have supported the principle of a teaching council and the concept of teaching as a profession dedicated to the community and to the future of our society. In that respect, teachers are public servants. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that a difficulty may arise if local authorities—in the old sense—disappeared and were not the employers and inspectors, and therefore not the administrators of local standards, with responsibility for the local public? Should not that matter be taken into account when considering the pros and cons of such bodies?

Sir Malcolm Thornton: Clearly, everyone who is involved in the oversight of education and is quite properly concerned about standards must have a say and a stake. That is very important. I do not believe that the role of a general teaching council and whatever role is envisaged for local education authorities are necessarily mutually exclusive: they should be complementary.

It is also important to say clearly at this stage what a general teaching council is not and should not be. It is not some sort of super-union. It would not have any responsibility for negotiating pay and conditions, which would remain firmly in the hands of individual teaching unions, and would be the ultimate responsibility of the pay review body. The council is about setting standards, and ensuring that those who are called to what I believe is an honourable profession are represented at national level.

The aim of my private Member's Bill was merely to establish the principle. I fear that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) is pushing us a little too far. The forum—the people who have pursued this matter for many years—is not yet ready to determine the way in which a general teaching council would operate. The Bill—which I described as a full set of measures—is an attempt to deal with certain issues in considerable detail, and those issues could properly be considered by a future general teaching council. When I and some of my hon. Friends who support the Bill met representatives of the forum, it was forcefully brought to our attention that some matters are still to be considered.

We should say clearly that it is the will of the House to establish a general teaching council. The hon. Member for Walton made that clear, and I welcome the fact that such a consensus has emerged. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister for an assurance that the Government are prepared to consider granting the statutory status that I believe to be essential if the council is to command the support that it needs to command.

Mr. Kilfoyle: Will the hon. Gentleman enlighten us a little further? What immediate difficulties and obstacles does he consider to lie in the path of the establishment of an effective and efficient general teaching council which could not be dealt with, given the support, help and encouragement of the Government of the day? Can such problems be addressed only in the fulness of time, or are there ways in which they could be speedily circumvented?

Sir Malcolm Thornton: I understand what the hon. Gentleman is trying to ask, but in all honesty I cannot give him a specific answer, because the details were raised only peripherally with my colleagues and me during our discussions.

The first essential underpinning of the council, however—in this connection, I note what my hon. Friend the Minister said in Committee—must be unanimity, and

agreement between it and existing professional organisations. That would provide an upward thrust which I believe the House of Commons, and indeed the other place, would find it difficult, if not impossible, to resist, and should not in any event wish to resist.

It is, I think, accepted that a general teaching council will not be established overnight. It will probably take the council at least three years to evolve, and to find requisite and acceptable methods for the election or appointment of teachers, who will have a major part to play as members of the body. Other questions are still outstanding, such as what other members there should be and how they should be elected.

Mr. Steinberg: I thank my hon. Friend—for I have been working along with him for so long that I now regard him as such. He has spoken of all-party consensus. Does he envisage a leading role and a majority say for the teaching profession on the governing body of the council?

Sir Malcolm Thornton: If it is indeed to be a general teaching council, I do not see how it could function in any other way. I am grateful to my hon. Friend—if I may call him that, as a fellow member of the Select Committee—for his opening comments. For many years, the Select Committee has demonstrated the way in which it is possible to unite behind a principle whose benefits can be envisaged.

The hon. Member for Walton drew attention to elements of the new clause relating to discipline. Those are matters of detail, but of important, significant detail.

I hope that the debate will generate the realisation—and a message to that effect, which the House can send those outside—that the time has come to establish a general teaching council, and that the will for it to be given a fair wind exists in all parties. Members of the forum, who have worked tirelessly, and with belief in what they are doing, for many years should understand that hon. Members on both sides of the House are saying, "Get on with it; present detailed proposals. Then we can enter into serious negotiation." I believe that that can happen.

I want specific legislation, early in the new Parliament, to give effect to these proposals, and to provide the teaching profession with the representation and, above all, the esteem that it needs and deserves.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I am absolutely delighted to follow the hon. Member for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton), whose involvement in the issue and whose concern for it is well known by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I agree with the vast majority of what he says, but I come to a different conclusion.

There is considerable support among hon. Members on both sides of the House for raising standards in our education system. There is a genuine acceptance that we can do that only if we have highly dedicated, highly skilled and appropriately qualified teachers who are enthusiastic about their work. Unfortunately, many teachers are bowed down by the constantly changing demands that are made of them, the increased pressure, the lack of resources to support them in their work, and the poor state of the buildings in which many of them have to operate. As a result of those pressures, sadly, many teachers—about four out of five—are leaving the profession before retirement age.

As we know, the Government's response to that has been to introduce overhasty changes to the teachers' pension arrangement. Some such changes might be needed, but it is equally important that the Government should have considered why so many teachers are leaving the profession, and should have begun to try to deal with those concerns.

If we are to improve the status of teachers, so that not so many leave and so that we can re-enthuse the profession, we need to ensure not only that they are given the tools to do the job and opportunities for high-quality service or continuing professional development, but, perhaps above all, that we truly raise the profession's status, so that teaching can again be considered a highly valued profession. Perhaps the best way of doing that is to ensure that the profession has its own professional body: a general teaching council.

Like the hon. Member for Crosby, I do not believe that the new clause goes far enough to establish the sort of general teaching council that I want. Like the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg), I want to make it clear that the council will be led by the profession. I want to go further than I suspect the hon. Gentleman wants to go, and ensure that the council will control entry into the profession and be responsible for removing people from it if they do not meet high standards, but the new clause does not deal with any of those matters. It sets up a body that is purely consultative, but its final paragraph contains the option—the opportunity—to build on such a body.

The hon. Member for Crosby said that the time for a general teaching council had come. I agree and we need to take action now to show the teaching profession that we truly value it. It would be appropriate to establish the general teaching council in the limited form proposed in the new clause and later, through subsequent legislation, to add measures that I know many hon. Members would like to introduce. Therefore, I urge the hon. Member for Crosby and his hon. Friends to consider whether it would be sensible to make a start today and to accept the new clause.

4.15 pm

Mr. Forman: I have listened carefully to the speeches made so far and have sought to clear my mind a little on some of the ideas that have been put forward.

I am prepared to accept that my hon. Friend the Minister of State might argue that the Bill is neither the place nor the best legislative vehicle through which to introduce such a measure. None the less, not having had the benefit of attending debates in Committee, I think that it would help the House and those who follow these debates if my hon. Friend could find a brief way of summarising the Government's reservations about the proposal. I, for one, think that, in principle, it is a good idea. It is probably long overdue from the professionals' point of view. Above all, such an initiative could remoralise rather than demoralise the teaching profession, which is urgently necessary for reasons that will be familiar to the House.

The first intervention made by the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) was, if I may say so, not of the best. If one is to have a valid general teaching council that does all the things that a real profession would expect of such a body, it is absolutely essential that

[Mr. Forman]

it should have real influence and power in the spheres of disciplinary action, professional standards and the rest. He has simply to draw a parallel with, say, the General Medical Council, the Bar Council or the Law Society to see the force of that argument. The teaching profession is every bit as important as the medical and legal professions and should have in its realm a professional council that is as prestigious and useful to its status as the other bodies to which I referred.

Mr. Steinberg: I understand the hon. Gentleman's argument, but what worries me is that such a body would become the profession's disciplinary watchdog. I personally would not want it to go down that line. I believe that present mechanisms adequately cater for bad teachers, and there are disciplinary measures in schools and local authorities. I would not want a specific watchdog to be set up as the be all and end all of discipline in our education system. That would be going down the wrong path.

Mr. Forman: As I am sure the hon. Gentleman will have noticed, the essence of most professions is that they make themselves freely and willingly responsible for standards, discipline and status in their professional sphere. It would therefore be a little odd if the teaching profession, which is a noble and long-standing one, were a large exception to that general rule.

One point that arises from my intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton) is that, if the body were brought into being, its remit should be confined to those who teach in schools. There is something very distinctive about school teaching that merits the uplift and extra esteem that the device could introduce. I should be a little wary about extending it into the sphere of further or higher education.

Bearing in mind what hon. Members on both sides of the House have said, I entirely agree that, for such a body to be a success, it is important that it commands in advance, as my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby said, virtually universal agreement and support among those who would fall under its remit. I am gratified to learn that, through the auspices of the forum to which my hon. Friend referred, that is the direction in which things are moving.

Such institutional measures, which are after all intended to last for decades, if not centuries, are best if they can be removed from any temptation to engage in party political squabble. The model of the Dearing committee—in which we are approaching some of the thorny issues of further and higher education under the auspices of the great, good and wise Sir Ron Dearing—should be borne in mind when debating such a measure, which for reasons that still elude me, has not been brought to fruition over all the years since it was first mooted.

I look forward to my hon. Friend the Minister's speech. I say to him and the House that it is about time that we got on with this rather good idea, even if we can make progress only in principle.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): In considering new clause 10, I should like only to express—in a non-carping manner—my surprise and disappointment that it provides for a general teaching council for a unit known as "England and Wales". One persistent irritation of being Welsh is that one consistently finds that political decisions about one's country are made within that type of framework and with the use of the phrase "England and Wales". There is such a thing as "Scotland", and there is such a thing as "Northern Ireland", but then there is something called "England and Wales". It reminds one a bit of "Sam'n Eric" in "Lord of the Flies"—except that that phrase denoted two equal individuals making one whole, whereas I do not believe that anyone regards "England and Wales" as a union of two equals.

Plaid Cymru and I favour a significantly distinct approach in many aspects of education policy in Wales, and specifically in mechanisms to maintain and raise standards. We sincerely believe that, over the past decade and more, many of the Government's reforms have been largely irrelevant to Wales. Although some of the reforms have been damaging, many of them, at best, have been merely irrelevant. That is why we are in favour of a radically different approach. We propose a parliament for Wales, which would have the power to design radically different proposals.

New clause 10 has been tabled by Labour Front Benchers—one of whom is the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths), who supports Labour's policy of establishing an assembly in Wales. A consistent claim has been that, although it would not have primary legislative powers, such an assembly would enable the development of distinct policies for Wales. I have received assurances from Labour Front Benchers that their Welsh Assembly would be able to pursue significantly different policies in Wales. It therefore seems very strange that we are now considering a general teaching council—a very significant body—for "England and Wales", and not for Wales and for England.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): In the hon. Gentleman's discussions with the Labour party, has it pledged any money to those "significantly different" organisations?

Mr. Dafis: No, we have not got round to discussing pounds, shillings and pence—or pounds and pence, or whatever we have these days. However, I have been given the impression that Labour envisages that its assembly in Wales will have power to do something significantly different.

We do not have to think about the future when we discuss such organisations, because there are already many separate and distinct institutions in Wales, some of which were created by the Conservative Government. Although the Welsh Joint Education Committee was established just after the second world war, the Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales was created by the Government, and all praise to them for that. Wales also has its own inspectorate, which works within the Welsh Office, and the Welsh Language Board has responsibilities for education in Wales.

By establishing those bodies, the Conservatives have recognised the distinctive Welsh education tradition. It is ironic that the tradition has not been recognised by those who tabled new clause 10—who belong to a party that wishes to enhance further the Welsh dimension by establishing a democratically elected body in Wales.

My comments are not intended to criticise Labour Front Benchers, but are intended to gain an assurance that after the Bill sinks without trace—as is likely at some stage in its passage—they will seriously examine the unquestionable need for a general teaching council for Wales. The fact that the new clause does not include that principle does not close the door on the possibility of creating such a council in future.

We know of the Labour party's intention to introduce a Bill on education as a priority after the election. I expect that Bill to be framed in such a way as to facilitate a distinctive Welsh approach to education. If that Bill makes provision for a general teaching council, it will be unacceptable for it to make no provision for a body for Wales.

The Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): This important debate has raised several points, not least of which is a paradox apparent in what has been said by almost all those who have spoken. Everyone has agreed that there is widespread support among teachers for the idea of a general teaching council. The word "unanimous" has been used several times. I am always slightly wary of that word, particularly when we are talking about nearly half a million people, but I am prepared to accept the belief of all those who have spoken—not least my hon. Friends the Members for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton) and for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman)—that there is widespread, nay overwhelming, support among teachers for some form of general teaching council. That appears to be a widespread view in the House today.

The argument continues—I have a little difficulty with this—that the creation by teachers of a general teaching council would raise the esteem in which they are held. Hon. Members have mentioned the General Medical Council and the Law Society. I am not sure whether the existence of the Law Society in itself means that we all respect solicitors. My own dear wife is a solicitor and an attorney at law, so she is pretty heavily legally qualified, but I do not know whether she would urge me to say that mere membership of the Law Society means that she is automatically held in esteem by everybody who meets her and deals with her.

Mr. Forman: My hon. Friend is in danger of misunderstanding the argument put to him by hon. Members on both sides. We have said that the measure might help. It would be a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition to raise the esteem of the teaching profession in the eyes of the public and would help to remoralise the teaching profession. That is an important point. My hon. Friend should not exaggerate his counter point. We were merely saying that the measure would be one contribution.

Mr. Forth: That is a helpful point, which I shall come to in a moment. What my hon. Friend said depends on further conditions being met. In any case, let us suppose that a council might make a contribution of the kind that is sought. As my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby pointed out, there are still other matters to be resolved.

That brings us to what the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) said. He started out bravely and at some pace, saying that of course it was obvious that we needed a statutory basis. He said that the reasons were—I made a note of the words that he used and I think that I am quoting him accurately—to "police the conduct of teachers" and to "apply sanctions".

That sits oddly with the fact that the new clause does not mention anything of the kind. It refers to a body advising the Secretary of State on matters similar to those that I have just mentioned. This is at the heart of the points raised several times by the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg). Would the body seek to usurp or replace the functions carried out variously by the Teacher Training Agency, the Department for Education and Employment and others, or would it only advise? We need to be clear on that before proceeding.

The argument of the hon. Member for Walton was inconsistent. He claimed to have resolved all the questions that I raised in Committee, but we have run into difficulty straight away. On the one hand, the new clause says that the proposed body would "advise" but, on the other, the hon. Gentleman says that the body needs a statutory basis so that it can "police the conduct of teachers" and "apply sanctions" where necessary.

On funding, the hon. Member for Walton was good enough to point out that he certainly had no intention of involving public subsidy. If I remember rightly, that is slightly at odds with the Bill presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby, which at least provided for public moneys to be made available—partly on an up-front and temporary basis, but I think that there was the possibility of on-going public funding.

The hon. Member for Walton said that there would be a universal registration fee to be paid by all teachers. If there is so much support and enthusiasm among teachers for the idea, I wonder whether that would be necessary. He also said that teachers would willingly subscribe, presumably a modest amount, to carry the enterprise forward.

People who have from time to time accused me of a certain cynicism will not be surprised if I say that, had there been so much enthusiasm for the proposed body, and for so long—as many hon. Members have claimed—is it not odd that, despite all their ingenuity and commitment, they have not been able to make their case more strongly up to now? Is it not at least possible that there is still sufficient disagreement on some of the fundamentals to have held back the enterprise thus far?

4.30 pm

That brings me to some of the more important remaining problems, which will allow me partly to answer the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington a moment ago. The matter of the composition of the proposed body has not yet been tackled; I think that it was touched on in the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby but not resolved, and we all understand why. Would the body comprise, as the hon. Member for City of Durham said, a majority of teachers? That question is probably fairly easily resolved: most would say that a general teaching council should almost certainly comprise a majority of teachers, but that brings us to the crucial issue of representation and, in turn, the method whereby the members would be appointed. Would they be appointed by election, appointment or invitation? What would be the relationship between this body and the teacher unions?

[Mr. Forth]

I know that some teacher unions have reservations about the composition of the body and its relationship with them. Were we to follow the model outlined by the hon. Member for Walton, that body would have the power to "police" and "apply sanctions", and would thus have a direct influence on the members of existing unions. Those are crucial issues, and I am not sure that they are capable of being resolved quickly or fully enough to allow us with confidence to accept the hon. Gentleman's proposal. My hon. Friend the Member for Crosby was typically much closer to the mark in his analysis. His Bill took a more cautious approach, because he recognised that many important questions had yet to be answered.

One way forward would be to accept a statutory trial and then fill in the gaps later, but that is probably a dangerous and undesirable approach. I was rather intrigued by the suggestion made by my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby that we should adopt something like a Dearing approach: we would say to a group of respected people, "Here is an idea that has widespread support; let's see whether we can resolve some of the important problems, and get sufficient acknowledgment of where the body should be heading and what its role should be, and then see whether it requires a statutory basis." There may be considerable promise in that approach, and it is one to which we should pay some attention. The answer to whether we shall consider the matter further is yes. Given my hon. Friend's Bill and the support expressed in the House today, the proposal certainly merits further, urgent and serious study by those who have expressed interest in it.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) raised the question whether there should be one body for England and Wales or separate ones. That is a legitimate question, given—as he rightly said—that we have acknowledged many times and in many different ways the distinctiveness of Wales, not least in education. That is another question that deserves attention and consideration.

Although I believe that progress has been made, not least through the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby, which enabled us to focus much more on the issue than might have been the case in the past, I still have sufficient doubts about the desirability of new clause 10 to be unable to recommend it to the House. I hope that the House will not be persuaded that we should add the new clause to the Bill, with all the questions that we have identified left unanswered. That would be unwise. Were we to have a general teaching council, it would be a better one if we were to pause at this stage and make a serious attempt to answer some of the unanswered questions. We could then return to the subject with fuller answers.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I was taken by the contribution by the hon. Member for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton), who has a long and honourable tradition of support for the concept of a general teaching council. I know that he has genuine differences with us about the difficulties that we would face in trying to implement a general teaching council, but when he was asked about ways in which the obstacles that he foresees could be circumvented, he was unsure. I think that he said that he did not know and that that would be a matter for some deliberation. If I understood him correctly, he also said that it would take at least three years for the notion of the general teaching council to evolve into its correct role.

The hon. Member for Crosby made an important point about the need for unanimity among the different professional groups involved. With his long and illustrious involvement in education, he will recognise that one of the more quixotic elements of education policy making is the need to consider the many and various differences of opinion—many of which would be expressed about a proposed general teaching council. Sometimes one has to have a bit of vision to supersede the various legitimate rivalries within the profession. The hon. Gentleman also made the essential point, with which I am sure we all agree, that a general teaching council is a sine qua non for raising the morale and status of teachers. That point was reinforced by broad support from the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman), who also made a telling comment about the need to remove the issue from party political squabble. I shall return to that point.

I do not wish to touch on the political sensitivities of Wales, which were raised by the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis). Suffice it to say that it is as important to establish the principle of a general teaching council for people in Wales as it is for those in England.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): If a decision is made that it is in the best interests of the profession to have a general teaching council for Wales and England, surely Scotland and Northern Ireland deserve the same treatment.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I agree that if the principle is good, it should be universally applied; I understand that such a body currently exists in Scotland.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): For the sake of clarification, may I point out to the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) that the Labour party's policy document for Wales states that, in all probability, there would be a separation after the Welsh Assembly had been created, but in the meantime we wish to set down the principle of a general teaching council for England and Wales?

Mr. Kilfoyle: I am grateful for that constructive intervention and I shall not follow the Welsh issue further.

I shall move on to the comments made by the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), who said that he and his party would ultimately go much further in defining the remit of a general teaching council—many hon. Members might agree with him. The important point is that the council should be allowed to reach the evolutionary stage to which the hon. Member for Crosby referred, and to develop professionally, with the full involvement of all its members.

I understand the concern expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) about the council's role vis-à-vis the professional responsibilities of individual teachers. The sometimes onerous responsibilities of the professional associations and trade unions must also have been at the back of his mind. That is why I repeat to the Minister that we would fully support

any proposals from the Government that might cater for those issues. The new clause merely provides powers to the Secretary of State to set up a general teaching council as he or she may see fit.

The Minister spoke about the widespread support for the idea and asked whether it would raise the esteem in which the profession was held. I refer him again to the comments of the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington. The measure is one of a package that would go some way towards restoring the morale and esteem of teachers, which have been sorely dented in recent years by the depredations of the Government and their agents, who have set out deliberately to undermine the standing of teachers in the community. We feel that the new clause would be a small step towards restoring the balance.

The Minister asked why, if there was such enthusiasm for the idea in all sectors of education, the general teaching council had not yet taken off. He should know, because he was a virulent opponent of such a council. No succour has been offered to those who want to establish it—except by Opposition Members.

The Minister dons his conciliatory hat on the crucial question of the Dearing approach. He uses that as a smokescreen, simply because of the Government policy set out in the article to which I referred, in *The Mail on Sunday*. He looked bemused when I spoke about that policy; but the Secretary of State and Ministers are quoted in the article. Unless *The Mail on Sunday* completely fabricates quotations, the word has certainly gone out that the Government intend the council to be a plank in their education policy at the general election.

The Minister does not want to consider the new clause because the Government want to steal the credit for the idea at the general election, although they have a long history of opposing the establishment of a general teaching council.

Sir Malcolm Thornton: The heartening point that has emerged from the debate is that there is clear support for the principle of a general teaching council. There is some disagreement, as expressed by my hon. Friend the Minister, about whether it should be a statutory body. I believe, for powerful and long-standing reasons, that it should be. We have had a good debate, because there is clear agreement about what the teaching profession needs. The idea is driven by the support from below, but supported by the political umbrella above. That message should go out loud and clear from the House today, and I would not want—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. This is turning into a mini-speech.

Sir Malcolm Thornton: I shall be brief.

Madam Deputy Speaker: No, the hon. Member has finished.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I do not want to claim prescience about what the hon. Gentleman was about to say, but I assume that it was a cri de coeur for a bipartisan approach to the issue, asking that we should not vote on it today. I do not doubt his sincerity, which is recognised by all right hon. and hon. Members, but I also do not doubt the fact that there is a political issue at stake. We have a party in government that refuses to acknowledge that a general teaching council is of itself a good thing.

The Minister can make all the noises that he likes, but he has done no more than to express doubt about whether our proposal represents the most efficacious way of establishing a council. He said that a general teaching council had never been established, despite the overwhelming support throughout the teaching profession. We are offering the Minister and the Government the opportunity to test that support and to propose in the House of Lords whatever changes he and the Secretary of State consider appropriate. We are promising support for the Government, as long as we get the general teaching council on the statute book.

Mr. Dafis: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kilfoyle: No, I will not.

There is no turning back, and everyone involved should move forward with an idea that, to use the words of the hon. Member for Crosby, has met its time. We therefore intend to press the new clause to a vote.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 252, Noes 298.

Division No. 54] **[4.45 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashton, Joseph
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beith, A J
Benn, Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Davies, Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank (Birkenhead)
Fisher, Mark
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John

George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Roy
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd–on–A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Sally Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stret'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian *(Makerf'd)*
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
Oakes, Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs B *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Robert
Shore, Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Squire, Ms R *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Sir Harold
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Cummings and
Mr. Eric Clarke.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas–Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'ld)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel–Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson–Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Gummer, John
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Sir Edward

Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Howell, David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Sir Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Scott, Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bowen Wells and
Mr. Roger Knapman.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 11

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE TARGETS IN LITERACY

'( )—(1) The Secretary of State may by regulations make such provision as she considers appropriate for requiring the governing bodies of maintained schools to secure that annual targets are set as to literacy in respect of pupils of compulsory school age.

(2) Targets required under this section shall be set in respect of—

(a) assessments at the end of each key stage for the purposes of the National Curriculum as specified in section 355 of the Education Act 1996: and

(b) the performance of pupils during each key stage.'.—*[Ms Estelle Morris.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Ms Estelle Morris (Birmingham, Yardley): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 52, in clause 35, page 29, line 36, after 'Curriculum', insert

'(to the extent that they are not required under subsection (2)(a) of section (School performance targets in literacy)).'.

No. 58, in page 29, line 40, at end insert—

'(1A) A governing body shall, before setting annual targets for pupils in the school in accordance with subsection (1) above, consult the local education authority and have regard to its views in setting such targets'.

Ms Morris: I shall start by saying something that will find agreement on both sides of the House on the importance of literacy in teaching and learning. It is important to master that basic skill if one is to access the rest of the curriculum and to realise one's potential. It is true to say that literacy, more than any other subject, underpins everyone's learning. Certainly, in the debate we had on this issue in Committee, the Minister made clear his agreement with us that any measures that would help to raise literacy standards in our schools should be considered.

The new clause would allow the Secretary of State to require governing bodies of maintained schools to set annual targets for literacy standards. In Committee, the Minister made the valid point that literacy is covered by the national curriculum at all stages and is one of the subjects and skill areas that is subjected to testing by standard assessment test at all the key stages. We have no problem with that: literacy is of paramount importance and it is right that it is a central feature of the national curriculum and of standard assessment tests.

5 pm

Re-reading the Committee *Hansard*, we can see that the issue on which we parted company with the Government was whether further targets needed to be set year on year, in between assessments at the key stages.

The difference between our new clause and the current statutory provisions is that very point: the new clause would allow targets to be set for individual pupils in the years between SATs. Instead of setting targets on literacy for schools to reach that would be measured at the assessment points, we would require annual targets to be set for individual pupil performance for every year of their school career.

Our reason for requiring extra attention to be given to literacy targets, so that literacy is measured more frequently than SATs currently do, is that too many of our young pupils are not achieving the necessary levels of literacy, especially at the age of 11. I know that the Minister, teachers and parents share our concern that more than 40 per cent.—almost half—of 11-year-olds are not achieving the standard of literacy that we could reasonably expect at that age. Unless we conquer that problem and take measures to ensure that as many as possible of our 11-year-olds achieve a reading age that is commensurate with their chronological age, we will allow them to enter secondary school without having mastered the important skill of literacy.

There are a number of ways in which we can do that. Labour proposals for smaller class sizes, more nursery education, and ensuring that children do not move on to the next year in years five and six without having achieved a level of literacy commensurate with their chronological age, are measures that can help us to raise literacy standards. We have to know what standard every pupil has reached at every point in his or her school career. Leaving the testing of literacy standards to tests at seven, 11, 14 and 16 is not sufficient to spot whether children are falling behind in this important area of learning.

I doubt whether this is a contentious issue. The new clause addresses the common concern of all hon. Members to ensure that literacy standards in this country rise to levels equal to those of our competitor nations. It merely provides that all pupils, year on year, should be set targets for improvement in literacy; that those targets should be realised wherever possible; and that action should be taken to support students who are not reaching the target levels that they can reasonably be expected to reach.

The new clause and the associated amendments build on provisions already in the Bill that will require schools to set targets at the key stages by requiring them also to set targets year on year, so that we can reach the point at which we are setting targets for literacy year on year, making sure that those targets are reached and taking measures to support pupils when those targets are not reached.

Probably the biggest challenge is to make sure that, at the age of 11, no child moves on to secondary education without having reached a level of literacy and numeracy that equips him or her to cope with the secondary school curriculum. The new clause is but one of several measures that Labour Members believe will help us to meet that challenge. I hope that we can reach a common understanding that target setting on an annual basis by schools to help raise literacy standards will play an important part in our shared quest to raise standards for all our pupils, especially in key areas.

Mr. Forth: As the hon. Lady pointed out, new clause 11 is intended to focus schools' attention on their pupils' levels of literacy. No one would disagree that that is a vitally important task and it is one that the Government have set as one of their highest priorities: that is why we have placed basic skills at the heart of the school curriculum and teacher training, and why we have set up the literacy and numeracy centres that are already giving excellent support to teachers around the country. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment made clear in her recent speech at the north of England conference that she will be saying more over the next few weeks and months about the Government's plans in that key area, so it can be seen that we are operating in a dynamic environment.

The new clause fails to recognise what the Government are already doing to deal with literacy. We have introduced regular assessment of pupils for the purposes of the national curriculum—and that, of course, includes English. This year, we are again improving the quality and rigour of tests in schools and emphasising the acquisition of basic numeracy and literacy skills. At key stage 1, the 1997 arrangements include new reading tasks and tests; a writing task for all children which assesses their ability to communicate meaning in writing, to use punctuation and spelling accurately and to write legibly; a spelling test, mainly for those working at level 2 or above in writing; and complementary teacher assessment.

At key stage 2, there is a reading comprehension test, a writing test, a spelling and handwriting test and complementary teacher assessment. At key stage 3, there is a Shakespeare paper that sets questions requiring close reading and analysis of a particular scene, a writing paper, a national pilot of a new paper specifically testing grammar, spelling and punctuation, and complementary teacher assessment. All those measures demonstrate our commitment to improving standards of literacy.

Two further reservations prevent me from accepting the hon. Lady's remarks, and we touched on these points in Committee. To single out literacy above all other subjects is mistaken. When I was asked in Committee whether there was anything else I could mention that was as important as literacy, I hazarded that, to my mind, numeracy ranks on a level with literacy. Others might argue that communication skills, which differ from narrowly defined literacy, are as important in today's and tomorrow's world, while yet others might say that a mastery of information technology is becoming a fundamental skill.

Mr. David Jamieson (Plymouth, Devonport): There is a difference between literacy and numeracy and other aspects of technology, because literacy is that which underpins all learning. Reading, writing, listening and speaking skills are absolutely essential to learning numeracy or any other subject in the curriculum. We are saying that literacy is so important because it is the fundamental base for all learning; in that sense, it differs from the other skills that the Minister mentioned.

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman and I will have to agree to disagree on that point. I do not think that his analysis is accurate, nor that it merits inclusion on the face of statute, which would be the effect of the new clause.

I have a different problem with amendment No. 58, which yet again seeks to insert local education authorities into the process. That is unnecessary and, indeed,

grant-maintained schools in particular would have some difficulty with the amendment's absolute and blanket requirement for local education authority involvement. Whether that is an accident or a subtle ploy by Labour Members, we may never know. One way or another, however, I believe that it is a fundamental objection.

Ms Estelle Morris: I wish to press the Minister on an issue that he has not mentioned. He referred to target setting at key stages 1, 2 and 3. The new clause would ensure that literacy targets are set for every year of a child's school career. Will the Minister address that key aspect of the new clause before he concludes his remarks?

Mr. Forth: It is a matter of judgment whether we are ready for that degree of prescription. Opposition Members—perhaps the hon. Lady herself—have criticised the Government over the years for introducing too much central prescription and control in education. One of the ironies of recent developments is that we are in danger of being overtaken on the fast track by Opposition Members, such as the hon. Lady, who want Government to prescribe even more than the Department for Education and Employment has suggested. The hon. Lady may like to ponder that point.

I am not persuaded that the new clause would be productive—indeed, I fear that it might even be counter-productive, for the reasons that I have outlined. Therefore, I hope that it will not be accepted by the House.

Ms Estelle Morris: That argument is rather difficult to accept from a Government who prescribe almost everything that occurs in education and who retain so many powers. The Minister said that it is not appropriate to set yearly literacy targets in education, but there is nothing more important than ensuring that our young people master literacy at an early age. If they do not succeed in primary school, they have little chance of mastering literacy at a secondary level. Literacy is central to learning, and too many children do not achieve the required levels of literacy at age 11.

Targets are important at the key stages, but much learning occurs between the ages of five and seven, seven and 11, and 11 and 14. If teachers do not identify what is going wrong at age eight, three valuable years will be wasted before the problems are discovered at age 11. The new clause calls for constant monitoring and target setting so that every child may improve his or her literacy standards year on year. That is what parents want. I cannot think that any parents would resent the Government's requiring their children to be set targets in order to improve their literacy skills year on year.

The Minister refuses to accept a simple new clause that requires that targets be set so that every child may improve his or her literacy skills on a yearly basis. Opposition Members have made clear the importance that we attach to high standards of literacy, and we believe that every child should improve in that area year on year. We want schools and everyone else to support children in achieving those targets. I am sure that parents and teachers would welcome the move, which would be good for pupils and for education standards in this country. I regret very much that the Minister will not accept the new clause. However, as I am conscious of the need to make progress in considering the Bill, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New clause 1

SIBLINGS

'( )—(1) A maintained school which admits a proportion of its pupils by reference to ability or aptitude, and also within its admission arrangements accords priority—

(a) on the basis of the proximity of a pupil's home to the school; and

(b) to a sibling of a pupil or former pupil

shall accord a greater measure of priority on the basis of—

(a) proximity; or

(b) being a sibling of a pupil or former pupil who was admitted on the basis of proximity

than that accorded to a sibling of a pupil or former pupil who was admitted by reference to their ability or aptitude.'.—*[Mr. Don Foster.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Don Foster: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Those hon. Members who served on the Standing Committee will be aware of my opposition to selection—and particularly partial selection—in schools. New clause 1 tries to draw attention to what I suspect may be an unexpected outcome of the Government's proposals to extend opportunities for partial selection in schools.

It is well known that in the event of over-subscription, schools normally include in the admission arrangements provision for the allocation of places on the basis of proximity to the school, with additional priority given to siblings. The criteria for the allocation of places must be published, clear and ranked in order of priority. When a school is partially selective, other criteria will obviously apply to the non-selective places. If a partially selective school is over-subscribed, it is likely that a number of local children will be displaced by children from more distant areas who are admitted under the selection process. A significant proportion of those children will live outside the locality that the school serves; otherwise, there would be little point in a school becoming partially selective. I hope that the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) accepts that point.

5.15 pm

Unless local children and their siblings receive a higher degree of priority on allocation of the non-selective places than do the siblings of children who were admitted in previous years to selective places, the proportion of non-selective places offered to children from distant areas will increase incrementally over time, thereby denying access to local children. My point is clear: if there is a partially selective system and a sibling rule, over time there will be diminished opportunities for local children to attend their local school.

For example, if a school admits 150 pupils annually and we assume that 30 per cent. of its intake—or 45 pupils—are selected according to ability, 105 non-selective places will remain to be filled. However, if the operation of partial selection continues

[Mr. Don Foster]

in year 2 and 10 places are allocated to the siblings of pupils admitted to selective places in the previous year—a large percentage of whom will live outside the normal catchment area—only 95 non-selective places will remain for local children. As the years pass, an increased number of children from distant areas and their siblings will be admitted to selective places. If sibling priority is ranked higher than proximity, the inevitable outcome will be the incremental loss of non-selective places to children who gain access purely on the basis of proximity. Therefore, we can protect local children's access to local schools only by giving greater priority to proximity and to the siblings of those admitted on the grounds of proximity.

When we debated the issue in Committee, it was apparent from the Minister's response that she did not understand that consequence of the Government's proposed legislation. I hope that she has reflected on her remarks since then and that she will now support the new clause.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Cheryl Gillan): If I remember correctly, the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) moved a similar amendment in Committee, although it was certainly different from the new clause that he has moved today. He did so with a great deal of frivolity, suggesting that he was emulating the style of the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth). However, by his own admission, "It clearly did not work"—and it is clearly not working today.

Opposition Members have shown on several occasions during the passage of the Bill that they would like the Government to prescribe schools' admission arrangements. However, the Government believe that the schools and local education authorities are in the best position to take an informed view about the admission arrangements that best suit them and their localities.

Mr. Don Foster: Would it be possible under current legislation for a local education authority to include in its admission arrangements the procedures that I propose in the new clause?

Mrs. Gillan: The hon. Gentleman is quick to get to his feet. His question will be answered firmly at the end of my contribution to the debate.

The hon. Gentleman said that he is concerned about schools attracting a higher number of children who are not local to the school. If the problem of a shortage of places for local children arises for whatever reason, the LEA or the Funding Agency for Schools will take the necessary action. The planning authorities are used to ensuring a proper supply of places in an area and taking account of demand from other LEA areas.

A neighbourhood comprehensive does not have to be a parent's only choice. We believe that parents want different types of schools from which to make a choice for their child. The hon. Gentleman will admit that parents have long sought places in denominational single-sex schools and in grammar schools in other LEA areas. There is nothing new about that.

The answer to the hon. Gentleman is that, if schools want to give priority to siblings of children admitted by selection, that must be a matter for them. Likewise, if they wish to change their admission criteria in line with the new clause, they are free to do so. I therefore reject the new clause.

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Minister advocates the primacy of parental choice. I understand that, but will she tell the House who makes the choice where there is over-subscription? Does the school make the choice, or do the parents make it, when they cannot gain access to a school that they would dearly like their child to attend?

Mrs. Gillan: The hon. Gentleman knows that, unfortunately, some parents are disappointed and cannot send their child to the school of their choice. We remain firmly committed to the principle of selection, allowing schools to choose how they bring in that selection. The permissive provisions in the Bill are firmly supported by Conservative Members.

Mr. Kilfoyle *rose—*

Mrs. Gillan: I will not give way a second time to the hon. Gentleman. I had finished my remarks. I reject new clause 1.

Mr. Don Foster: Many LEAs will be interested in the debate and will take note of the Minister's clear assurance that it is within their present power to introduce the admission arrangements set out in the new clause.

As all hon. Members want to make swift progress in our further consideration of the Bill, and as there may be an opportunity to return to the matter in another place, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New clause 2

SCHOOL PREMISES AND SURPLUS PLACES

'School premises

( )—(1) The Secretary of State shall conduct and publish a review of regulations relating to the size and standard of school premises for the purposes specified in subsection (3) below.

(2) Before undertaking such a review, the Secretary of State shall consult such persons as appear to her to be concerned.

(3) The purpose of the review referred to in subsection (1) above shall be to enable the Secretary of State to consider, before bringing into force under section 72(3) below any provision amending the provisions of section 259A of the Education Act 1996, the effect on the efficient use of premises and the creation of surplus places of any such provision.'.—*[Mr. Don Foster.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Don Foster: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I remind the House that, some time ago, the Government removed the space regulations that applied to our schools. Many of us have been concerned about the removal of those regulations, fearing that in certain circumstances it may lead to further overcrowding in schools. There is clear evidence that the Government are keen on the uncontrolled expansion of pupil numbers in some schools. The matter was debated in relation to new clause 3, which was defeated last night, and discussed by the Prime Minister and his colleagues in their meeting to

prepare the Government's forthcoming manifesto proposals. A review is needed of the space requirements of schools.

It is important to consider the implications of the uncontrolled expansion of schools proposed by the Government. The best evidence of the potential consequences comes from the Audit Commission report entitled "Trading Places", which I am sure that many hon. Members have seen.

Mr. Kilfoyle: The hon. Gentleman will see that I also have a copy of the report. Will he remind the House of the timing of our debate in Standing Committee and the timing of the publication of that document?

Mr. Foster: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point. He was present in the Standing Committee and is aware of the amazing juxtaposition of those dates. The day after we concluded our deliberations in Committee, the report was published. Had it been available to us in Committee, we might have had an even more well-informed debate on the Government's proposals.

The report contains an indictment of the Government's proposals for the uncontrolled expansion of schools. It identifies a direct conflict between promoting grant-maintained schools and ensuring the economic and efficient supply of school places. Since GM status was introduced, 40 per cent. of schools that local education authorities wanted to close have remained open by opting out, despite the clear commitment that opting out was not to be a route used by schools to avoid an LEA reorganisation proposal.

The report shows that the cost of promoting choice undermines the need to control public expenditure, and that there is no clear evidence of the Government's policy in that regard. It reveals a breakdown in the system of capital allocations to schools, which has prevented LEAs from maintaining—let alone improving—their school buildings. It shows the total confusion caused by the Government's use of two different definitions of school capacity, resulting in great overcrowding, especially in popular primary schools.

The report calls on the Government to revise their policies on GM status for schools facing reorganisation, capital allocation to schools, the definition of school capacity, parental choice, and the balance between parental choice and surplus places.

The report suggests that more effective power should be given to local agencies, especially LEAs, to plan provision, in marked contrast to the Government's current proposals to allow the unfettered expansion of some schools. It recommends that local agencies should have more powers to manage the market, and that an improved set of incentives should be introduced to promote value for money.

In the light of the Audit Commission report, the Minister will have to reconsider parts of the Bill and new clause 3, which the Government will no doubt seek to reintroduce in another place. The report is a condemnation of existing and planned Government policies. Although it is couched in the impeccably professional terminology that one would expect from the Audit Commission, its recommendations, taken together, raise serious questions about the Government's policy approach.

The attempt to replace rational planning with a market-driven consumerist approach is, according to the evidence in the report, patently failing to deliver parental choice or real diversity and, as far as the Audit Commission can tell, is not even leading to a rise in standards in our schools.

In reviewing recent experience, the Audit Commission paints a picture that is all too familiar to education officers, head teachers and parents in many parts of the country. Nationally, nearly 20 per cent. of schools are operating at 105 per cent. or more of their physical capacity and more than 50 per cent. of primary classrooms offer less space per pupils than recommended. There is overcrowding in spite of the fact that in popular schools

"'choice' is primarily exercised by the schools deciding which pupils they will accept . . . rather than by parents deciding which school their children will attend."

5.30 pm

Parental satisfaction—or lack of it—can also be measured by the increase in primary and secondary appeals of 58 per cent. and 35 per cent. respectively between 1992 and 1995. In one example, the "plethora of admission arrangements" means that parents have a choice of seven varieties of school, with a large number of schools of each variety, many of which have individual admission arrangements. The net result is that one group of parents can hold on to a sheaf of offers while others go through an appeals procedure that frequently causes parents distress and must have serious effects on the pupils involved.

The study quotes the evidence of a specially commissioned MORI poll on secondary transfer, the first such poll to dig beneath the surface of parental choice. It found that, in addition to the 10 per cent. of parents who did not get their first choice of school, another 9 per cent. did not even feel able to ask for their genuine first preference, in case it stopped them getting their second or third genuine preference.

In some parts of London, where the Government's encouragement to parents to shop around has been made much easier by the Greenwich judgment—whereby local authorities are prevented from offering any priority to their own residents—49 per cent. of parents are failing to obtain a place for their child in their genuine first preference school. Huge numbers of children trek across the capital to distant schools and other children travel from Brighton to schools in south London.

Mr. Forth: Will the hon. Gentleman name them?

Mr. Foster: The right hon. Gentleman asks me to name them. I have not yet had the opportunity on the Floor of the House to congratulate the Minister on his recent elevation and I do so now, but I strongly suggest that he should talk to LEAs such as Richmond and ask them about the serious difficulties created by the Greenwich judgment.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks. I was inviting him to name some of the children who are trekking across London to better schools. I thought that the House might be illuminated by that information.

Mr. Foster: No doubt the Minister is hoping that I will refer to some of his would-be future constituents and give

[Mr. Foster]

him some publicity in that respect. I have no intention of helping him out, but I am sure that he would not deny what I said.

By far the shortest chapter in the Audit Commission report is that dealing with the impact on LEA performance. A minority of LEAs are criticised for failing to close schools or tackle the problem of small sixth forms. However, there is scant mention of schools threatening to seek grant-maintained status if reorganisation, let alone closure, is even mooted. The report makes no mention of the Education Bill, which will enable grant-maintained schools to expand by 50 per cent. and to open a sixth form and a nursery without having to seek approval. Had such a reference been made, I have no doubt that the condemnation in the report would have been even greater.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Quite manifestly, those schools would not be seeking to increase their numbers if they did not have demand from parents. We are in favour of parental choice.

Mr. Foster: The hon. Lady has failed to understand the principles underlying the Government's proposals. Let me explain. At present, it is perfectly possible for a popular school to expand its numbers subject to approval and the appropriate funding becoming available within the local education authority arrangements, but those arrangements require the publication of the appropriate statutory notices, the appropriate consultation and, if there are objections, the ultimate opportunity for the Secretary of State to reject those proposals if, for example, he believes that they may have significant damaging effects on the education provided in neighbouring schools.

The hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) fails to recognise that the Government are now proposing to allow schools to expand without even seeking the approval of the Secretary of State and certainly without taking into account the impact of that expansion on the education provided in neighbouring schools. She should reflect on the fact that in the past, under current arrangements, the Secretary of State has rejected proposals for the expansion of certain schools, no doubt for good reasons. Whatever other concerns she might have, the hon. Lady ought to be concerned about the constitutional position. Individual schools are given the unfettered right to do almost whatever they want, regardless of the impact on any other schools and without the Secretary of State having the right to intervene.

To return to the Audit Commission report, the most telling comment on Government policy is contained in the long chapter devoted to the impact of national policy. It states:

"the pursuit of a wide range of competing objectives has generated tensions and conflicts . . . and risks the school planning system becoming gridlocked."

That must concern us all. The report states that ways must be found to avoid the impending gridlock in the allocation of places and to restore parental confidence in a system in which recent changes have led to more overcrowding, a frantic scramble for places in popular schools at infant, junior and secondary level, more appeals, higher levels of expectation and even higher levels of disappointment, longer journeys to school for pupils of all ages and significantly—I hope that the hon. Lady is listening—a waste of resources through duplication in some areas and shortages in others.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The hon. Member has not had the misfortune of dealing with Lancashire county council, which deliberately keeps open many secondary school places in east Lancashire, where the population is not increasing, to the detriment of the schools in north Lancashire, where the population is increasing. The population is not increasing in Skelmersdale and Burnley, but it is certainly going up in Garstang, Lancaster and the entire Wyre district.

Mr. Foster: I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for her consistent concern for the educational provision in her constituency. I cannot speak as eloquently as she does about her area, as she knows it far better than I do. I merely assure her that according to the Audit Commission report, one of the key blocks to the ability of LEAs to take out surplus places is existing Government policy, particularly the policy that has been promoting competition between schools so vigorously. The hon. Lady shakes her head, but that is what the report says. She cannot deny that.

In conclusion, the new clause represents a modest proposal. It does not go so far as to reimpose a formal space limit—as I would do, in an ideal world. It requires the Government to undertake a serious review of the effects of their earlier action in removing those space regulations. There is now powerful new evidence that such a review is not only prudent but urgently needed. If it revealed that the removal of earlier regulations had produced results that created cause for concern, there would be a strong case for their reintroduction. I suggest that, without a review, it would be wholly and absolutely wrong for the House to support legislation that would provide an unfettered opportunity for schools to expand the number of places they offer without any control whatsoever.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I wish to add to the comments by the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster). In general, I support his contention regarding the conclusions of the Audit Commission report known as "Trading Places". When we examine some of those conclusions, we understand how fortunate the Government were that the report was published the day after we finished our deliberations in Committee. It is important to place those conclusions on the record, because they have a bearing on the important new clause tabled by the hon. Member for Bath.

There are an estimated 900,000 surplus places in schools. If the Government of the day were to remove a realistic percentage—say 40 per cent.—£100 million a year would be saved, which might be better employed on progressive educational policies. One school in six has more than 25 per cent. of its places unfilled, and that position is not restricted to any one type of school or any one local education authority—it is spread throughout the spectrum. The position has improved significantly since previous studies, but there is still a very long way to go. One school in five is overcrowded. That leads to larger classes, but I shall not stray on to the subject of a later debate.

The report signals the problems of sink schools and over-subscribed schools and says that neither type of school is in a position to respond to its situation, one because of loss of funding and the other because of lack of capital. I am moved to recall the comments of a former Secretary of State, Mark Carlisle, who said that schools did not have elastic sides. Schools, even when over-subscribed, can deal with only a finite number of pupils. It is very difficult to reallocate places. We accept the difficulty; we do not understand the Government's unwillingness to do anything about it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) has mentioned the gridlock of places several times, and the hon. Member for Bath referred to it earlier. We need a national policy framework to prevent the whole system from being placed at risk of gridlock.

In "Trading Places", the Audit Commission said:

"The pursuit of a wide range of competing objectives has generated tensions and conflicts between policies which prevent any of them from being implemented with full effect, and risks the school planning system becoming gridlocked. It is not possible for LEAs to move forward on all of these policies as currently defined, and maximise value for money."

The hon. Member for Bath mentioned the problem of schools opting out to avoid closure. I have had experience of it in my home town and it is not beneficial in any shape or form, even to the illusion of selection.

I note what the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) said about the belief in parental choice. I also note the Under-Secretary's comments on new clause 1, when she said that parents do not have choice where there is an over-subscribed school. I believe that the record will show that there is a contradiction there. If we want further evidence, we need only consider the steep rise in the number of appeals to recognise that people are not getting the choice that they wish for their children.

On the subject of schools opting out to avoid closure, the Audit Commission said:

"There is a tension between the policy of promoting GM schools and that of ensuring the economic and efficient supply of school places."

Mrs. Gillan: I would like the hon. Gentleman to square his recent remarks with the fact that last night he voted against popular schools expanding.

Mr. Kilfoyle: Last night, the Government failed abysmally in that vote. Earlier today, the Minister spoke about basic skills. Whether there was a deficiency in numeracy or in communication skills, it certainly showed in the Government Whips' abject failure to deliver a vote for the Government on one of their flagship policies.

Last night, we voted against allowing one part of the maintained sector to expand without reference to the impact on provision generally in the vast majority of our schools. The proposal was unconscionable and inefficient and the House delivered its judgment—on the second occasion. I hope that, when the Government attempt to raise that matter in another place, their Lordships will take a similar view.

"Trading Places" flagged up the inefficiency of planning, with both LEAs and the Funding Agency for Schools making proposals for new capacity where basic need exists. That has already occurred in Epsom and Colchester—hardly bastions of the hard left. "Trading Places" says:

"If the proposals in the 1996 White Paper to allow the FAS to propose new GM schools in all LEAs become law, duplication may become common"—

not my words, but those of the Audit Commission. It described the difficulties that the Government have caused popular schools that wish to expand. They lead to larger classes and, as the Audit Commission said in "Trading Places",

"Satisfaction through achieving the school of your choice may lead to dissatisfaction with its large class sizes".

How do our schools compare with those of our overseas competitors—those people against whom we must compete in education, as in all things, to succeed in the modern world? The majority of the 10 overseas primary schools that were surveyed had either minimum space requirements, which the Government in their wisdom lifted in September 1996, or an upper limit on class size, or both. Pointedly, the Audit Commission report states that this country has neither.

5.45 pm

On LEAs' planning of school places, "Trading Places" warns:

"there is a danger of establishing a vicious circle . . . The dispersal of LEA powers encourages central government to take more powers to itself and to use these powers more actively; which in turn limits the scope and incentives for LEAs to act of their own volition; which in turn encourages central government to assume more powers of direction and coordination; which in turn reduces the LEA role still further."

Those are not my words or those of local education authorities or of any alleged vested interest in education; they are those of the Audit Commission.

The Audit Commission argues that there is a need for a local solution. It says:

"Such problems require local intelligence, local judgment, and local action—and national government is too remote to be able to provide these as quickly or as effectively as a local agency."

That points to the need for a local solution:

"the need for effective local intervention and coordination to manage the market".

Pointedly, the Audit Commission comments:

"Inaction is not an option. Unwanted and unnecessary school places lock up scarce resources which could be used elsewhere. Class sizes continue to rise in popular schools. Appeals are on the increase. Schemes for school rationalisation are decreasing. Government and LEAs blame each other"—

and that is where the deadlock is risked.

I shall finish by quoting once more from "Trading Places"—that splendid piece of research and erudition by the Audit Commission. It was a pity that we did not have the opportunity to use the material contained therein in Committee.

"Trading Places" suggests a stronger role for local agencies in managing the local market—I am quite taken by the phrases used by Government these days. I quote:

"Local problems are solved most efficiently by agencies operating at the local level. Such agencies could be given duties to plan the supply and allocation of places in the local area, to coordinate admissions . . . and intervene where a school was not delivering an adequate standard of education . . . One approach would be for agencies to develop local education plans".

Now there is a marvellous phrase. It seems to echo down the years—certainly recent years—in Labour party education policy.

[Mr. Kilfoyle]

"One approach would be for agencies to develop local education plans, consulting extensively with interested bodies in the area. These plans, covering a 3 to 5 year period, would be submitted to central government for approval, after which as many decisions as possible should be taken by the agency without reference to the Secretary of State".

I conclude my remarks there, but I sincerely hope that the Minister will take heed of the very serious comments, reservations and proposals of the Audit Commission—a body with no partiality in these matters except for effective good practice.

Mrs. Gillan: We have had quite a lengthy debate on new clause 2. I am rather surprised that the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) wishes to discuss placing conditions on the operation of a clause that is not part of the Bill. His approach shows a justified awareness—

Mr. Don Foster: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Minister is suggesting that the debate is not in order because it was not agreed that new clause 3 should stand part of the Bill. Would I be correct in reminding the House, Madam Deputy Speaker, that you gave a ruling when I raised the matter yesterday? You said that it would be perfectly in order to discuss the matters that have been raised in this debate, and that it was for the Government to sort out the difficulties that they have created.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I can confirm that the present debate is perfectly in order.

Mrs. Gillan: I am sorry that the hon. Member for Bath jumped to his feet so prematurely before I had completed my sentence. He is showing a justified awareness that any reversals in the Bill's progress will be merely transitory. I wished to thank him for his vote of confidence in the Government.

Mr. Jamieson: I am interested in what the Minister has just said. She described the problems that the Government are having with the Bill as transitory. How do the Government intend to reintroduce new clause 3?

Mrs. Gillan: The Government remain committed to the clause that was lost last night. We shall therefore seek to reintroduce it in another place.

There is no need for a review of school premises regulations. The regulations were revised only last year, as many hon. Members will remember only too well. We eliminated much that was bureaucratic and inflexible and retained the minimum standards that count. It is predictable that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) will try to relive that previous debate.

Mr. Kilfoyle: Predictably, the Minister is wrong. I intended to ask her to confirm that the Government, in removing school places, took away the miserly minimum space per child and the minimum space for recreation that had prevailed for a long time before changes were made in the regulations.

Mrs. Gillan: I remember that we gave more powers to local education authorities. It has been argued from the Opposition Dispatch Box this afternoon that centralising is wrong and that decentralising—making power more local—is correct, but when it came to minimum teaching areas the Opposition did not apply the principle that they preach so often.

We are concerned about the health, safety and welfare of pupils, which is why we have retained the minimum standards that count. Before the new regulations were made, we carefully considered which elements of the old regulations needed to be retained. We consulted schools and LEAs, among others. Whatever were their individual concerns, there was consensus that change was needed. The new regulations retained the essential safeguards and eliminated irrelevant detail.

Mr. Spearing: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs. Gillan: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman because we have had several exchanges on these matters in previous debates. I know that he feels strongly about them. I am sure that he is about to say something that we have heard before, but I am willing to give way to him.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful to the Minister. It is right that we have had detailed debates in Committee on a former Bill. We are now, however, in the House. We did not have much opportunity to discuss the statutory instrument that followed that former Bill.

The Minister has talked about minimum standards that count. Of course there must be hygiene, fire and ventilation regulations, for example. Is the hon. Lady saying to teachers that adequate space and flexibility in a secondary school in arranging lessons and a timetable are not physically important standards that must be achieved—standards that she and the rest of the Government have swept away?

Mrs. Gillan: I agree that such matters are important. The hon. Gentleman puts a great deal of faith in LEAs, and so did we on this occasion. It is for LEAs to manage their affairs, as the hon. Gentleman knows only too well.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does my hon. Friend accept that if the regulations had not been modified, the vast majority of village schools, which do an excellent job, would have faced closure?

Mrs. Gillan: I cannot confirm what my hon. Friend says at the moment. I know, however, that many village schools do an excellent job. I am sure that all Members would endorse that.

When deciding to deregulate to allow grant-maintained schools to expand by up to 50 per cent. without the need to publish statutory proposals, we considered the effect on surplus places throughout the country. We believed that the net effect on the total number of surplus places would be minimal.

Yes, the expansion of popular GM schools may lead to surplus places in unpopular schools. As a result of parental choice, parents will choose the schools that they think best for their children. If that means that an unpopular school becomes unviable, there will be ways to deal with that. I hope that Opposition Members will not suggest that parents should be forced to send their

children to schools that they do not wish them to attend so that no school should have to close or improve its performance to enable it to compete.

We want to allow good and popular schools to expand. One effect of that will be to identify more sharply unpopular schools, which should be the first in line when considering how and where to remove surplus places. If the net effect is more places at good and popular schools and fewer at unpopular schools, will Opposition Members object to that outcome?

If surplus places and expanded GM schools are worrying Opposition Members, they do not need to become too concerned. Grant-maintained schools are popular with pupils and parents and they achieve good results. If there is no demand in a certain area, schools within it will not seek to expand. I remind the House that grant for capital work will not be automatically available to GM schools that wish to expand. Such schools will need to make a good case to the Funding Agency for Schools, or raise the money themselves.

It is—*[Interruption.]* I was not quite sure. I did not know whether you were looking at me in an appealing fashion or whether you wanted to intervene.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady must remember that she is addressing me.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I shall address you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

What does the Minister foresee in the theoretical demand for expansion of a GM school? How does she see the transition of other schools that, of necessity, will lose pupils to GM schools? Does she see those schools withering on the vine as pupils move out of them? Does she see them developing into sink schools, for example?

Mrs. Gillan: The hon. Gentleman is not up to date. He seems to be caught in a time warp of grammar schools and comprehensives. I see choice and diversity. A school that is not grant-maintained may try to improve its targets. It may go for technology college or language college status. We are creating choice within the education system, but the hon. Gentleman is talking the language of 20 years ago.

I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker, for my inaccuracy. I am sorry that I addressed the Chair incorrectly. I did not think for one moment that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, were looking appealingly at me.

The hon. Member for Bath queried the timing of the production of the Audit Commission's report. I think that he should apologise to the commission. It would not take kindly to having the date of its reports dictated by the Government or the Opposition. The report was published in December, and we shall obviously reflect on what it has to say. We welcomed the attention that the report gave to removing surplus places. We in the Department have been stressing the importance of that for some time. Considerable progress has been made. The number of surplus places has been about halved over the past 10 years.

Mr. Don Foster: The Minister is talking about the removal of surplus places. A short while ago she referred to the Audit Commission's report. For the enlightenment of the House, will she tell us whether her Department had sight of the draft of the report before the final report was published?

Mrs. Gillan: I have no idea. I have, however, had sight of a press release that was issued by the Department yesterday in the name of my hon. Friend with responsibilities for schools, which includes the latest figures on the reduction in surplus places. There has been a 1 per cent. fall to about 10 per cent. of the total capacity of 7.6 million places. That is encouraging, but some local authorities could do better. We share the Audit Commission's view that more could be done, such as encouraging LEAs to follow the examples of good practice contained in the report. Officials will continue to follow up individual local authorities whose returns suggest scope for action where it is not being taken.

Time is running short and we have ranged widely over topics related to the new clause. We have discussed briefly the Audit Commission's report, "Trading Places", and in rejecting the new clause I can safely say to Opposition Members that we will not be trading places with them.

6 pm

Mr. Don Foster: As the Minister said, the debate has been wide ranging, and rightly so, because this important issue goes to the heart of the difference between the Opposition's approach to planning for education and that of the Government. Liberal Democrats believe that there should be an element of strategic planning to maximise parental choice. I would argue that that view is supported by the conclusions of the Audit Commission's report, which makes it clear that the Government's policies are leading not to increased parental choice but to reduced choice.

The Minister seems unconcerned about the effect of the removal by her Department of the space regulations. To date, she has not given us a clear explanation of why the regulations were removed, and has consistently refused to make available to hon. Members the details of the alleged extensive review undertaken by her Department, which she claims led to the Government's policy in this area.

Mr. Spearing: The Minister referred to surplus places, but she will not give a definition of a place, so how do the Government know how many places are allegedly surplus?

Mr. Foster: The hon. Gentleman has referred to that confusion on a number of occasions. He rightly points to the fact that neither this Minister nor any other Minister has ever answered that question.

The Minister continues to peddle the notion that grant-maintained status is popular, whereas in reality it is not. As I have said in the House before—I happily repeat it—the best evidence to justify my claim is the simple statistic that in the past 12 months only 0.5 per cent. of all eligible schools even bothered to hold a ballot on grant-maintained status. It is not popular, and it cannot be right for grant-maintained schools to be given the unfettered right to expand their school premises and pupil numbers without having any regard to the impact that that may have on neighbouring schools. I hope that the new clause will receive the widespread support that it deserves so as to avoid further chaos in our education system, such as the Government's policies have already caused.

Question, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 263, Noes 304.

Division No. 55] **[6.3 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashton, Joseph
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beith, A J
Benn, Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John
Davis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Roy
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Ilsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stret'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian *(Makerf'd)*
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
Oakes, Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs B *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Robert
Shore, Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Squire, Ms R *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Sir Harold
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and Mr. Simon Hughes.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer

Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg Cthorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hat'fd)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Gummer, John
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howell, David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broadowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, William *(E Londy)*
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bex'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wiltshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'd)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bowen Wells and
Mr. Roger Knapman.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 12

REDUCTION IN CLASS SIZES

'( )—(1) After section 355 of the Education Act 1996 there shall be inserted—

"Reduction in class sizes

( )—(1) Each local education authority shall determine, and notify the Secretary of State as to targets for the maximum number of pupils in classes in maintained schools in its area with respect to such years and year groups as the Secretary of State may specify.

(2) The Secretary of State may make grants to local education authorities for the purposes of securing reductions in numbers in classes.

(3) The Secretary of State may issue guidance to local education authorities, or to governing bodies or headteachers of maintained schools, for the purposes of this section.".'.—*[Mr. Kilfoyle.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

New clause 12 presents us again with what was new clause 90, which was debated and withdrawn in Committee on 16 January. It seeks to allow the phasing in of our proposals for reduction in class sizes, whose good sense I hope the Government will recognise. It is framed as an insert in the curriculum section of the Education Act 1996, to follow section 355. Section 355 deals with "teaching groups", which is the only definition of classes of which I am aware. The new clause attempts to focus debate on the curriculum benefits of smaller class sizes, and notes the role of governors and heads—who control class sizes—in enabling guidance to be issued to them as well as to local education authorities.

As I have said, the issue was debated at length in Committee. Indeed, it has been debated at length in the House and elsewhere on many occasions. The arguments are simple. All other things being equal, teachers teach better and children learn more easily if teachers have to work with fewer children at a time.

I note that no one dissents at this stage from that statement of the obvious. Common sense says that it must be so. Academic research proves it, and parents, governors and teachers believe it. Children themselves know it to be true. The Government alone, like the people who persecuted Galileo, persist in insisting that the educational world is flat.

Of course, all things are not equal—certainly not the Government's attitude towards education in different parts of the maintained sector. An excellent teacher will do well for a class of 40, even if he or she is acutely aware that he or she could have done much better with 20 children at a time. The poor teacher will fail to communicate and engage with a class of 15, although it is likely that confrontation with 35 could lead to total failure.

Devoid of rational argument and adrift from common sense, the Minister has persistently sought to compare the best with the worst in teaching, as if that somehow proved that class size made no difference. In Standing Committee, he led us down the byways of individual Members' decisions about their children's education. I thought that I would mention that before the Minister does. *[Interruption.]* He can be my guest and raise it at any stage that he sees fit, but for all his typically robust performance on that occasion—presumably he will repeat it tonight—few would be persuaded by his tortured logic. "Tautology" should be his middle name.

All things are not equal in another sense. The assisted places scheme allows a small minority of people to buy into smaller class sizes at the taxpayer's expense, but it is not just the anonymous taxpayer who pays for that. The privilege is bought at the expense of every child who suffers from the inflated class sizes that are imposed on the public sector by this parsimonious Administration. That is one inequality that Labour can—and, when in office, will—rectify.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that Islington has class sizes of only 15 and it does not do a good job, so people go out of Islington into other boroughs?

Mr. Kilfoyle: The hon. Lady suggests that class sizes are not relevant to the way in which standards rise or fall in any given school. She may—or may not—understand that other factors are involved, but class size is important in raising standards for all children. That is the perceived wisdom in education, and I would far sooner go with that perceived wisdom than with the hon. Lady and her somewhat idiosyncratic views on education.

In Standing Committee, the Minister produced some odd figures that purported to show that little would be saved from abandoning the assisted places scheme. His calculations relied on some strange assumptions about education's cost. The independent work that we have commissioned through the National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales shows that the likely savings from phasing out the scheme will allow us to make real progress in reducing class sizes in the lifetime of the first Parliament of the incoming Labour Government, but, even if the Minister were correct, our policy would still be right.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: If an incoming Labour Government did abolish the assisted places scheme, the saving would fund one teacher for every seven schools.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I have of course heard that soundbite before, but if the hon. Lady cares to consider the way in which the new clause has been constructed, she will find that it is a matter for consultation across a given area, so that all stakeholders can have a say in how class sizes can be reduced.

Resources are restricted, but it is fundamentally wrong anyway for significant sums of public money to be spent on buying an advantage for the few, which the Government perversely and persistently deny to the many. That does not take into account the arguments that I am sure will be advanced, certainly by Conservative Members, about the dead weight cost that is inherent in schemes such as the assisted places scheme.

It is far more sensible for education funding—the incoming Labour Government will realise this at the earliest opportunity—to be put into the reduction of class sizes rather than to allow the current 35,000 or 36,000 or so pupils to be taken out—or, as one hon. Member put it in our debate last night, to escape from comprehensive schools and from the maintained sector generally.

I therefore hope that good sense will obtain on Report, and that the Government will finally bow to the inevitable. There is a better way to spend the money that goes on the

assisted places scheme. The most appropriate way is the Labour way, of dedicating that resourcing to reducing class sizes.

A huge number of children are in classes of over 30 pupils—over 20,000 children are taught in classes of over 40—so the new clause is the way forward in education.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): The hon. Gentleman appears to be repeating himself about the reduction in class sizes. Does he not realise that the average cost of an assisted place is less than the amount that is put into the education budget for a place in any inner-London school?

Mr. Kilfoyle: It is nonsense to propagate the myth that an assisted place costs less than a place in a typical maintained school, but the point is that the sum total of that money can, as the new clause suggests, be dedicated through grants to ensuring that class sizes are reduced for the many, rather than being an advantage proffered to the few.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): I back my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle). The new clause does not explicitly say anything about the assisted places scheme, but my hon. Friend is correct to point out that the new clause states:

"The Secretary of State for Education and Employment may make grants to local education authorities for the purposes of securing reductions in numbers in classes."

The Minister knows that the Labour party has explicitly said that money from the assisted places scheme will be used to reduce class sizes for primary school pupils. We must recognise that the reason for doing that is that we believe that it is proper for that money to be used for the benefit of the many, not of the few. It may serve some people well, but the assisted places scheme reaches a limited number of people. Having a policy that potentially affects everyone in a primary school is clearly a far more equitable distribution of those resources.

It is obvious to everyone except Conservative Members that the size of a class is a factor in the performance of pupils in that class.

Mr. Ian Bruce: So is Labour going to put some more money in?

Mr. Gunnell: The hon. Gentleman intervenes from a sedentary position. If he wants to make a point, he can do so. Is he anxious to make that point?

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): We are listening to the hon. Gentleman's speech, and we are enjoying it.

Mr. Gunnell: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is enjoying my speech.

Let me put it like this. The hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) says, "Put more money in." Obviously, that money must come from somewhere. On every spending pledge that the Labour party has made, it has been explicit about where the money comes from.

That is why the myth that I have heard repeated again and again at Prime Minister's Question Time—that the Labour party has made £30 billion of election pledges—is complete nonsense. The hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) knows that that myth is complete nonsense and a fiction. We have made it clear where the money is coming from in our pledges, and we intend to continue to do that. The Government are on a false trail if they wish to label us as spendthrifts. We have made it clear that education is a priority. It is a priority for us to reduce class sizes in primary schools.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): The hon. Gentleman has said that, if the ultimate disaster happened and it got into power, the Labour party in government would not be spendthrift. Why, when providing a given level of service anywhere in the country, do Labour local authorities cost much more than Conservative local authorities?

6.30 pm

Mr. Gunnell: That is a contentious statement. If the hon. Gentleman takes into account the spending and grants per head in Westminster, he will find it very hard to take the view that Labour authorities consistently spend more than Conservative authorities. Labour authorities are certainly more concerned with the level of public services that they provide. I do not think that his thesis holds water.

There is a popular belief, which the Minister apparently does not share, that smaller class sizes mean better pupil performance and a better life for teachers. Advertisements for almost every private sector school boast small classes. Why would they advertise that their classes were small if they did not think that it was attractive to parents and that it improved the school's educational performance? They know that small classes are an important selling point. It is not part of Labour's argument that such schools are not offering a good education to their pupils. Class size is one of the factors that enables them to do so.

I taught in a United Nations school that was neither public nor private; it was private to the citizens of New York but public to those for whom it was set up: children of people at the UN. Like most schools of its sort, it advertised—although it did not really need to, because it was known throughout the UN—that its class sizes were reasonable, and certainly a good deal smaller than the 30 about which we have talked.

Everyone knows that class size is important, but it is not the only important factor. The primary school in the greatest demand in my constituency has classes—certainly on entry—of as many as 39 pupils. I am sure that people at that school wish that the classes were smaller. The school's quality is due in part to the staff, in part to the facilities and in part to the area in which it is situated. It is a very popular school, and many therefore want to go to it.

I ask the Minister to name research—

Mr. Forth: I will.

Mr. Gunnell: He might find some research that shows that other factors are very important, but he will not find any that shows that class size has no effect on pupil performance. Popular belief is backed by evidence and research. Much research on class size has been conducted in the United States, and it all points to the fact that reducing class numbers is relevant to pupils' progress.

[Mr. Gunnell]

Class size is also a factor in the ability of staff to cope and give individual attention to their pupils. A consistent stream of evidence points in favour of smaller class sizes.

In choosing as its priority in education the reduction of class sizes in primary schools, the Labour party has taken a very wise step, which is fully in tune with public opinion. One of the concerns expressed among people when talking about their local school is about the amount of attention that their child receives. It is common sense that it is not possible to give the same attention to each child in a class of 40 as it is to those in a class of 30 or fewer. The fact is self-evident, backed by research and condoned by almost everybody in the education system; yet Conservative Members seem to think that it is of little or no importance.

I look forward to hearing the Minister cite research that demonstrates that class size is irrelevant to pupil performance. I have not argued—and would not—that class size is the only factor. There are plenty of others—

Mr. Marlow: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know that you have been following the debate very carefully. I was always brought up to believe that there was something called tedious repetition. I am sure that you will assist the House if it comes about.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): That is for the Chair to decide.

Mr. Gunnell: The reason why we have spent so much time debating class size is that we consider that it is very important. It is clear to the public that one of the messages on education that the Labour party has sought to get across is that the start that children get is fundamental to their continued progress in the system. There is no doubt that pupil performance is affected by class size. I look forward to the Minister demonstrating that it is not.

Mr. Forth: We have come to recognise that Labour Members believe that, if they peddle a shibboleth often enough, people might begin to believe it. I shall explain why not all parents seem to have been persuaded of the much-repeated shibboleth about class size, and I shall name names. Before I do so, I note that, at the very least, we have seen Labour Members backing off from some of the wilder claims that they used to make on the subject. The wording of the new clause is modest, to put it mildly.

Labour Members are saying that there will be a determination of targets for maximum numbers of pupils in classes and that

"The Secretary of State may make grants to local education authorities for the purposes of"

reducing numbers. They omit to point out that, unless they propose to change the whole system of education funding, giving an LEA money does not guarantee that it will spend it on the named objective. We can all think of many LEAs that have not spent their education money in anything like the way that was intended.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I am sure that the Minister will go on to give us a very full list of authorities that—he will allege—have misspent their funding. I refer him to Subsection (2) of the new clause, which says specifically that any funding would take the form of grants. Such funding would not be subsumed in the generality of education funding.

Mr. Forth: If the hon. Gentleman is seeking to subvert the long-established principle that, as we have always recognised, elected, accountable LEAs should make their own decisions on their priorities or that schools should make their own decisions on how they spend their money—whether on more teachers, buildings, books, equipment, or whatever—it marks a significant departure for Labour Members.

The new clause contains the implication—if not the certainty—that Labour Members now believe that they know, class by class throughout the nation, how many pupils should sit in front of a teacher in a classroom, the better to be taught. That is such a significant departure from what we have heard in the past that I suspect that some Labour Members may not be prepared to support it. I am sure that most of my hon. Friends would not, either.

Under pressure from my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman), the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) said that he believes that, if the assisted places scheme were abolished at some unspecified time during the period of office of the next Labour Government, some progress may begin to be made on some reduction in the numbers in some classes. I paraphrase his words only slightly.

That is perhaps a more honest statement than those of the past. The implication in the past was that, if one abolished the assisted places scheme, the alleged problem of oversized classes would be resolved. Now we are hearing a rather clearer idea that, since there would not be anything like enough the money that was needed as a result of the scheme's abolition, Labour could not in any case meet the target.

The only correction that I would make to the figures given in the very useful intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster is that, according to my figures, the abolition of the assisted places scheme would provide one extra teacher for every 90 schools. That provides some idea of how useless it would be to abolish the scheme.

The hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) challenged me on the subject of research. Professor Mortimore—from no less than the university of London institute of education—has said that the impact of class size on education quality is

"at best not clear cut and at worst contradictory".

The American research that he quoted is equally contradictory. Not only could the Americans not sustain the very small class sizes in their pilot projects—I know of no evidence that they have done so statewide, let alone nationwide—but they believe that other forms of intervention are generally much more likely to be cost-effective.

Time and again, we have heard from Labour Members that parents believe that smaller classes provide better education. I shall cite two pieces of evidence that I believe contradict that oft-repeated statement.

First, we know that parents who have a choice of school for their children prefer that they attend a popular school that provides an excellent education, even if it is over-subscribed and the choice means that their children

will attend large classes. Moreover, parents choose those schools knowing that the attendance of their children will further increase class size. They also choose those schools in preference to ones that may be just down the road—such as, for example, Hackney Downs, which was so awful that it had to be closed down, although it had a pupil-teacher ratio of 8:1 and, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) pointed out, spent more per pupil than the assisted places scheme ever could.

Labour Members should think carefully about the second piece of evidence. They seem to be insulting the intelligence of the Leader of the Opposition, and challenging the wisdom of his parental choice. As the House will know, class sizes in Islington—the borough in which he did not choose to educate his child—are smaller than those at the London Oratory school, which he did choose. If Labour Members require any evidence that parental choice contradicts their entire argument, they need only ask their own leader. I invite them to do so, and I invite the House to reject new clause 12.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I was quite taken by the Minister's Freudian slip about the "the next Labour Government"—which will not be long in coming, to put our policies into effect. He was very quick to correct the figures quoted by the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) about one teacher for every seven schools, but he made no attempt to correct the figures provided by the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce), who said something very different about the cost of places in the assisted places scheme compared to those in the maintained sector.

In Committee, the Minister dismissed the Tennessee Star research and said that it was inconsequential and covered conditions in America, and in only one American state. He attempted to make the same point by quoting Professor Mortimore, and said that the impact of class size is at best unproven. However, research from the university of London institute of education suggests quite the reverse. The Minister knows that, for every academic prepared to make one argument, it is possible to find another to argue the opposite.

What is the real test on the matter? In his reply, the Minister referred to the real test, which is parental choice and how that choice is exercised. There is no doubt what Conservative Members choose to do. They choose the independent sector, which uses smaller class sizes as one of its strongest selling points.

The Minister is a great advocate of choice and is determined to support parents' choice to opt for the independent sector—I do not disagree with that exercise of choice, for their children; if that is how people choose to spend their money, let them do so—but he is not prepared to offer the same choice to parents who say in overwhelming numbers that they would like smaller classes for their children. They do not have that choice, because places are not provided.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kilfoyle: No; I am conscious of the time.

Mr. Bruce: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman mentioned me by name and said that I was wrong, but he has not given any figures to substantiate his claim.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for me. The hon. Gentleman is responsible for his own speech, as he knows.

Mr. Kilfoyle: As for the choice made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), can the Minister tell me the name of any Prime Minister with children in the maintained sector—as the next Prime Minister surely will? The Minister cannot produce an example. The Leader of the Opposition has made that commitment to the maintained sector.

We have repeatedly heard comments—true cant—from Conservative Members about the choices and children of Labour Members. In this debate and in Committee, the Minister has advocated choice. I am surprised that he does not now support the choice made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield, who chose the maintained over the independent sector.

The Minister's opening comments on the wording of new clause 12 were not critical but damned with faint praise. He said that, compared with previous comments made by Labour Members, the wording is "modest". If it is so modest, I am sure that the Government will find it in their heart to support it—to ensure that parents can choose smaller class sizes, which they so evidently want.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 257, Noes 295.

Division No. 56] **[6.45 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashton, Joseph
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begge, Roy
Beith, A J
Benn, Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Davies, Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*

Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Roy
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Sally Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stret'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian *(Makerf'd)*
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
Oakes, Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs B *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Robert
Shore, Peter
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Squire, Ms R *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Sir Harold
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Joe Benton and
Mr. Kevin Hughes.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bitten, John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Gummer, John
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*

Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howell, David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shephard, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Roger Knapman and
Mr. Bowen Wells.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 13

LICENSING OF TEACHER AGENCIES

'( )—(1) The Secretary of State may by regulation make provision—

(a) for the licensing of any business or agency supplying short-term or temporary teaching staff;

(b) for the regular inspection of any such business or agency by persons appointed by her for that purpose;

(c) as to the conduct of any such business or agency.

(2) The Secretary of State may by regulation provide for amounts to be payable in respect of any person seeking a licence under this section.'.—*[Mr. Kilfoyle.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

7 pm

Mr. Kilfoyle: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 53, in clause 63, page 47, line 11, leave out 'or'.

No. 54, in page 47, line 12, at end insert

'or

(d) any other person who arranges, whether under contract or otherwise, for another person to be a short-term or temporary teacher'.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I shall be extremely brief because the clause is self-evidently sensible. It has arisen from the assiduous work done by my hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) in her attempts to ensure that the Government regulate agencies to prevent them abusing their position by, for example, accepting on to their books people debarred from active teaching because they are on list 99. I commend the new clause to the House.

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): I, too, shall be brief because I know that other issues have to be debated.

As I said in Committee, I warmly welcome clause 63. When I introduced the Protection and Education of Children Bill, 39 Conservative Members voted against it, including three who considered this Bill in Committee. I am therefore delighted that the Conservatives have seen fit to change their mind and take this opportunity to start the regulation process. I also thank the Under-Secretary for her letter in response to issues that I raised in Committee.

The regulation of teacher agencies is important. From the data that we have, we know that probably one in 15 to one in 20 classes are currently taught by supply teachers. A survey that I carried out in the first three weeks of the autumn term showed that three out of four schools in London use supply teacher agencies. It is because such agencies are here to stay that we must ensure that they

[Ms Margaret Hodge]

operate correctly. As I have said before, many reputable agencies do a good job, but my survey showed that a third of the schools that we contacted had experienced problems with supply agencies.

Clause 63 insists that all supply teachers meet the same standards and undergo the same checks as permanent teachers—that means medical and police checks, checks on their qualification and investigation of whether they are on list 99. My real concern, and the reason why I urge Conservative Members to support the new clause, is whether clause 63 will work in practice. I shall explain that concern.

Under clause 63 as drafted, the onus rests with the head teacher or the supply teacher. In practice, a head teacher arrives at school at about 7.30 am and discovers that a member of staff is off sick. In an hour and a half, that head teacher has to find a supply teacher. He rings a supply teacher agency but, in the short time available, he cannot verify that the supply teacher has the necessary qualifications or has undergone the necessary checks.

Nor is it sufficient to put the onus on the supply teacher. Many supply teachers come from Australia or New Zealand. They spend only six months to a year working in this country before moving on, and the temporary nature of their work in Britain means that there is no incentive for them to ensure that they comply with the requirements of the regulatory framework as set out in clause 63.

We therefore need to regulate and regularly inspect the agencies involved. The good agencies have recognised that. Agencies such as Timeplan and Capstan have said that they are willing to pay for the regulation themselves, so there would be no cost to the public purse. Regulation of the agencies is a simple way to regulate supply teachers properly.

The agencies, which are employment agencies, have been subject to deregulation under this Government, so anyone with a mobile telephone and a car can set up a supply teacher agency—many people do just that. While carrying out my research, I came across an agency in south Glamorgan that changed from supplying crane drivers to supplying teachers. Another had been supplying construction workers, drivers and secretaries and then supplied teachers.

One reputable agency set up a branch in Bromley, but was contacted by the regulatory authorities and the Department of Trade and Industry only when the DTI tracked it down, having seen an advertisement in the paper saying that the agency was in the business of supplying teachers.

Inevitably, some agencies cut corners. I talked to an ex-member of staff of one agency who told me that although the agency did take up references on teachers, it put them straight into the filing cabinet and did not check them. Another agency that I came across accepted a teacher, whom I shall not name, who had been rejected by another agency. It accepted her even though her reference said:

"Ms . . . appeared to be a very needy person who seemed somewhat unstable. I am therefore unable to recommend her to you."

Despite that reference, the less reputable agency placed her in a school, and problems subsequently arose.

Mrs. Gillan: Does the hon. Lady know whether that incident was reported, as I suggested in Committee that it should be? I made it clear that the necessary mechanisms were in place.

Ms Hodge: I thank the Under-Secretary for that intervention; I shall come to the relevant mechanisms in a moment. I do not know whether that particular incident was reported, but I shall take soundings and find out.

The real problem is that the prime concern of many agencies is for the bottom line. For example, Recruit plc advertised, "Book 10 teachers days and get one free". Another said, "Book before Christmas and get £10 off". The worst case, which I mentioned in Committee, involved an agency that had set up a new office in Manchester. The manager went to a school to attempt to drum up business, but the head teacher found that the manager was on list 99.

I know that the Under-Secretary is bound to say that the Department of Trade and Industry carries out routine inspections. In her letter to me, she said that in future they would be focused on teacher supply agencies, for which I am grateful, but the current system is rather hit and miss. It deals largely with complaints made after the event—it is a question of too little, too late.

I hope that Ministers agree that the new clause would place on the statute book a foolproof system that is simple to operate and which would involve no cost to the public purse. I therefore hope that they will accept the new clause. I am delighted that the Government have gone as far as they have, and I simply wish to urge them to go one step further to regulate properly the supply teachers who play an important role in teaching many children in many of our schools.

Mr. Ian Bruce: I must declare an interest as an adviser to the Federation of Recruitment and Employment Services and as someone who ran an active employment agency and still owns an employment agency that is not active. I am surprised that the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge), who has now been fully briefed on the issue, should continue to try to turn the tables on employment agencies. It is well known that the hon. Lady, when she was the leader of a certain council, presided over a situation in which that council did not vet teachers.

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): Social workers.

Mr. Bruce: I am sorry—social workers. As a result, the wrong social workers were employed. Employment agencies that want to supply teachers currently have to go to the local education authority to get vetting done, because the agencies do not have access to the information. Many local education authorities, especially in the north of England, have tried to stop agencies vetting.

The industry wants to vet teachers and will do so, and that is why the Government's proposals are so warmly supported by the industry. The Bill will allow vetting and ensure that supply teachers are pre-vetted before head teachers ring at 8 o'clock in the morning for a supply

teacher. The new clause would simply do what the Employment Agencies Act 1973 did. In other words, it would involve a whole rigmarole meaning that it would take two or three months to decide whether somebody could start work, and it would provide no extra safeguards for the individual. Agencies have to do a proper job of vetting people and will do that without any recourse to the new clause.

Ms Hodge: All the reputable agencies to which I have talked wish the new clause to be incorporated in the Bill. The new clause would provide not for the odd spot check, but for a proper regulatory framework with registration and inspection, paid for by the agencies. The reputable agencies want that because it would give us a foolproof system.

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Lady need not make her speech again. I oppose the new clause.

Mrs. Gillan: I thank my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) for his contribution and for the welcome that he has given to clause 63. It seeks to close a technical loophole in the legislation on qualifications, health and misconduct that did not previously cover staff, whether teaching staff or others working with young people in schools and colleges, who did not have contracts of employment.

The hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) welcomed clause 63, and she withdrew her amendments in Committee after an amicable debate. As most of the points were covered in Committee, I shall merely refer hon. Members to the report of the Committee from column 626 onwards. However, I wish to make a couple of further points.

A licence is no guarantee of future good conduct. The majority of serious breaches of the legislation are when licences were issued by licensed agencies. Instead, we have put in place a power to prohibit persons from carrying on business in employment agencies when there has been misconduct or for other sufficient reasons. I can tell the House that the employment agency standards inspectorate has plans to visit some 100 agencies dealing with teacher employment in the next six months, and the Department has also arranged for information on the employment agency standards team's powers, including the number of its national inquiry line on which any problems can be reported, to be included in "Schools Update". That will be issued to all schools in the spring and will reinforce information already contained in circular 7/96 on the use of supply teachers.

I shall repeat what I said to the hon. Member for Barking. If any hon. Member believes that there have been breaches of the conduct regulations or that other issues need examination, they should take up the matter with my hon. Friend the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs at the Department of Trade and Industry, who is directly responsible for overseeing the work of employment agencies.

Clause 63 will empower the Secretary of State to impose regulations that will be binding on all parties involved, including agencies. We take the matter seriously and we have acted. I therefore reject the new clause.

Question put and negatived.

New clause 5

CORPORAL PUNISHMENT LAWFUL WITH PARENTAL CONSENT

'For section 548 (no right to give corporal punishment), section 549 (interpretation of section 548) and section 550 (no avoidance of section 548 by refusing admission to school) of the Education Act 1996, the following sections shall be substituted—

"Corporal punishment lawful with parental consent

548.—(1) Where a pupil to whom this subsection applies is required on disciplinary grounds to be excluded from school for a fixed period, the school may make arrangements in accordance with subsection (2) for him to be given corporal punishment at his school as an alternative to that exclusion, and such punishment shall not be unlawful if his parent's consent to it has been given in accordance with subsection (2) and if the conditions set out in subsection (6) are satisfied.

(2) After the decision has been made to exclude the pupil the school may contact the parent to indicate that instead of and as an alternative to that exclusion, with the parent's consent, the pupil may be given corporal punishment, and if the parent indicates his consent in the form of a signed parental declaration the corporal punishment may be given instead of excluding the pupil.

(3) Subsections (1) and (2) apply to—

(a) any pupil for whom education is provided—

(i) at a school maintained by a local education authority,

(ii) at a special school not so maintained, or

(iii) at a grant-maintained school;

(b) any pupil for whom education is provided at an independent school—

(i) which is maintained or assisted by a Minister of the Crown (including a school of which a government department is a proprietor) or is assisted by a local education authority, and

(ii) which falls within a prescribed class;

(c) any pupil for whom education is provided by a local education authority otherwise than at a school; and

(d) any pupil who is an assisted person for the purposes of this paragraph and for whom education is provided at an independent school not falling within paragraph (b) above.

(4) A pupil is an assisted person for the purposes of subsection (3)(d) if—

(a) he holds an assisted place under the scheme operated by the Secretary of State under section 479;

(b) any of the fees or expenses payable in respect of his attendance at school are paid by—

(i) the Secretary of State under section 491, or

(ii) a local education authority under section 517, or

(iii) the funding authority or a local education authority under paragraph 9 or 10 of Schedule 4;

(c) any of the fees payable in respect of his attendance at school are paid by a local education authority under section 518; or

(d) he falls within a prescribed category of persons.

(5) The Secretary of State may prescribe, for the purposes of subsection (4)(d), one or more categories of persons who appear to him to be persons in respect of whom any fees are paid out of public funds.

(6) The conditions referred to in subsection (1) are:

(a) that the head teacher of the school must have previously determined, and made generally known within the school and published in a form prescribed by the Secretary of State that corporal punishment is one of the measures that may be taken with a view to regulating the conduct of pupils;

(b) that the punishment must be given by the head teacher or by a member of the staff who is a senior teacher specifically or generally authorised by him for the purpose;

(c) that in addition to the member of the staff giving the corporal punishment, a female member of the staff must be present when corporal punishment is being given to a female pupil and a male member of the staff must be present when corporal punishment is being given to a male pupil;

(d) that the punishment must be reasonable in all the circumstances;

(e) that the reasons for the punishment must be set out in writing and given to the parent before the punishment takes place, and those reasons shall also be recorded in a register which, in accordance with regulations made under this section, is to be maintained by the school and open to inspection, and a parent shall have the right to see a copy of every entry relating to his own child on giving reasonable notice of his desire to do so; and

(f) that the register shall also record details of the nature of the corporal punishment, along with the names of those present when it is given.

(7) In determining for the purposes of subsection (6)(d) whether a punishment is reasonable, the following matters in particular shall be taken into account—

(a) whether the punishment constitutes a proportionate punishment in the circumstances of the case; and

(b) any special circumstances relevant to its imposition on the pupil which are known to the person imposing it (or of which he ought reasonably to be aware) including in particular—

(i) the pupil's age,

(ii) any special educational needs he may have,

(iii) the pupil's state of health, and

(iv) the pupil's disciplinary record.

(8) If the parent does not consent to corporal punishment as required by subsection (2) the period of the exclusion referred to in subsections (1) and (2) shall not be affected.

(9) Section 572, which provides for the methods by which notices may be served under this Act, does not preclude a notice from being given to a pupil's parent under this section by any other effective method.

(10) Where, in any proceedings, it is shown that corporal punishment has been given to any pupil to whom subsections (1) and (2) apply by or on the authority of a member of the staff and the requirements of this section have not been met, giving the punishment cannot be justified on the ground that it was done in pursuance of a right exercisable by the member of the staff by virtue of his position as such.

(11) A person does not commit an offence by reason of any conduct relating to a pupil which would, apart from this section, be justified on the ground that it is done in pursuance of a right exercisable by a member of the staff by virtue of his position as such.

(12) Where, in any proceedings, it is shown that corporal punishment has been given to any pupil by or on the authority of a member of the staff, giving the punishment cannot be justified if it was inhuman or degrading.

(13) In this section—

'parental declaration' means a declaration to be signed by a parent indicating his consent to the corporal punishment.

'exclusion' means exclusion in accordance with—

(a) the provisions of this Act in the case of pupils who are not assisted persons for the purposes of subsection (3)(d) above; or

(b) the custom and practice of the school in the case of a pupil who is an assisted person for the purposes of subsection (3)(d) above.

'excluded' means excluded in accordance with—

(a) the provisions of this Act in the case of pupils who are not assisted persons for the purposes of subsection (3)(d) above; or

(b) the custom and practice of the school in the case of a pupil who is an assisted person for the purposes of subsection (3)(d) above.

(14) The Secretary of State may make regulations under this section.

"Interpretation of section 548

549.—(1) A person is not to be taken for the purposes of section 548 as giving corporal punishment by virtue of anything done for reasons that include averting an immediate danger of personal injury to, or an immediate danger to the property of, any person (including the pupil concerned).

(2) In section 548 and this section 'pupil' does not include any person who has attained the age of 18.

(3) In section 548 'member of the staff' means—

(a) in relation to a person who is a pupil by reason of the provision of education for him at a school, any teacher who works at the school and any other person who has lawful control or charge of the pupil and works there; and

(b) in relation to a person who is a pupil by reason of the provision of education for him by a local education authority at a place other than a school, any teacher employed by the authority who works at that place and any other person employed by the authority who has lawful control or charge of the pupil and works there.

"No avoidance of section 548 by refusing admission to school etc.

550.—(1) A person shall not be debarred from receiving education (whether by refusing him admission to a school, suspending his attendance or otherwise) by reason of the fact that any provision of section 548 applies in relation to him or, if he were admitted, might so apply.

(2) Provided the decision to exclude referred to in section 548(1) complies with subsection (1) of this section, nothing in this section shall be interpreted as interfering with the ability of the school to proceed with that exclusion where the parental consent required by section 548(2) is not given.".'.— *[Mr. Pawsey.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Pawsey: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss new clause 6—*Corporal punishment lawful in certain circumstances*—

'For section 548 (no right to give corporal punishment), section 549 (interpretation of section 548) and section 550 (no avoidance of section 548 by refusing admission to school) of the Education Act 1996 the following section is substituted—

"Corporal punishment lawful in certain circumstances

548.—(1) Where, in any proceedings, it is shown that corporal punishment has been given at school to a pupil to whom this section applies on disciplinary grounds, giving the punishment can be justified on the ground that it was done in pursuance of a right exercisable by the member of the staff by virtue of the authority given to him by the governing body in accordance with subsection (5) below.

(2) Where, in any proceedings, it is shown that corporal punishment was given at a school to a pupil to whom this section applies on disciplinary grounds, his punishment shall not be held to be inhuman or degrading if it was given in accordance with the conditions set out in subsection (5) below.

(3) Where, in any proceedings, it is shown that corporal punishment was given at a school to a pupil to whom this section applies on disciplinary grounds, his punishment shall

not be held to be unlawful by virtue of the absence of his or his parent's consent to it if the conditions set out in subsection (5) are satisfied.

(4) This section applies to any pupil who is attending—

(a) a school maintained by a local education authority;

(b) a grant–maintained or grant–maintained special school; or

(c) a city technology college or city college for the technology of the arts.

(5) The conditions referred to in subsection (3) are—

(a) that the governing body and head teacher of the school must have previously determined, and made generally known within the school, that corporal punishment is one of the measures that may be taken with a view to regulating the conduct of pupils:

(b) that the punishment must be imposed by the head teacher or by another teacher at the school specifically or generally authorised by the governing body for the purpose; and

(c) that the punishment must be reasonable in all the circumstances.

(6) In determining for the purposes of subsection (5)(c) whether a punishment is reasonable, the following matters in particular shall be taken into account—

(a) whether the punishment constitutes a proportionate punishment in the circumstances of the case; and

(b) any special circumstances relevant to its imposition on the pupil which are known to the person imposing it (or of which he ought reasonably to be aware) including in particular—

(i) the pupil's disciplinary record,

(ii) any special educational needs he may have,

(iii) the pupil's state of health, and

(iv) the pupil's age".'.

Mr. Pawsey: I shall briefly, and somewhat unusually, say what the new clause is not about. It is not about beating, thrashing, flogging or any of the other emotive phrases so beloved by those who oppose corporal punishment. New clause 5 is about discipline in schools and caning. It is, at all times, about reasonable punishment.

7.15 pm

For some time, I, like many hon. Members, have been concerned about the degree of disruption that is taking place in some of the nation's schools. That indiscipline is increasingly reflected in the number of exclusions that take place. Exclusion damages a child much more than one or two strokes of the cane. The effect of exclusion is to put a child outside the school gates, but then the very children who would gain most from being in the classroom and benefiting from education are thrust outside.

If the new clause was adopted, it would simply provide schools and teachers with an additional sanction that they might use in place of exclusions. Caning would be used only in serious cases of misdemeanour when otherwise exclusion would take place. In the case of an excluded child, the new clause would enable the school to contact a parent and to offer an alternative to the exclusion: that alternative would be caning. If the parent was agreeable to the child being caned, he or she would have to say so in writing.

Mr. Beggs: The hon. Gentleman referred to the damage that might be done to the child who was excluded. Does he agree that damage is done indirectly to other children in the classroom, through the high cost of providing home tuition for the growing number of pupils who have been excluded?

Mr. Pawsey: The hon. Gentleman clearly knows much about the subject and I congratulate him on the strength of his intervention. He makes a valid point and I am grateful to him.

Express permission from the parent would allow the school to cane the child instead of excluding him. Without that permission, caning could and would not take place. In response to a parliamentary question that I tabled on 13 November 1996, my hon. Friend the Minister of State said that nearly 9,000 exclusions took place in the school year 1994-95. That was the number of children permanently excluded from secondary schools. The House will note the word "permanently". How many youngsters were temporarily excluded? I frankly do not know and neither does the Department. However, I believe the figure to be substantial and, more to the point, it is growing. It has been argued that the number of pupils excluded is relatively small and I am sure that it is, but the House will understand that for the individual child who has been excluded, the figure is 100 per cent.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): If no one in a school was prepared to cane, or if the licensed caner was away for the week, would there be a residual obligation on the local education authority to ensure that it had someone on its books who could pop round and flog people who needed it?

Mr. Pawsey: I am sorry that I gave way to my hon. Friend, whose intervention was not worthy of his intellect.

Mr. Gunnell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pawsey: No. I shall give way in a moment, but I want to make some progress.

Recently, I received a booklet produced by the Commission for Racial Equality, entitled, "Exclusion from School: the Public Cost". It sets out in considerable detail the cost involved in permanent exclusions, and maintains that one permanent exclusion, starting in 1994-95 and extending into 1995-96, would cost £5,134 a year.

To that figure, however, must be added the cost of the involvement of various agencies. For example, 20 per cent. of those who are excluded use social services, at a cost of about £1,100; 20 per cent. use the health service, which costs about £100; and 25 per cent. incur a cost to the criminal justice system of about £2,000 per case.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid–Kent): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Pawsey: Let me make it absolutely clear that my advocacy of corporal punishment owes nothing at all to hard cash. It is based on the truism that a pound funding exclusion is a pound less for schools—a pound less that we might use in the classroom. I believe, therefore, that exclusions can be regarded as a misuse of scarce

[Mr. Pawsey]

resources. That argument would apply most especially if a viable alternative to exclusion were available. The new clause offers that alternative.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that the increase in the number of exclusions dates from the time when corporal punishment was first removed? That should mean a financial cost benefit, but the real problem is the behaviour that precedes the exclusion; if we had a decent deterrent in schools, the appalling behaviour that leads to the exclusions would not happen.

Mr. Pawsey: My hon. Friend makes a strong point, and I am grateful to him.

Mr. Rowe: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Pawsey: I shall give way presently.

I invite the House to consider for a moment the impact of both temporary and permanent exclusions. Clearly, there will be a substantial impact on the individual child. Exclusions substantially damage the child, who is being deprived of a reasonable education.

Several of the members of Standing Committee D, which considered the Bill for well over 40 hours, are present today. They will note that there is a fundamental difference between the new clause that I tabled in Committee and the one to which I am speaking at the moment. Principally, the reference to corporal punishment would no longer be contained in the school-parent contract. For a child to be caned, it would be necessary for the parent to give specific permission, in writing, for each individual offence.

Mr. Rowe: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Pawsey: I accept that a blanket provision, for the period of a child's school life, is simply not on. I now give way to my hon. and persistent Friend.

Mr. Rowe: I am most grateful. Has my hon. Friend been able to make any assessment of how many of the children excluded from school have the kind of parent who would accede to such a request, and of how effective corporal punishment would be on the damaged children who are most commonly excluded?

Mr. Pawsey: The answer to my hon. Friend's first question is certainly yes. I have in front of me *The Sunday Telegraph* of 3 November 1996. The headline clearly says, "Bring back the cane, say voters" and the article tells us that 68 per cent. support corporal punishment. That 68 per cent. includes parents who are prepared to let their children receive corporal punishment.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Pawsey: Let me make a little progress.

The new clause lays down rules for the way in which corporal punishment would be administered, in line with case law and opinions given under the European convention on human rights. As the parent will have given permission and the punishment is at all times to be reasonable, European law would not be breached. It is also worth recalling and repeating that at no time has the European Court of Human Rights found or ruled against the United Kingdom in matters of corporal punishment in schools.

The new clause would ensure that teachers could smack a delinquent child without any risk of civil prosecution, and removes the risk of parents changing their mind when learning that their child might be subject to corporal punishment. Let me make it absolutely clear that the new clause is permissive, not prescriptive.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that he is being a little mealy-mouthed, on the basis that a good, sound thrashing is to the advantage of the child and of the local authority that pays for that child? Will he be a little more robust in his arguments in the remainder of his speech?

Mr. Pawsey: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his helpful advice, but I do not intend to take it. I am convinced that I am being sufficiently robust; I am spelling out in some detail the fact that the new clause is responsible and would improve the quality and standard of state education in our schools.

The new clause is permissive, not prescriptive. It does not force or require schools to adopt corporal punishment. It merely provides corporal punishment as an added sanction that might be available in cases of severe misdemeanour. It should be remembered that the caning would at all times be reasonable.

A common theme running through the Government's education reforms has been devolving additional power to individual schools. Conservative Members do not believe that all schools should be identical, with identical punishments or identical administrations. We want choice and diversity.

If some schools decide to accept the principle of corporal punishment in place of exclusions, so be it; they are not forced to do so: the choice lies with the individual school. The introduction of the cane would be a decision taken by the head teacher, the governors and the parents. They would decide what was best for their children and their school. The new clause simply gives added choice to individual schools.

Recently, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been much concerned about the increase in the number of premature teacher retirements. I suspect that one of the reasons for those retirements is the indiscipline in some classes. I believe—with, I am sure, the full support of my right hon. and hon. Friends—that there are few who enter the teaching profession to grow rich. Most teachers enter the profession from a sense of genuine vocation and because of the satisfaction that they derive from imparting knowledge. That satisfaction must be much reduced when a teacher is faced with a disruptive, undisciplined and at times violent class.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): From my 23 years' experience in the teaching profession, including 12 years at a comprehensive with 1,100 boys at King's Cross, I believe that there is a place for moderate and reasonable corporal punishment, but I have not yet understood from my hon. Friend's argument how the new

clause would work. Would corporal punishment be an alternative to every possible exclusion order, or would it apply only in particular cases relating to particular offences? We cannot pick and choose: pupils would look for consistency, and the alternative should be available either in all cases or in none.

Mr. Pawsey: I would leave it up to the school. I am anxious that schools should have greater powers. I want individual schools to express their views on the issue. I agree with the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris), who said:

"I trust head teachers to behave in a way that protects their pupils and to ensure that members of staff behave in the most professional manner."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 12 December 1996; c. 426.]

She is right. The overwhelming majority of the nation's teachers are committed both to their profession and to the children under their charge.

7.30 pm

Recently, one of my constituents—a well-respected, retired teacher of English—said in my local newspaper:

"When I started in 1958 I very occasionally caned the odd miscreant so that the class could study quietly and listen and learn. Children knew that they were expected to behave reasonably and that there were sanctions if they did not."

That teacher spoke with 35 years' experience of teaching English in a secondary school. The House will note the use of the word "occasionally". As my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) said, the cane is a powerful deterrent. The fact that it exists is enough in most cases to ensure classroom discipline.

To return to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Kent (Mr. Rowe), in polls conducted by newspapers, 68 per cent. of those polled were in favour of corporal punishment. Interestingly, that support was consistent across the political spectrum. The principal question that the House has to answer is: what does the greater damage to a child, exclusion or being caned?

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I note that my hon. Friend has made provision for female pupils to be caned. Is he serious that girls should be caned in school? To be honest, I think that that is barbaric.

Mr. Pawsey: The decision is not one that my hon. Friend or I will make—it is a matter for the school. If it is thought appropriate in a specific case—

Mr. Steinberg *rose*—

Mr. Pawsey: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I will not give way.

In the United Kingdom, the teacher acts in loco parentis—in place of the parent. The teacher should, therefore, act as any reasonable parent would.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: May I venture the opinion that, if girls behave in as barbaric a way as some boys, they deserve to be treated identically?

Mr. Pawsey: I think that the House will agree that learning best takes place in a reasonably disciplined environment. The new clause will merely ensure that teachers have an added sanction that will allow them to teach a class without too much disruption. Conservative Members have a free vote tonight and I understand that Opposition Members also have a free vote. I believe that hon. Members on both sides of the House can come together in agreement that we want the best for children. We want our children to be educated in a reasonably disciplined environment. That is all that the new clause does.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I could have gone to the theatre tonight, but I am glad that I did not because the speech of the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) was hilarious and I am grateful for the entertainment that he provided. Anyone who took the issue seriously could no longer do so having heard the hon. Gentleman.

I had hoped that the hon. Gentleman would set out what constitutes "reasonable" corporal punishment. The details of his new clause take up several pages of the amendment paper, but I am still no clearer about what he means by reasonable corporal punishment. The new clause fails to clarify a number of important points. He mentioned that the cane would be the implement to be used and implied that there is such a thing as "reasonable" use of the cane. I should be interested to hear a little more about what he means by reasonable use. He has not made clear in the new clause or in his speech which parts of the body are to be struck by the cane. We used to get struck on the head at my school—[*Interruption.*] As hon. Members will be aware, it worked very well. Is it to be the head, the hands, the backside or the legs? It is not clear from the hon. Gentleman's comments what he proposes.

I had also hoped that the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth would explain what he means by "reasonable punishment" and what is the boundary between reasonable chastisement and assault. I have had to deal with that boundary because, before I came to the House, I worked in social services for many years, dealing with children who had received corporal punishment, some of which might be defined by more civilised Members of Parliament as unreasonable. For instance, would the hon. Gentleman accept that if a child's body is marked, it is unreasonable chastisement? I am happy to give way for him to answer because those areas concern me. I have had to give evidence in a court of law in cases in which children had received what I and the local authority regarded as unreasonable chastisement. They had weals on their buttocks and legs. Is that reasonable or unreasonable? I want to know because it is not clear from the hon. Gentleman's remarks.

Mr. Jamieson: Is my hon. Friend aware that the "Oxford English Dictionary" definition of corporal punishment is as follows:

"Punishment inflicted on the body, originally including death, mutilation, branding, bodily confinement, irons, the pillory, etc."?

Is he also aware that in 1868 the House abandoned corporal punishment in the Army? Would he suggest that pupils could avoid it by joining the cadets?

Mr. Hinchliffe: My hon. Friend makes his point well. I heard one or two hon. Members saying that they would subscribe to the dictionary definition in its entirety.

Mr. Gunnell: Does my hon. Friend agree that the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) made

[Mr. Gunnell]

matters even more confusing because he did not correct the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), who was talking about "flogging"—I guess he was thinking that he might apply to be the flogger in Devon after the next election—or the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle), who talked about "thrashing"? Clearly, both those hon. Members used language that suggested that they were unreasonable, but the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth did not correct them or say that they were going beyond the bounds of what he regarded as reasonable.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I made it clear at the start that interventions should be brief and to the point. That applies to all hon. Members who participate in the debate.

Mr. Hinchliffe: My hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) makes the point that the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth did not exactly discourage those of his colleagues who were more enthusiastic than he was about making bestial noises on this subject; nor has he intervened to define "reasonable" and "unreasonable". May I invite him instead to tell us what he regards as inhuman and degrading punishment?

Would the punishment of a boy or girl in a public arena be deemed degrading or inhuman? Punishment in front of other pupils used to happen regularly in my school. Would it be inhuman or degrading if, for good effect, pupils' clothing was lifted or removed when they were being caned? Does that excite the hon. Gentleman? It is important that he should clarify those points. This is a sick and sad new clause and it needs further explanation.

Mr. John Carlisle: Many Conservative Members have suffered the indignity of caning, which most Opposition Members probably have not suffered, for various reasons such as fathers' income. Will the hon. Gentleman accept that no clothing had to be removed? In fact, many of us put cardboard in our pants in an attempt to remit the punishment. It was degrading and painful, weals were put on one's buttocks and blood was drawn, but it was done on the basis that, because of the punishment, one did not commit that particular offence again. That is what the new clause is all about.

Mr. Hinchliffe: If the hon. Gentleman is saying that it did him the world of good, why is he sitting on the Conservative Benches?

I made it clear on Second Reading that my opposition to these attempts to restore corporal punishment was based on my experience and observations in a secondary modern school. Like the hon. Gentleman, I experienced various forms of corporal punishment. I was reminded of that last summer, when I attended the funeral of the head teacher of that secondary modern school, for whom I had a degree of respect. He did not cane or slipper me—he was a decent teacher and a good human being.

At that funeral, I met my former physical education teacher, whom I had not seen for 35 years, since leaving the school. Having shaken hands with him, I said that I owed him an apology. "What is it, David?" he asked. I replied that, 35 years ago, I had failed to turn up for the slipper, having been last out of the changing rooms after one of his lessons. We used to receive corporal punishment if we were the last to finish getting changed after PE or rugby. When I told him that, he was embarrassed to be reminded of the regime used in my school 35 years ago.

Also at that funeral was my former deputy head teacher, who was my form teacher in my first year at secondary modern school. His behaviour as deputy head teacher made me believe passionately that corporal punishment was inhuman and degrading and that it should be done away with as soon as possible. Each week, in front of our form—a mixed class of boys and girls aged 11 and 12—boys from across the school were wheeled in and slippered.

I remember vividly one boy who would now be regarded as having special needs, or even as being delicate. Each week, that child screamed, wept and had to be helped out of the class room. Eventually, he was transferred to special education—damaged for life by that experience. That sort of brutality stuck with me and I was reminded of it when listening to the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth. On Second Reading, I mentioned that, to me, the best possible reason for arguing against the restoration of corporal punishment was my memories of being in 1J at the age of 11, watching the same boys coming back, week after week. That proved to me, even as a simple soul at the age of 11, that corporal punishment did not work. If it was a deterrent, it obviously did not work in respect of the sort of boys who attended my school.

7.45 pm

I went back to my school in the autumn and asked the staff specifically about the abolition of corporal punishment and about the current regime used in place of corporal punishment. They gave me a detailed breakdown of what they call "discipline for learning", which is the system now used at the school. It is based on positive rewards for good behaviour, a range of rules that are understood by pupils, a gradual grading of rewards and behaviour checks and punishments and, at the end of the line and for serious misbehaviour, exclusion—which is rarely, if ever, used.

The staff showed me cards that are given out by teachers to pupils who have done good work, for example, asking the pupil to go for coffee with a teacher as a reward—an honour—for good behaviour. Teachers give pupils vouchers—positive rewards for good behaviour—which contrasts sharply with the negative regime that I had to put up with when I attended that school 35 years ago.

Many teachers are desperate about the current state of the education service, but I have not met one teacher who argues in favour of the return of corporal punishment. I have visited many schools, but I have not met one head teacher who argues for the return of corporal punishment.

Mr. Harry Greenway: What the hon. Gentleman has described is a serious abuse of corporal punishment, not moderate and reasonable corporal punishment. I do not believe that corporal punishment should ever be used in response to bad or late work, or in the absurd cases cited by the hon. Gentleman: it must be strictly confined to

serious offences, for which it can be a suitable punishment. Abuse of that sort should be condemned and I support the hon. Gentleman's comments in that respect.

Mr. Hinchliffe: In my opinion, corporal punishment is in itself an abuse of children.

I note with great interest that the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth has been unable to define what is reasonable or unreasonable corporal punishment. Therefore, if the new clause were passed, the whole issue would end up in the courts, and no one wants that. If the hon. Gentleman responds to the debate, he has a duty to state exactly what he means by reasonable and unreasonable.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I support the new clause because I start from the premise that we demand of our teachers—especially our head teachers—that they maintain an orderly and disciplined school; only in that framework can they provide the environment for disciplined education and learning. My concern is that, since the 1960s, we have progressively withdrawn all the sanctions, controls and deterrents with which teachers can maintain discipline.

Mr. Mike Hall (Warrington, South): Will the hon. Gentleman tell us how many teachers have contacted him demanding the reintroduction of corporal punishment in our schools?

Mr. Arnold: Parents and teachers have contacted me—I shall refer later to teachers' views on the subject. The new clause proposes that a deterrent be placed at the disposal of schools to be exercised according to the judgment of head teachers. I think that all hon. Members will agree that teachers are professionals who can exercise good judgment. That is a key element of the new clause. Since the 1960s, we have increasingly sent defenceless teachers into the classroom, and it is no surprise that they have avoided maintaining discipline or tried to pass the buck to someone else—invariably unsuccessfully.

Mr. Jamieson: Will the hon. Gentleman assist the House by informing us which party was in government when corporal punishment was abolished in the 1980s?

Mr. Arnold: It was a Conservative Government with Labour local education authorities. I will return to that point later.

The Bill is beginning to reverse the trend of denying schools the means of maintaining discipline. Part IV of the Bill moves in that direction, and I believe that we should take a further step forward. The corporal punishment sanction should never have been withdrawn. I was a member of the local education authority of the Labour-controlled Northamptonshire county council in 1982, and I remember well when the sanction was withdrawn. Teachers' representatives appeared before the education committee and told us, "Stick to your guns. We are right behind you; we must have this sanction available, even if we do not use it. It is a deterrent."

We advanced our case, as did the teachers' representatives. However, when the crunch came, they voted with the Labour and Liberal groups to abolish corporal punishment in schools. When I asked them why they had bothered to argue to retain corporal punishment as a deterrent to be used according to their professional judgment, their rather supine response was, "We have to live with the Labour group who control the education authority, so we must go along with them and not upset them." As a consequence, teachers in our classrooms are defenceless and have no adequate deterrents.

We are discussing the issue today in a beautiful wood-panelled hall—our meeting in Northamptonshire took place in a similar setting—and we are seeking to outbid each other by claiming, "We are not barbaric; we think that corporal punishment is uncivilised." However, it is the teachers who have to maintain disciplinary standards in our schools and it is the teachers whom we are sending defenceless into the classroom. I ask hon. Members to empower the teachers and to demonstrate our trust in their judgment. I urge hon. Members to support the new clause.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I shall be brief, as another new clause deals with substantially the same subject. I have nothing but contempt for the new clause—especially in view of the way in which it has been presented today. I hope that the increased number of Conservative Members in the Chamber—there are more present now than at any other time during the Report stage of the Bill—reflects support for the enlightened view of the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) rather than for what I would describe as the Neanderthal view of the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle): I hope that he made his contribution to the debate with his tongue firmly in his cheek, and I am sure that the good burghers of Luton would share my view.

The hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) is a cheerful cove at the worst of times and amiable at the best of times. I was extremely surprised to hear him use the phrase "choice and diversity" in the context of punishment. We must ask: whose choice and what diversity? My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) referred to many body parts and the diverse implements that can be used to inflict pain upon them. I remind the hon. Member for Luton, North that, like many of my colleagues, I suffered continued indignities and punishments of the kind that he believes should occur on a regular basis.

I believe that the clause, as it stands, is unworkable. New clause 6 makes allowances for children with special needs, but there is no provision to deal with the somewhat grey area of emotionally and behaviourally disturbed children. We do not know whether such children—the group most likely to be brutalised by corporal punishment—would be exempt. There is also the question of legal definition.

Despite the protestations of the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth, I believe that the new clause is contrary to the European convention on human rights and, if tested, would prove demonstrably so. I also believe that it is counter-productive. There are examples on both sides of the House of people whose recidivism was not ameliorated by liberal lashings of the strap, taw or cane. It is no wonder that in Committee the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth earned the soubriquet "flogger".

Mr. Pawsey: Only by you.

Mr. Kilfoyle: That view was certainly shared privately by hon. Members on both sides. I echo the

[Mr. Kilfoyle]

hon. Gentleman's remarks about allowing a free vote on the new clause and I hope that all hon. Members will take a lead from the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam and view the measure as barbaric. I can think of nothing more barbaric than state-sanctioned assault on children—and that is what is being advocated in the House today.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Although I have no Nolan-type interests in the debate, I do have some relevant experience to declare. I was at the receiving end of corporal punishment when I was at school. It was probably richly deserved, and I have not the slightest idea now whether it did any good or any harm. However, as it happened more than once, I guess it did not act as a deterrent. I am the parent of two children, both of whom were smacked by my wife and by me when they were young. That had the desired effect at the time, and they do not appear to have suffered any physical or psychological damage.

I was a teacher for a short time when corporal punishment was permissible in schools—although I never used it and I cannot remember whether other teachers did. When I was a teacher, we could clip students around the ear—that did occur in my school—and not get sacked or sued. I have worked for a long time with many children in the voluntary sector, and I have had to separate fighting children physically. I have used a rap across the knuckles as a means of enforcing discipline and protecting children from damage, and I have found it to be a necessary sanction.

That experience has led me to several conclusions. First, although physical chastisement of children can clearly be harmful and damaging—as the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) pointed out correctly—it can also be positive and helpful if it occurs within a loving and caring relationship. My second conclusion is that the use of corporal punishment at home and at school raises separate issues, which I shall not explore this evening. Thirdly, I can see a difference between using corporal punishment as an immediate response and as a delayed ritual. For example, an instant smack or rap across the knuckles is different from a smack administered by father when he comes home or sending a child to the head's study. We would need to explore that difference if we were to go further down this route.

Mr. Nicholls: Does my hon. Friend agree that tonight we should concentrate on ensuring that we introduce safeguards that would protect teachers who must smack or manhandle a child outside the classroom? Should we not also make it clear that children cannot be caned without inflicting damage in the form of weals or even bleeding? There is no way of hitting someone gently with a cane, because it is not designed for that purpose.

Mr. Wilshire: I understand my hon. Friend's point. New clause 4, which we dealt with yesterday, achieves those aims—which is why I voted for it enthusiastically.

Returning to the subject at hand, it follows that for me the new clause raises practical issues rather than matters of principle. For example, is corporal punishment wanted in schools and will it work in schools? It occurred to me, as one or two Opposition Members suggested it should, to ask my constituents what they think. I asked the parents and the teachers in my constituency. I wrote to the head teachers of all 36 schools. I persuaded the *Staines Informer* to run a telephone poll to ask its readers. I included a question on corporal punishment in schools in my newsletter, which goes to 30,000 homes.

8 pm

My questionnaire is still on-going, but the early replies are overwhelmingly in favour of corporal punishment. The telephone poll run by the *Staines Informer* got a result of 65 per cent. in favour and 35 per cent. against.

More interestingly, of the 36 schools, 15 replied. Twelve said no, two said that they were not sure and one said yes. The one school that said yes held an informal ballot among its teachers, who voted 10 in favour and eight against. The other schools' responses seem to have been the view of one person. Equally interestingly, of the schools that said no, six volunteered the view that capital punishment was perfectly acceptable in the home, if not in the school. *[Laughter.]* When thinking about what I was going to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was convinced that I would refer to capital punishment before I finished, for which I apologise to you and to the House.

What can we make of the research that I carried out? It tells me that, at least in my constituency, many parents and some teachers support corporal punishment. They believe that some form of corporal punishment has a legitimate protective and educational role in bringing up children. I agree with them in principle, but I must tell the House that, if I were still a teacher, I doubt whether I would want to go beyond the immediate physical restraint and the immediate clip around the ear. I would not wish to cane a pupil. That is an individual choice.

When I was bringing up our children, when my wife was bringing up our children, and when I was teaching, I could choose whether corporal punishment was appropriate. For better or worse, I had that choice and I could make it for myself. Today, parents and teachers do not. I believe that today's parents and today's teachers should have exactly the same choice as my wife and I had.

If I understand my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) correctly, the new clause would not force parents to accept corporal punishment, and would not force teachers to administer it. The new clause would give parents and teachers a choice. On that basis, even though I have reservations about the detail, and even though I doubt whether, if I were a teacher, I would wish to use the provisions, because it gives a choice I am happy to vote for it.

Mr. Steinberg: I shall be brief, as many hon. Members want to speak. I understand the frustration of many Members and others who want the cane to be reintroduced. Since I left the teaching profession 10 years ago, the situation in the classroom has got worse and worse. Many schools and teachers are having a difficult time.

Often I, too, think it is a damn good idea to give certain children a good hiding, but ultimately it does not work. The children who are chastised are the ones who keep coming back for it, time and again. Moreover, if a teacher gives a child a good hiding, the child's parent is likely to come into the school and give the teacher a good hiding. That must not be overlooked.

It is all right to conduct research and ask parents whether they want their children to be flogged. I suspect that, as the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) probably found out, the vast majority of parents want corporal punishment to be brought back, but they want it to be brought back for someone else's kid, not their own kids. As soon as a teacher touches their kids, there is hell on and they come to the school to see the head teacher.

Let me tell the House about my experience. I was a teacher for 20 years and a head teacher for 10 years. I have experienced both being flogged and flogging. I remember, at the age of 12, being off with the 'flu and coming back to school to find that a piece of homework had been set by the art teacher. As I was terrified of the art teacher, a man called Mr. Lynn, I attempted to do the art homework, which was on perspective. I handed it in and got flogged because it was not correct. I have always remembered that. Eventually, I got my own back on the gentleman. Several years later, when I applied for a deputy headship at a certain school and he applied for the same job, I got it and he did not.

As a head teacher, I used the cane, for about three years. The system in the school was that if, at the end of the day, a teacher felt that a particular child was causing so much disruption that the teacher felt unable to cope, the child was sent to my office. I had to decide whether to use the cane on the child. To back the teacher up, nine times out of 10 I had to cane the child in cold blood. The child would be brought into the office and told to put his hand out, and I would hit him with the cane.

As the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) said, when one uses the cane, one does not intend to tickle the child: one intends to hurt him, otherwise there is no point. On many occasions, one missed the child's hand and got him across the wrist, and immediately one could see the blood come. I did that on several occasions. Officially, I was allowed to do it. I entered the child's name in the punishment book and he would go away.

Amazingly, the children who were caned were always the same ones. I began to think that was ridiculous. There was a lad called Simpson—I remember him now—who used to come backwards and forwards. Every week he was in front of me and I was thumping hell out of him. He would go away, and two days later he would be back again. In the end, I remember him telling me to "eff off" and rushing out the door. I chased him, grabbed him by the neck, brought him back and whopped him again. Two days later, Simpson was back for another one.

The entire exercise was pointless and a waste of time. I was caning the same kids over and over again, with absolutely no effect. After three years, I said, "Enough is enough. This is ridiculous. It is getting me nowhere, it is getting the kids nowhere, and it is not improving discipline in the school." I adopted a completely different approach. If one rewards children, they respond. They respond to kindness and to being well looked after. They do not respond to a bloody good hiding.

The new clause is too stupid for words. I believe that the vast majority of teachers do not want caning brought back into schools. It is ridiculous to say that they do. Teachers have their own ways of dealing with disciplinary problems. It is about time we put more resources into our schools and considered other methods, rather than bringing back the archaic approach of trying to thump kids into submission.

Mr. Marlow: When the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) said that corporal punishment could have a positive impact on discipline problems in schools, his instincts were quite right. He then made the wrong judgment. He cited the example of the child who kept coming back for more. Perhaps it did not work for that child, but what about the other children who were never sent to his study in the first place?

New clause 6, standing in my name, is similar in thrust to new clause 5, but different in detail. We used to have caning in our schools; now we do not and something has gone badly wrong in some of our schools. That is largely recent and to a large extent it coincides with the abolition of corporal punishment.

Mr. Rowe: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Marlow: I shall not give way, as many hon. Members wish to speak.

As we have seen on television recently, sadly, some of our schools have been reduced to a savage anarchy. There is no discipline and, without discipline, there can be no education. For so many of our children, the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity of learning the foundation for a successful, prosperous and independent life is negligently and needlessly blotted out. We see the results on a daily basis in crime on our streets.

There is no single cure for indiscipline, but control cannot be regained until sufficient respect for authority is restored. In some schools, that respect could in part be restored by the reintroduction of caning. Louts and bullies are almost inevitably cowards. The threat of pain is an effective corrective. Our proposals are not barbaric. Sadly, the conditions in some of our schools are barbaric.

New clause 6 proposes that, if the board of governors and the head teacher of a school want to reintroduce corporal punishment, they should be entitled to do so. It would be up to them to decide. I understand that many schools would not opt for it, but some would find it effective and others might follow suit. It would be neither mandatory nor a requirement, but optional, and for some it would work and some of our problems could begin to be solved.

Why are we here today? Why are we in this position? The system was operating and then the European Court of Human Rights intervened. It is gross that an international court across the channel should tell us how we should behave and what is civilised in our country. That is a matter for the House to decide. We are a democratically elected Parliament and we should take the decisions.

I understand that, believe it or not, the new clause would be in accordance with the European Court of Human Rights. If it were passed, it would become the law of the land and schools would immediately be able to reintroduce corporal punishment should they so wish. Some people might then want to take a case to the European Court of Human Rights, but it would probably be thrown out. If it were not, if we had corporal punishment in our schools and it was found to be

[Mr. Marlow]

effective, if some foreign court at that stage decided to throw out the laws of our land and this Parliament, we would take a significant view to that court.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): Will the hon. Member give way on that point?

Mr. Marlow: No. I apologise to the hon. Gentleman, but there is very little time and others are waiting to speak.

Finally, there has been a load of steamy nonsense in the press suggesting that, if there is a vote, the Government will be embarrassed. The Government have wisely and decently decided that there is to be a free vote. That is quite proper and appropriate. I understand that there is also a free vote for the Opposition. Let us see what that means. We have heard about free votes for the Opposition before.

The Government are probably unable to accept the new clauses. Given their position in respect of the European Court of Human Rights and an election fairly shortly, I understand their difficulty. I do not blame them for that, but tonight the British people will find out who understands the problems in our schools and who can do something about it. It is the Conservative party, and not the Opposition.

Mr. Don Foster: The hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) was absolutely right to express concern about the number of exclusions in our schools and the damage that does to the education of those young people. He then told the House that the most fundamental question we had to address tonight was: which was more damaging to children—exclusion from school or caning? He was absolutely wrong. The fundamental question was posed to him by the hon. Member for Mid–Kent (Mr. Rowe): was there any evidence whatsoever to show that the reintroduction of corporal punishment would reduce the number of exclusions from schools?

The hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth has repeatedly failed to provide any evidence to suggest that the reintroduction of corporal punishment would reduce the number of exclusions or the indiscipline in our schools, about which we are all concerned.

Mr. John Marshall: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Foster: No, time is very short.

The hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth can produce no such evidence. In fact, all the evidence is to the contrary and suggests that the reintroduction of corporal punishment would not reduce indiscipline in schools. Not one country in eastern or western Europe uses corporal punishment or considers it to be of value.

8.15 pm

In 1989, the Elton committee examined the issue. I remind the House of its conclusion:

"there is little evidence that Corporal Punishment was in general an effective deterrent either to the pupils punished or to other pupils."

The very people whom the hon. Gentleman wants to use corporal punishment are opposed to its reintroduction. None of the teacher unions or professional associations believes that a return to corporal punishment would be beneficial to reducing indiscipline in our schools.

It is also instructive to consider the views of the pupils. One hon. Gentleman, whom I shall not name because I did not have an opportunity to inform him that I would refer to him, wrote in his local newspaper that, when he was at school, he was caned every single week. It is interesting to read the ensuing correspondence from year 9 pupils in a school in his constituency. I shall quote only two examples. The first wrote:

"You said you'd been caned frequently at school; but doesn't this mean you behaved badly again and again to get such treatment—you didn't learn your lesson."

The second wrote:

"It didn't make a difference to the way you behaved, did it? What makes you think it'll work for us?"

There is no evidence that a return to corporal punishment would reduce indiscipline in our schools.

Surely when people in the country and the House should be trying to reduce violence in society, is it not strange even to contemplate reintroducing a violent form of punishment? I hope that, even on a free vote, the majority of hon. Members will vote against the new clause.

Mr. John Carlisle: The speech by the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) was the most extraordinary intervention that the House has heard for some time. I suppose that the hon. Gentleman would recommend some form of counselling so that those poor youngsters could talk it out of their system. He and the House know that that is complete nonsense.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle), for whom I have some affection, made an extraordinary accusation against the Conservative party when he said that too many Conservative Members were trying to speak. It is extraordinary in our great democracy that those of us who wish to express our opinion on a subject on which we feel strongly should be criticised by the hon. Gentleman for being here to do so in numbers.

I fully support my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), albeit on the basis that he presented his case far too reasonably. We are discussing a serious subject that must be approached with the vigour and enthusiasm of those of us who have suffered and even administered the cane to offending youths. My hon. Friend's arguments were far too reasonable, given that those who have offended—and some of my hon. Friends speak from experience—agree that the offence is such that punishment requires physical pain and that the counselling that the hon. Member for Bath would envisage would have no effect.

Some of us are somewhat proud of the old school tie. I am wearing mine tonight in deference to the punishment that was inflicted on me and that I inflicted on others on the basis that, in many cases, it is ultimately the only answer to a terrible problem. We should inflict on those who easily inflict physical punishment on others the physical punishment that they understand. It is the short, sharp shock type of treatment that is needed and the House should allow it to be administered. That is why my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth is right.

This issue goes back to the days of the Criminal Justice Bill of 1980. I see in the corner my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), who was in the House at the time. This issue matters, and corporal punishment is the language that young thugs, wherever they come from, begin to understand.

It is the deterrent value of corporal punishment that means something, rather than the punishment itself. That is why my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth is right to propose that the choice should be available. I believe that it should be mandatory on teachers and those in local education authorities to inflict corporal punishment.

I remind the House that, many years ago, when the European Community, as it was in those days, tried to impose its will on the House, the National Union of Teachers supported the continuation of corporal punishment because it felt that it should be available to its members.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Carlisle: I give way to the hon. Gentleman in the red cardigan.

Mr. MacShane: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for praising the NUT in a previous speech. No doubt that praise will be suitably noted.

I had a conversation with my daughter and a group of her nine-year-old friends the other day. One of them asked, "Do you know Mr. Major?" I said, "Yes, I have seen him now and then." They asked, "Is it true that he is going to bring back caning for us if we go to secondary school?" Is the hon. Gentleman aware that if those nine-year-olds had the vote, they would not vote for the Conservative Members who are coming in from the wilder shores of the Internet with their sadism and perversion tonight?

Mr. Carlisle: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making one of his rare visits from Switzerland. He has given his wisdom to the House, of which it will have taken note. The Prime Minister must make his own decision. I am pleased that the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has some sympathy with the views that have been expressed by Conservative Members.

If we do not pass new clause 5, we shall regret it for a very long time. I fear that, if it falls tonight, it will be gone for ever.

Mr. Walter Sweeney (Vale of Glamorgan): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Carlisle: My hon. Friend is a very dear and close friend; he will forgive me if I do not give way.

The measure proposed in the new clause, which was admirably put by my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth, should be available to teachers and those in local education authorities. I hope that the House supports it tonight.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I have always supported corporal punishment, but I much prefer new clause 6 to new clause 5. In my view, the people whose sons—it is unlikely to be girls, but it may be—require corporal punishment would assent to it. If new clause 6 became law, the school, governors and head teacher, in conclave, could make that part of a mission statement to be placed before prospective parents.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I will not give way.

Those people would inform parents that corporal punishment was among the disciplinary measures that might be taken. Opposition Members—I believe a Yorkshire Member—object. It seems to me that they object on health grounds, mental health grounds and so on. The hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) spoke only about new clause 5. Had he thoroughly read new clause 6, he would have found that those aspects were covered. The school must consider not only the pupil's disciplinary record but any special educational needs that he may have, his state of health and his age. I believe that that covers all the points made by the hon. Member for Wakefield, the ex-social worker.

No doubt all hon. Members regularly visit schools in their constituencies, so they cannot have failed to notice a steady but rapid deterioration in discipline in many schools. That applies across the country. As my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) said, that deterioration dates from about 10 years ago, when caning was abolished. My recollection is that the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers, not the NUT, wished to retain it, and I believe that it still does.

One of the kindest headmasters whom I have ever had the good fortune to know, who has been in post for 25 years at a school in my constituency—he was more of a teddy bear than a headmaster, but the discipline in the school was exceptionally good—said to me, "I have been here for 25 years and I have used the cane only once, but everyone knows that it is behind the door. I believe that it is essential."

I do not agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire). I would never give a child a clip round the ear. Hitting a child's head can damage their hearing or their brain. However, I believe that it is perfectly acceptable to hit a child on the hand, and I believe that the power to do so should be restored.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey). I was amazed at the hilarity with which his speech was received by Opposition Members. It is obvious that they are completely out of touch with the ordinary people in this country, especially parents. I support this move, for two reasons.

First, I believe in variety and choice in education and the Opposition believe in uniformity. No one is saying that every school should have the cane, but if a few schools had it, parents who wanted a highly disciplined school with appropriate punishments could send their children there.

Dr. Lynne Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Townend: I will not give way because I want to get on.

[Mr. Townend]

Many parents are witnessing their child's education being ruined by classroom anarchy caused by a few people. Many parents are worried sick because their children go to school frightened of being bullied, and are bullied. We have a duty to consider not only the naughty children who are being caned but the rest of the children in the class.

There is nothing wrong with the new clause. It is based on choice: the choice of the parent and the choice of the school. The Opposition are frightened that if only one or two schools introduce corporal punishment, an avalanche of parents will want to send their children to them.

I would say to the hon. Members for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) and for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) that corporal punishment, as practised at their school, was obviously wrong and ineffective. Corporal punishment, to be effective, must be rarely given. At my school, if one went to the headmaster, one did not return the next week and the week after.

One of the very fine headmasters in my constituency—the headmaster of a comprehensive school, who has now retired—who was not a Conservative but a lifetime socialist, said to me, "Mr. Townend, you would be surprised, but I agree with your views on corporal punishment. I have caned only a few times in my career, never more than once a term, but I believe that by caning young thugs at the right time I have saved four or five of them from a life of crime."

The second reason why I support the new clause is the alternative. The alternative ultimate punishment is exclusion. That is damaging for the child, and excluded children are encouraged to commit vandalism and petty crime on the streets, and before too long petty crime becomes more serious crime.

In my constituency, crime is a real problem. A high proportion of my constituents are old and it is often they who suffer when 14, 15 and 16-year-olds are excluded from school and roam the streets.

I wish my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth well. The new clause should be passed, because if there were a referendum on the subject today we would bring back not only caning in schools but corporal punishment.

8.30 pm

Mr. Forth: It is about 10 years since corporal punishment was last debated in the House. I shall leave it to others to decide whether this debate was worth waiting for. My hon. Friends the Members for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) and for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), as we expected, argued their cases with commitment. We were not disappointed. I hope that it will come as no surprise to the House when I say that the Government will resist the new clauses.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear, the Government will not support the new clauses. The remarks of the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) were a disgrace. For him to imply to his doctrinaire friends that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister would support the new clauses was grossly dishonest, but the House will not be surprised that I am not surprised about that.

I recognise that new clause 6 is the attempt of my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North to bring back corporal punishment. His new clause would effectively repeal the prohibition of the use of corporal punishment, which is set out in section 548 of the Education Act 1996. The effect of that would be broadly to revive the common law principle that applied before the Education (No. 2) Act 1986—that a teacher acting in loco parentis would be able, where merited, lawfully to administer corporal punishment, even where parents specifically objected to that form of punishment. That would be in violation of the European convention on human rights.

Mr. Marlow: As my hon. Friend is considering what line he will take on this issue, may I reassure him that I have taken advice? The new clause would not be in conflict with the European Court of Human Rights. The court is concerned with degrading and inhuman punishment. The clause is defined in such a way that if corporal punishment were reintroduced, it would not be carried out in a degrading and inhuman way. In other words it would be all right. That being so, my hon. Friend can vote for the new clause.

Mr. Forth: It seems that my hon. Friend and I have received conflicting advice, which is not unusual in legal matters. I must rest on the advice that I have received. The prohibition of corporal punishment in state schools in 1986 was prompted by the 1982 ruling of the European Court of Human Rights that the United Kingdom was in breach of article 2 of protocol 1 to the convention. The court found that UK law failed to respect the philosophical convictions of parents who were opposed to schools using corporal punishment for their children. I believe, therefore, that new clause 6 falls at the first hurdle, and would be in breach of the European convention. As the United Kingdom is a signatory to the convention, my hon. Friend's approach would not work.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth tabled new clause 5. He has taken account of many of the points that were made in Committee. He has gone to considerable lengths to seek to take account of what I have said about the European convention and the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights. I have received advice that his new clause may—this is not certain—deal with the points made by the convention and the court.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Forth: I shall give way, but I must seek to make rapid progress.

Mr. Arnold: Was not the whole point of the convention to provide an avenue of judicial recourse for individuals in France and Italy, were their countries to go communist, so that they might have protection against what happened to individuals in eastern Europe? As that circumstance no longer exists in Europe, is it not high time that the convention in its current form were scrapped?

Mr. Forth: A debate on our membership of the Council of Europe and our adherence to the European convention on human rights awaits another day. It is my advice that as long as we are a signatory to that convention, we must adhere to it and to the rulings of its court.

I move on to two or three substantive points. The first of those points was made by the hon. Members for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) and for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) and by others. The analysis of punishment books before the abolition of corporal punishment revealed, as has often been said, that many pupils' names appeared again and again, even though they had been subjected to corporal punishment. That seems to suggest that the punishment was ineffective in deterring pupils from committing misdemeanours. Surely that must be a telling point.

Another argument that has been raised—

Dr. Lynne Jones *rose—*

Mr. Forth: I shall not give way at this stage.

Another argument that has been advanced by several Members is surely key to the debate. There is little, if any, evidence, in spite of the points made by my hon. Friends the Members for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) and for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire)—evidence that I am aware of, or the Department is aware of—that there is a demand from teachers for the restoration of corporal punishment and its availability to them. To the extent that that is so, the mere restoration of corporal punishment would not mean that it would be used in schools. Therefore, restoration would not have the effect that my hon. Friends seek.

The final point—

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Forth: No. I shall not give way at this stage. I apologise to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Forth: I am not giving way to my hon. Friend or other hon. Friends. I want to take up the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman); it is possibly the most crucial of all the arguments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth has had to rest on the concept of parental consent to get around the problems posed by the European convention on human rights and the European Court of Human Rights. Surely those parents who are likely to consent are the very ones whose children would not need corporal punishment. Equally, the parents who would withhold consent are almost certainly those whose children, it is alleged, would most benefit from corporal punishment.

Moreover, in resting the case on parental consent, we would create a situation in which schools would contain two categories of pupil. There would be those who would be subject to corporal punishment and those who would be immune from it because their parents had not given consent. That would create an intolerable position in our schools. For these practical reasons, and perhaps with some regret, I cannot recommend acceptance of the new clauses.

Mr. Pawsey: This has been a particularly interesting debate.

I shall deal first with the speech of the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe). The Education Act 1996 does not define corporal punishment. I have, therefore, followed the precedent that has already been established. The hon. Gentleman made a great point about reasonable punishment. The essence of new clause 5 is reasonable punishment. A teacher could be sued in the civil courts for trespass to the person unless the corporal punishment was carried out in accordance with the new clause. That is the answer to the hon. Gentleman's argument.

The hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg), who sits next to the hon. Member for Wakefield, told us that he undertook caning. Does the hon. Member for Wakefield really believe that his hon. Friend is a violent character of the sort described? The hon. Gentleman knows his hon. Friend better than I do.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold), in a thoughtful speech, said that an additional sanction was being made available to teachers. He was right to advance that argument. My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) said that corporal punishment could be of benefit in a loving and caring environment. He was right to make that point. Indeed, that is what the new clause emphasises. It is a reasonable amendment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) said that without discipline there is no learning. He is right. Learning best takes place in a reasonably disciplined environment. My hon. Friend was critical of the European Court, and I was not surprised about that.

The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), who is now in his place, mentioned exclusions and evidence. The best evidence that I can give him is that 68 per cent. of those who have been polled are in favour of the reintroduction of corporal punishment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) supported the new clause. He described me as being too reasonable. I was somewhat surprised to hear him say that, given the way in which I was attacked by Opposition Members. Perhaps I have got things about right and have achieved a mid-way position between Opposition extremists and the extremists who sit behind me.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) made a typically robust speech. He argued that the new clause would enhance choice in schools and in education generally. He made a good point about the responsibility of schools to the children who wish to learn.

My hon. Friend the Minister made one of the more disappointing speeches that I have heard from the Government Dispatch Box. That means that he did not give me the unconditional support that I wished to hear from him. He said that he would resist the new clause, and that was a surprise. He thought that I had sought to deal with some of the objections that might come from the European Court. I appreciate that there is conflicting advice, but I have been advised that I have answered the court's objections.

The new clause would allow schools to reintroduce corporal punishment. It would be at the discretion of the school, its governing body, its head teacher and its parents. No one is forcing corporal punishment down anyone's throat: it is a matter for the individual, and parents would have to give their consent. That 68 per cent. poll clearly includes a substantial number of teachers—we cannot exclude them.

[Mr. Pawsey]

The debate has been about the need to provide a reasonably disciplined environment for learning. I urge my hon. Friends and Opposition Members to join me in the Lobby tonight.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 101, Noes 376.

Division No. 57] **[8.40 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Atkins, Robert
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Beggs, Roy
Bendall, Vivian
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brazier, Julian
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carttiss, Michael
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Colvin, Michael
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Day, Stephen
Dicks, Terry
Dover, Den
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Fry, Sir Peter
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Howell, David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jessel, Toby
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
MacGregor, John
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Stewart, Allan
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bexh'yh'th)*
Trotter, Neville
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whitingdale, John
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Walter Sweeney and
Mr. Warren Hawksley.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Allen, Michael *(Selby)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Austin-Walker, John
Baker, Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bates, Michael
Battiste, Spencer
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A J
Benn, Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Billen, John
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowis, John
Bradley, Keith
Brandreth, Gyles
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clappison, James
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clelland, David
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colley, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Congdon, David
Connarty, Michael
Conway, Derek
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Couchman, James
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Denham, John
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dewar, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dowd, Jim
Duncan, Alan
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fishburn, Dudley
Fisher, Mark
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Dr John
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, Sir John
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gummer, John
Gunnell, John
Hague, William
Hall, Mike
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter

Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heppell, John
Heseltine, Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kaufman, Gerald
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Key, Robert
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Stret'd)*
Loyden, Eddie
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian *(Makerf'd)*
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
MacKay, Andrew
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclean, David
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Madel, Sir David
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Michael, Alun
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Oakes, Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Neill, Martin
Oppenheim, Phillip
Orme, Stanley
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pendry, Tom
Pickles, Eric
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Portillo, Michael
Prentice, Mrs B *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowe, Andrew
Rowlands, Ted
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Scott, Sir Nicholas
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shephard, Mrs Gillian
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soames, Nicholas
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Ms R *(Dunfermline W)*
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Steel, Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stott, Roger
Streeter, Gary
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Sykes, John
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, John
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Williams, Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Patrick McLoughlin.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I apologise for raising a point of order at this time, but I wonder whether there is any way of urgently contacting a Home Office Minister in connection with the hunger strike at Rochester prison—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. That has absolutely nothing to do with the Chair, and there is a telephone outside.

New clause 7

PROMOTION OF MARRIAGE AND PARENTHOOD IN MAINTAINED SCHOOLS

'—(1) Section 351 of the Education Act 1996 (General duties in respect of the curriculum) shall be amended as follows.

(2) At the end of subsection (1) there shall be inserted

"including marriage and parenthood.".'.—*[Mr. Leigh.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Under section 351 of the Education Act 1996, the national curriculum must prepare people for the

"opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life."

My new clause simply suggests that marriage and parenthood constitute one of the key aspects of adult life, and should be included in the national curriculum.

Politicians of all parties tend to make vague generalisations about being "committed to the family". When politicians say that they are committed to the family, do they mean that they are committed merely to maintaining the status quo, or do they mean that they want

[Mr. Edward Leigh]

to support a stable, lifelong relationship between a man and a woman, and to support the notion that being a parent means being a parent for life?

There is a danger that the definition of the ideal family has been stretched to include any configuration of adults and children. Given that we have a detailed national curriculum, I consider it appropriate for Parliament to lay down clear objectives about the aims that we want our state schools to achieve.

Parents are rightly concerned about examination results and academic achievement, and we should do all we can to ensure that standards are raised; but education is education, not only for the purposes of employment but for the purposes of life itself. Schools, whether they like it or not, have a key role in communicating values to young people. It surely cannot have escaped many people's attention that today's society faces serious problems as a result of the breakdown of the family.

Of course young people can be profoundly affected by a parent's leaving the family home, but education must deal with the fact that, one day, most young people will grow up and become parents themselves. My concern is to see our schools promote responsible attitudes towards marriage and parenthood. I strongly believe that the time has now come to extend the objectives of the national curriculum to include preparing pupils for the responsibilities of marriage and parenthood.

Dr. Lynne Jones: I do not think that anyone would disagree with the hon. Gentleman's view that marriage—and parenthood in particular—represent an estate on which many people will embark, and that for that reason they should be included in the national curriculum. Surely, however, the hon. Gentleman hit the nail on the head when he said that they were "one of" the key aspects of the national curriculum.

Why should those matters be singled out in the new clause—given that they are already covered in the Bill as it stands—in preference to any number of items that could be added, relating to the responsibilities and opportunities of adults? Does not the new clause invite people to add an infinite number of items, according to whim and to their particular interests?

Mr. Leigh: I am grateful for that point. I shall refer to it in detail, but marriage and parenthood are such an integral part of life that they should be part of the national curriculum, and should be taught.

Some people might say, "Surely schools already cover marriage and parenthood in their courses on personal and social education." I accept that, but my main concern is that such courses can often put marriage on an equal basis with temporary relationships, and fail to promote a responsible attitude to marriage and parenthood.

The book that I have in my hand is a well-established teacher's book for primary schools. I think that most Members reading the book would be appalled by its suggestions. The introduction is a guide to flouting the law so that sex education can avoid being within the framework of "moral considerations" and "family life" as required by Parliament. The introduction gleefully points out that Parliament—that is us—has failed to define what it means by the family.

9 pm

Later, the book says:

"Parenting can be carried out just as successfully by people who are not necessarily the child's natural parents."

That may be true in some circumstances, but it is a somewhat offhand dismissal of natural family ties. Of course I accept that, in some cases, adults who are not the natural parents can do a great job of raising children, but common sense teaches us that the ideal is for children to be cared for and nurtured by both natural parents. To pretend that that is not true is to distort the truth and to deceive children.

I would never claim to be able to look after other hon. Members' children as well as the hon. Members themselves. Obviously, we must assume that it is overwhelmingly the case that natural parents are the best carers and models for children. The book adopts a completely irresponsible attitude to human relationships. For the book, one-night stands are just as valid as marriage. In my view, they are not.

There is an accompanying teaching book for secondary schools. It is clear on the moral values that it promotes. Let me read just one sentence from a story to be read to pupils—school children—to help them to feel more confident about the subject:

"Deb and Philip had been together for two years, and . . . they both had other close friends with whom they slept occasionally".

What sort of example is that for young people? This is a well-known teacher's manual.

Of course these are only two teacher's manuals, albeit fairly typical ones. We do not know what is taught in every classroom. Parliament cannot control every classroom, but it can act to give general guidance to schools. My new clause addresses the national curriculum as a whole. Here, we can make a difference and state what we want.

My worse fears have been fully justified by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, which recently considered the moral values that schools should promote. Their moral framework was drawn up by SCAA officials after it appointed 150 people to a National Forum for Values in Education and the Community.

In the first draft last September, the family was not even mentioned. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment intervened. She called for the curriculum to support traditional family values. That intervention led to the next draft including the family.

By January, the "moral framework" included a weak reference to marriage. The framework says that schools should

"support families in raising children and caring for dependants, support the institution of marriage"

and

"recognise that the love and commitment required for a secure and happy childhood can be found in families of different kinds".

Fine. I accept that the guidance says that the institution of marriage should be supported, but it qualifies that by implying that other sorts of families are equally secure and happy. Such a caveat ignores all the evidence that, normally, children thrive best of all when they live with their two married parents. That is just common sense.

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): My hon. Friend will recall that it was suggested that putting

marriage into such teaching in schools was irrelevant for many children. I might suggest that talking about going to the moon could be just as irrelevant, and it could be included with marriage as an ideal to which they might aspire.

Mr. Leigh: Yes. I am glad that my hon. Friend has made that point. I will return to it. We should not frame national policy making on the basis just of the lowest common denominator, but seek to provide an example to young people.

Of course there are always individual exceptions to the rule that I have outlined, but that does not change the fact that, on average, children thrive best when they live with their married father and mother. The reason why the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church have objected to SCAA's wording is that marriage is supported in the document, not promoted. Marriage is not held up as the ideal, but is just one configuration of family among many others. The wording that SCAA has chosen is therefore pretty meaningless.

The public, however, are very clear about what they want. Opinion polls clearly show that people want schools to promote marriage, not just support it. A Gallup poll, which was reported in *The Sunday Telegraph* on 3 November, found that 75 per cent. of people believe that schools should teach children that marriage is a good thing. Another poll, conducted by Audience Selection, which was reported on the same day, found that 73 per cent. of people believe that the teaching of moral values in schools should focus on marriage and traditional family values.

Only after massive public controversy—reported on the front page of virtually every national newspaper—and intervention by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State did SCAA include marriage in its framework document. That shows how out of step educational bureaucrats can be with the general public. I hope that my right hon. Friend will take firm action to ensure that her own quango issues sensible guidance in future.

The two most important commitments that a person can make in their lifetime are to marriage and to parenthood. Our law recognises that both should be lifelong. The English legal definition of marriage is the

"voluntary union for life of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others."

That definition was given by Lord Justice Penzance as long ago as 1866.

Legislation, such as the Child Support Act 1991, recognises that parenthood is for life. Children need a mother and a father; they need to be cared for and nurtured in a stable environment of love between mother and father.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way during his excellent speech. Does he agree that the whole point of education about parenthood is not to consider the rights and needs just of children in a classroom but to train them to be parents for the generation of children they will bring up in the future?

Mr. Leigh: I am very glad that I gave way to my hon. Friend, because his point leads directly to the one made by Norman Dennis, a Labour party member and sociologist, who has argued that all studies show that, on average, children from married families do better than children from broken homes or lone-parent households.

I of course accept that many children from broken homes do better in terms of their health, education, employment, and so on, than some from married homes, but the point is that, on average, that is not so. Dennis argues that men are no longer tied to the responsibilities that they once had for the family. The social constraints on them to act responsibly have been substantially relaxed. My amendment calls for schools to prepare boys and girls to face up to and prepare for the responsibilities of marriage and parenthood.

Dr. Nick Tate, chief executive of SCAA, has argued that official documents cannot promote marriage, because, in some classes, 60 per cent. of pupils come from broken homes—precisely the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock). I do not doubt that such classes exist, but Tate's argument is a recipe for despair.

Are schools to affirm, against the evidence, that any kind of family is just as good as any other—no matter whether children have a male and a female carer or what the adults' commitment is to the children? Not all families are equally effective. It is nonsense to pretend that they are. There is a danger that Dr. Tate is promoting the very relativism that he claims to be against.

I strongly believe that we should reject the "stand idly by" approach to breakdown of families, for two good reasons. First, instead of promoting responsibility and family stability, that approach panders to the lowest common denominator of instability and irresponsibility to which I have referred. *[Interruption.]* There is no point in the Whip constantly trying to make me sit down. I have prepared my speech, and I shall make it.

There are, of course, children whose mothers or fathers have deserted the family home. Many realise that life is not what it should be. My amendment calls for schools to point them to a better way—not to become the absent fathers, the deadbeat dads of the future. Yes, there needs to be respect and sensitivity for all children, from whatever background. Children do not choose their parents, but they grow up to be the parents of the future.

The second reason why we should reject the fatalism of Dr. Tate is that the analysis is factually wrong. Yes, there are serious problems with the breakdown of the family, but they are not as serious as some would have us believe. Reports of the death of marriage and the nuclear family have been greatly exaggerated. If one accepts that children need a mother and a father, marriage is still the norm. Only 3 per cent. of children live with a cohabiting mother and father, whereas 71 per cent. live with their married mother and father. Those figures surprised me and I had to double-check them, but they are true.

Dr. Tate is wrong in arguing that we should not promote the family type in which 71 per cent. of children live. Of the remaining family types, 7 per cent. of children live in a step-family—of which 4 per cent. are married step-families and 3 per cent. cohabiting; 2 per cent. live in a lone father household; and 17 per cent. live in a lone mother household. Therefore, the overwhelming majority of children come from married households.

Most adults will marry, and most marriages will be for life. According to the general household survey, only 9 per cent. of men and women aged 15 to 59 are

[Mr. Leigh]

cohabiting. The question is which form of human relationship schools should promote. Not to answer that question is to advocate a completely laissez-faire approach—a family free-for-all—and children deserve better than that. Unfortunately for them, the choices that adults make are not equally valid. At the very least, however, those choices will have a profound effect on children.

Yes, there are irresponsible fathers and mothers. In moving this new clause, I ask only that schools promote responsibility and the concept of a permanent relationship between a man and a woman. It is in the interests of our nation's future children that they do so; it is therefore in our national interest.

Lady Olga Maitland: I warmly welcome new clause 7, which has been moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh). It is not enough to prepare children for adulthood without advocating positively and without any equivocation the importance of a stable and committed marriage and parenthood. There is plenty of evidence to suggest and support the belief that families and children flourish if they develop within the context of a traditional marriage, and that the life chances of a child reared outside that context are very much reduced.

Britain's rates of divorce and of children born outside marriage are the highest in Europe, and our marriage rates are far lower. The cost to society is so high that we cannot skimp on action or prevaricate on the issue. The nation spends more than £9 billion to support unstructured parenting—the "never-marrieds", the lone parents and the divorced—and the cost in children's development is cripplingly high. Parenting chaos plunges many children into the poorest percentile of society, and 90 per cent. of single parents aged 16 to 24 are on income support.

Children's life chances suffer because of constantly changing homes and an unorthodox type of parenting—whether it is a mother alone or with a succession of partners and stepfathers. Instability means that children suffer from poor performance in school and lack of concentration. They are anxious, clinging and attention-seeking, especially when they are young. As they grow older, they have a greater tendency to fall prey to solvent, drug and alcohol abuse, and to commit vandalism and other juvenile crime. They are rootless youngsters, whose life chances can be affected to the point that they lose the spirit to carry on with further education. Teenage girls become pregnant without stable relationships and marriage.

That vicious circle cannot be allowed to continue. We are being unfair to children if we do not give them a positive model to which they can aspire. They may have been denied a stable home themselves, but they should be encouraged to hold an ideal and aspiration, to stop the vicious circle.

One difficulty is that schools have fought shy of discussing traditional marriage, partly because some teachers have chaotic lives of their own and do not share such a commitment, and partly because schools believe that such discussion would embarrass children who do not come from stable homes. Children are being sold short if there is any equivocation on the virtues of marriage. The National Forum for Values in Education and the Community fails on that count, because, although it states that it supports marriage, in the same breath it states that

"the love and commitment required for a happy childhood can be found in families of different kinds."

That gives legitimacy to single parenthood and to the "never-marrieds", and it undermines the traditional family.

We should be bold in our support of marriage, and the theme of marriage should permeate all aspects of education. Children should be taught that walking out of a marriage, divorcing or never marrying are not easy alternatives, and that such actions can wreck lives and destroy the life chances of others.

We must follow the firm line of the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches, that, if we do not support marriage clearly and unequivocally, we undermine the institution. I very much hope that my hon. Friend the Minister and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will reflect carefully on this important new clause.

9.15 pm

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friends who have spoken in support of the new clause are knocking on an open door. Few would take issue with the substance of what they say. I ask them to reconsider pressing the clause at this stage, for pragmatic and practical reasons.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) generously acknowledged that there are already elements in the curriculum that point us in the right direction, even if they do not go as far as he wishes. He referred to one such measure, and there are others—under the provisions for sex education, for example.

I ask my hon. Friends to bear in mind two points. There are always pressures on the curriculum and on schools to include many subjects that have wide support from different areas. Of course, the issue that my hon. Friends have raised has enormously wide support, as they have pointed out, and as we know from the many hon. Members who have given their support. Other subjects also have widespread support—citizenship is often mentioned in this context, as is giving young people an awareness of financial responsibilities.

Those issues may not be in the same category as those raised by my hon. Friends, but the point is that there is always pressure to include ever more in the curriculum. We are trying desperately to hold on to core skills and to use the curriculum to best effect to teach young people the basic skills—literacy, numeracy and so on. We have to be careful about allowing other subjects, even though they are important, to be brought into the curriculum.

I could also say—although it would be risky to do so—that to assume that putting something into the curriculum means that it is automatically carried forward into the consciousness of young people is interesting, but sometimes rather dangerous. I shall not press that point, because it would take me down a road that I do not want to go too far down.

I understand the views of my hon. Friends about the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority and the forum, but I ask them to be patient. Much good work has already been done. A real effort is being made to find as much common ground as possible and to bring as many people as possible behind the values that my hon. Friends have supported. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is well aware of their concerns.

I have listened carefully to what my hon. Friends have said, and my right hon. Friend will be made well aware of the points that they have made. She is happy to give the undertaking that my hon. Friends have asked for that we will give the closest consideration to what they have said. My right hon. Friend will particularly bear in mind what has been argued in the House this evening when she considers what emerges from the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority and the national forum.

I ask my hon. Friends to accept that undertaking in the spirit in which I offer it. I hope that they will not press the new clause for inclusion in the Bill at this stage.

Mr. Leigh: I am grateful for the generous way in which my hon. Friend has dealt with our concerns. In view of the fact that he said that we were knocking on an open door and that our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has particularly seized on the arguments that we have made this evening, I am happy to beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Schedule 1

SCHEDULE INSERTED AFTER SCHEDULE 5 TO THE EDUCATION ACT 1996

Amendment made: No. 36, in page 52, line 9, at end insert—

' "admission authority" has the same meaning as in Chapter I of Part VI;'.—*[Mr. Forth.]*

Clause 14

GRANTS TO PROMOTERS OF GRANT-MAINTAINED SCHOOLS

Amendment made: No. 5, in page 13, line 16, at end insert—

'(1A) The funding authority shall not, however, make any grant under this section to any such persons unless—

(a) the authority are satisfied that it is likely that the proposed school would, if established, be a viable school; or

(b) it appears to the authority, on the basis of material already submitted to them by those persons, that it is likely that they would be so satisfied once those persons had taken any particular further steps, and the grant is made in respect of expenditure to be incurred in connection with taking those steps.

(1B) For the purposes of subsection (1A) a proposed school would be a viable school if there would be a sufficient demand for places at the school to ensure that a satisfactory standard of education was provided there.'.—*[Mr. Forth.]*

Clause 19

RESPONSIBILITY FOR DISCIPLINE: LEA-MAINTAINED SCHOOLS

Amendments made: No. 6, in page 16, line 17, leave out 'prepare' and insert 'make'.

No. 7, in page 16, line 31, at end insert—

'(2A) Before making or revising the statement required by subsection (2)(a) the governing body shall consult (in such manner as appears to them to be appropriate)—

(a) the head teacher, and

(b) parents of registered pupils at the school.'.

No. 8, in page 16, line 45, leave out 'prepared' and insert 'made'.—*[Mr. Forth.]*

Clause 20

RESPONSIBILITY FOR DISCIPLINE: GRANT-MAINTAINED AND GRANT-MAINTAINED SPECIAL SCHOOLS

Amendments made: No. 9, in page 17, line 31, leave out 'prepare' and insert 'make'.

No. 10, in page 17, line 45, at end insert—

'(2A) Before making or revising the statement required by subsection (2)(a) the governing body shall consult (in such manner as appears to them to be appropriate)—

(a) the head teacher, and

(b) parents of registered pupils at the school.'.

No. 11, in page 18, line 14, leave out 'prepared' and insert 'made'.—*[Mr. Forth.]*

Clause 21

DETENTION OUTSIDE SCHOOL HOURS LAWFUL DESPITE ABSENCE OF PARENTAL CONSENT

Amendments made: No. 12, in page 18, line 36, leave out from beginning to 'Where' in line 39 and insert

'After the section 550A inserted in the Education Act 1996 by section *(Power of members of staff to restrain pupils)* of this Act there shall be inserted—

"Detention

550B—(1)'.

No. 13, in page 19, line 11, after 'and' insert

'have—

(i)'.

No. 14, in page 19, line 12, after 'school,' insert

'and

(ii) taken steps to bring to the attention of the parent of every person who is for the time being a registered pupil there,'.—*[Mr. Forth.]*

Clause 23

EXCLUSION OR REINSTATEMENT APPEALS: LEA-MAINTAINED SCHOOLS

Amendment made: No. 15, in page 20, leave out lines 29 to 34 and insert—

'(3) For paragraph 8 there shall be substituted—

"8.—(1) On an appeal by a pupil or parent the appeal committee shall give the appellant an opportunity of appearing and making oral representations, and shall allow him to be represented or to be accompanied by a friend.

(2) On such an appeal the committee shall allow—

(a) the head teacher to make written representations and to appear and make oral representations,

(b) the local education authority and the governing body to make written representations,

(c) an officer of the authority nominated by the authority, and a governor nominated by the governing body, to appear and make oral representations, and

(d) the governing body to be represented.".'.—*[Mr. Forth.]*

Clause 32

ADOPTION OF BASELINE ASSESSMENT SCHEMES

Amendment made: No. 65, in page 27, line 40, leave out subsection (5) and insert—

'(5) However, in the case of any particular maintained primary school, the baseline assessment scheme which is to be adopted for the school under this section by its governing body shall be such scheme to which subsection (2) applies as is chosen—

(a) by the head teacher after consulting the governing body; or

(b) if such a scheme is not so chosen by him within a reasonable time, by the governing body;

and, when choosing the scheme to be adopted for a school which is maintained by a local education authority, the head teacher or (as the case may be) the governing body shall ensure that the scheme selected by the authority under subsection (4) is considered (whether on its own or with any other schemes).'.—*[Mrs. Gillan.]*

Clause 33

ASSESSMENT OF PUPILS IN ACCORDANCE WITH SCHEME

Amendments made: No. 17, in page 28, line 21, after 'direct' insert—

'(a)'.

No. 18, in page 28, line 22, at end insert ', or

(b) that, for the purposes of the assessment under that subsection of a particular registered pupil at the school, the school's baseline assessment scheme is to have effect with such modifications as are specified in the direction.'.

No. 19, in page 28, line 27, leave out from first 'the' to second 'and' in line 29 and insert

'matters set out in subsection (5A);'.

No. 20, in page 28, line 30, at end insert—

'(5A) The matters referred to in subsection (5) are—

(a) the fact that the head teacher has given the direction in question and his reasons for doing so;

(b) in the case of a direction under subsection (4)(b), the effect of the modifications specified in the direction; and

(c) whether the direction is to have permanent effect (and, if not, the period for which it is to have effect).'.—*[Mrs. Gillan.]*

Clause 39

FUNCTIONS OF THE AUTHORITY IN RELATION TO EXTERNAL VOCATIONAL AND ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS

Mr. Win Griffiths: I beg to move amendment No. 62, in page 32, line 19, leave out subsection (3) and insert—

(3) The Secretaries of State may by regulation make such provision as they consider appropriate for the Qualifications and National Curriculum Authority in England and the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales to cooperate in the exercise of their functions as set out in subsection (2)(a)–(g) above and section 45(2)(a)–(g) below respectively.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: Government amendment No. 21.

No. 61, in clause 41, page 33, line 36, after 'question', insert

'in accordance with regulations made by the Secretary of State'.

Government amendment No. 22.

No. 64, in clause 42, page 34, leave out lines 21 to 23 and insert—

(b) shall include among those members persons who have been nominated to him by persons representative of occupations, trades or professions having experience and an interest in education or training.'.

No. 63, in clause 45, page 35, line 24, leave out from second 'Wales' to end of line 34 and insert

the functions set out in subsection (2) with respect to external qualifications.

(2) The functions are—

(a) to keep under review all aspects of such qualifications;

(b) to advise the Secretary of State on such matters concerned with such qualifications as he may refer to them or as they may see fit;

(c) to advise the Secretary of State on, and if so requested by him assist him to carry out, programmes of research and development for purposes connected with such qualifications;

(d) to provide support and advice to persons providing courses leading to such qualifications with a view to establishing and maintaining high standards in the provision of such courses;

(e) to publish and disseminate, and assist in the publication and dissemination of information relating to such qualifications;

(f) to develop and publish criteria for the accreditation of such qualifications;

(g) to accredit, where they meet such criteria, any such qualifications submitted for accreditation.'.

Government amendments Nos. 23 and 24.

Mr. Griffiths: Unfortunately, we shall have to be brief as time is pressing. The amendment would remove the uncertainty and potential confusion in clauses 39 and 45 with regard to the Qualifications and National Curriculum Authority, the QNCA, and Awdurdod Cymwysterau, Cwricwlwm ac Asesu Cymru, or ACCAC. We also want to ensure that the membership of ACCAC truly represents those with expertise and interest in education and training. Finally, the amendment deals with a technical matter relating to fees.

The Bill allows for considerable confusion. The two bodies—the QNCA for England and ACCAC for Wales—have many functions, some of which are clear and some of which are not. The QNCA's functions are clearly stated in clause 39(2)(a) to (g), but ACCAC's role is dependent on the Secretary of State for Wales and the QNCA. The Secretary of State can, by order, decide that ACCAC runs its affairs concurrently with the QNCA or, at some stage, on its own. In the meantime, however, under schedule 6, the QNCA may authorise ACCAC to act as its agent in Wales in relation to external academic and vocational qualifications.

Although the underlying education and training needs in Wales are similar to those in England, there are differences that need to be recognised and tackled specifically by the QNCA and ACCAC in their own spheres of responsibility. In relation to the national curriculum and assessment, that has already been recognised in sections 358 to 361 and schedules 29 and 30 to the Education Act 1996. The existing Awdurdod Cwricwlwm ac Asesu Cymru, or ACAC, and the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority are designated as bodies of equal standing with responsibilities for the national curriculum and assessment in their respective

countries, but with a duty to co-operate with one another and, indeed, to be represented at each other's main board meetings and committees. That model should be the one used in creating the QNCA and ACCAC. The possibility of that happening is foreshadowed in the Bill, but it remains only a possibility.

I trust that the Government will respond positively to the amendment, which is intended to give a clear and consistent role to ACCAC by homing in on one of the options that the Government have provided in the Bill. I hope that the Government will have the courage to take up that option by accepting the amendment; otherwise it will appear to people in Wales that, when facing the serious problems involved in creating a skilled work force at all levels of activity in Wales, the Government have chosen to dither by offering three options for which no timing is proposed for action. That seemingly flexible but in fact uncertain programme is a recipe for failure. The Government have had the courage in the past to create separate bodies, as with ACAC and SCAA, and I hope that they will have the courage to accept our amendments, which offer a clear and purposeful lead for enhancing vocational and academic qualifications in Wales.

Finally, I wish to refer to a matter that was raised earlier when we discussed the principle of a general teaching council. It would be Labour's intention to have a body in England and in Wales, once there was an assembly.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): I support the proposals in the Bill and the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths). It strikes me that the whole of our education system has been bedevilled by the 40-year-long dispute about the respective values of academic and vocational education. I hope that, by bringing the bodies together, we can introduce the ideas of parity and respect for the vocational routes to education as well as the academic, because that seems to me both fundamental and important, especially in Wales.

There could be a Welsh solution to the problems. In that respect, I support the amendments, which make it clear that we could bring the bodies in Wales together to promote the values and importance of vocational education alongside those of academic qualifications. The original Education Act 1944 envisaged a tripartite development of education, with grammar, secondary and technical strands. It was the absence of the technical education route that caused many of the later problems. Fortunately, that absence was filled in Wales by the development of the HND and OND qualifications and the growth of apprenticeships, which provided an alternative educational route for a whole generation of young people and were promoted by the gas and electricity companies and the then National Coal Board, Hoover and other major companies in Wales. As a result of the collapse of those training schemes, we have lost much of the vocational education that was once available. We need to restore that education; we need to restore respect for it and the qualifications that come with it.

It is vital that we establish respect for national vocational qualifications. They should be rigorous, reliable and respected and we should look for ways to achieve that. We can do that in Wales and we can do it best by bringing the two organisations together to promote a powerful vocational educational route, down which so many of our young people should go. That is the single most important action we can take to promote and assist a generation of children who do not necessarily desire to take a purely academic route forward. They need vocational qualifications that will be seen to be valued and to command the respect and support of employers in the Principality. For those reasons, I support the amendments.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Jonathan Evans): In essence, four issues have arisen in the debate. The first relates to the power to limit examination fees. One position has been adopted by the Opposition in amendment No. 61 and another by the Government in Government amendments Nos. 22 and 24. The issues were highlighted in the debate in Committee, when the Opposition tabled an amendment that was identical to amendment No. 61, which required that any limit could be put in place only

"in accordance with regulations made by the Secretary of State".

The Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan), said in Committee that she believed that it might be appropriate for there to be a role for the Secretary of State, although she was resistant to the idea of a whole new regulatory framework. Government amendments Nos. 22 to 24 give effect, therefore, to a role for the Secretary of State in limiting such fees and, in the circumstances, I hope that that proposition will be accepted by the House.

Amendment No. 62 stipulates co-operation between ACCAC and the QNCA, but we believe that that is unnecessary. Under the existing arrangements, such co-operation already exists. We are resistant to the idea that it would be appropriate to set up a whole new regulatory framework and an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy to achieve that. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths), who is shouting from a sedentary position, need only look to the existing co-operation between the organisations to understand how unnecessary the amendment is.

Amendment No. 63 deals with a substantive point, and I have endeavoured to give reassurances about it. It would make the functions of ACCAC for Wales identical to those of the QNCA. However, Sir Ron Dearing, in his review of qualifications for 16 to 19-year-olds, recommended that SCAA and the National Council for Vocational Qualifications should be merged, but he did not propose what the amendment suggests: that NVQs in Wales should be the responsibility of ACCAC. He did not recommend that, and neither did the Welsh Office as a result of its consultations.

I can give the assurance that we anticipate that a conferment of functions order setting out what ACCAC will do will be introduced in the House. That will be broadly along the lines of what is contained in clause 39(2)(a) to (g), although it will introduce the flexibility of being able to change those arrangements in the light of experience.

9.30 pm

The hon. Member for Bridgend referred to the appointment of representatives to ACCAC. There is a clear divergence of opinion between us. He proposes what in essence should be a representational role for those who come from representative bodies or trade unions. We are

[Mr. Jonathan Evans]

of the view that the body should draw upon the experience of a wide range of people in both education and training, but we see no representational role, so we resist the amendment.

Mr. Win Griffiths: I am a trifle disappointed by the Minister's response because, as I read the Bill, the third option is more or less what we proposed in detail in the amendments. We put the amendments down as a marker for what will happen when there is a Labour Government and the Welsh Assembly is created.

Amendment negatived.

Clause 40

OTHER FUNCTIONS OF THE AUTHORITY

Amendment made: No. 21, in page 33, line 11, leave out 'Act' and insert 'Part'.—*[Mr. Forth.]*

Clause 41

SUPPLEMENTARY PROVISIONS RELATING TO DISCHARGE BY AUTHORITY OF THEIR FUNCTIONS

Amendment made: No. 22, in page 33, line 41, at end insert—

'(5) Before exercising on any occasion their power to impose conditions falling within subsection (4)(a) the Authority shall obtain the consent of the Secretary of State as to such matters relating to the exercise of that power as he may determine.'.—*[Mr. Forth.]*

Clause 46

OTHER FUNCTIONS OF THE AUTHORITY

Amendment made: No. 23, in page 36, line 17, leave out 'Act' and insert 'Part'.—*[Mr. Forth.]*

Clause 47

SUPPLEMENTARY PROVISIONS RELATING TO DISCHARGE BY AUTHORITY OF THEIR FUNCTIONS

Amendment made: No. 24, in page 37, line 2, at end insert—

'(5) Before exercising on any occasion their power to impose conditions falling within subsection (4)(a) the Authority shall obtain the consent of the Secretary of State as to such matters relating to the exercise of that power as he may determine.'.—*[Mr. Forth.]*

Clause 55

PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO INSPECTOR BY LEA

Amendment made: No. 25, in page 41, line 30, at end insert—

'(2A) In the case of any inspection under section 53, subsection (1) above shall apply in relation to any school maintained by any local education authority to which the inspection relates as it applies in relation to the authority; and without prejudice to that subsection (as it so applies)—

(a) the governing body of any such school shall give the inspector, and any person assisting him, all assistance in connection with the exercise of his functions which they are reasonably able to give; and

(b) the governing body of any such school and the authority shall secure that all such assistance is also given by persons who work at the school.'.—*[Mr. Forth.]*

Clause 58

PROVISION OF CAREERS EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

Amendments made: No. 26, in page 42, line 28, leave out 'and'.

No. 27, in page 42, line 30, at end insert

'; and

(e) pupil referral units.'.

No. 28, in page 42, line 34, leave out 'and'.

No. 29, in page 42, line 36, at end insert

', and

(c) in the case of a pupil referral unit, the local education authority maintaining the unit and the teacher in charge of it.'.

No. 30, in page 43, line 17, at end insert

'or, in the case of a pupil at a pupil referral unit, by the teacher in charge of the unit.'.—*[Mr. Forth.]*

Clause 59

SCHOOLS AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS TO CO-OPERATE WITH CAREERS ADVISERS

Amendments made: No. 31, in page 44, line 2, at end insert—

'(5A) Where a careers adviser has responsibilities in relation to persons attending an educational institution to which this section applies, he shall on request be permitted to have, in the case of any group of relevant pupils or students specified by him, access—

(a) to that group of persons in the manner specified in subsection (4)(a) and (b); and

(b) to such of the institution's facilities as can conveniently be made available for his use,

for the purpose of enabling him to provide those persons with group sessions on any matters relating to careers or to advice or guidance about careers.'.

No. 32, in page 44, line 3, leave out 'or (4)' and insert ', (4) or (5A)'.

No. 33, in page 44, line 7, after '58(2)' insert '(a) to (d)'.

No. 34, in page 44, line 10, leave out 'and (4)' and insert ', (4) and (5A)'.—*[Mr. Forth.]*

Clause 60

PROVISION OF CAREERS INFORMATION AT EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Amendment made: No. 35, in page 45, line 2, after '58(2)' insert '(a) to (d)'.—*[Mr. Forth.]*

Schedule 9

MINOR AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendments made: No. 37, in page 75, line 22, after '(a)' insert '(i)'.

No. 38, in page 75, line 23, leave out '(a)' and insert '(i)'.

No. 39, in page 78, line 35, at end insert—

'(4) After that subsection insert—

"(9) Where the arrangements for the admission of pupils to a school provide for all pupils admitted to the school to be selected by reference to ability or aptitude, those arrangements shall be taken for the purposes of this Chapter to be wholly based on selection by reference to ability or aptitude, whether or not they also provide for the use of additional criteria in

circumstances where the number of children in a relevant age group who are assessed to be of the requisite ability or aptitude is greater than the number of pupils which it is intended to admit to the school in that age group.".'.

No. 40, in page 79, line 7, at end insert—

'. For the cross-heading "CORPORAL PUNISHMENT" preceding section 548 of that Act substitute—

"PUNISHMENT AND RESTRAINT OF PUPILS

Corporal punishment.'.

No. 41, in page 79, line 43, at end insert—

'"wholly based on selection by reference to ability or aptitude (in Chapter I of Part VI) *section 411(9)".'.*

No. 42, in page 80, line 8, after 'pupil),' insert—

'(a) in paragraph 14, after "relevant person," insert "the head teacher,"; and

(b)'.'. *—[Mr. Forth.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

9.33 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

This Bill is about extending diversity, improving discipline and raising standards. On Conservative Benches, we know that all three are essential to an effective education system, and I pay tribute to my right hon. and hon. Friends for their valuable and thoughtful contribution to the debate today and yesterday.

We are told that Opposition Members have heard of the word diversity. I believe that it appeared in the title of their policy statement on schools. Clearly, they have not grasped its meaning, however, as in that same policy statement they declared their intention to diminish diversity by abolishing grant-maintained and voluntary-aided schools. Equally clearly, some of them can understand it, because they apply it to the choices that they make for their own children. Therefore, there is a split in Labour ranks—a split between words and actions. Most people would call that hypocrisy and if Labour Members' manoeuvrings last night illustrated anything, it was the hypocrisy at the heart of Labour's education policy.

Last night, Labour Members voted against the expansion of popular schools—the schools parents want to choose—and in particular against the very grant-maintained schools chosen by, among others in their ranks, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) and the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman). If their objections were so principled, it is curious that we heard no protest from them when the London Oratory school expanded to set up a junior house, nor murmurings of discontent about the current application to expand St. Olave's grant-maintained grammar school in Bromley. To the outside world, their principles on that matter might well be put this way: "My children are okay, so let's pull up the ladder in case anyone else's want to climb up."

Of course, some Labour Members are less hypocritical than others. Let us turn to grammar schools. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) may promise parents a vote on the future of grammar schools, if indeed that is what his obfuscation means, but leading Labour councillors are saying that they would move to abolish them immediately after a Labour election victory. So will grammar schools be allowed a future under Labour or not?

A recent MORI poll for the King Edward VI Foundation in Birmingham was reported in the papers as showing that six out of 10 Labour voters would oppose any move to close the five foundation grammar schools. That is not surprising, because they are excellent schools. No wonder local people want to keep them. No wonder, given the comments of Labour councillors, that they are afraid that Labour would destroy that excellence. Labour politicians do not even seem to understand the views of their own voters—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Lady must relate her remarks to the Bill before the House.

Mrs. Shephard: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Under the idea of choice promoted by Opposition Members during the debate in the past two days, one can choose any school one wants so long as it is the local education authority comprehensive, as under their plans that is what all schools would be. Real choice, however, means giving parents access to good schools of different kinds. That can be achieved only by extending diversity, which means giving schools more freedom to change what they do. That is what part I of the Bill is about. It will not compel any school to change, but it will give schools more flexibility to respond to what parents want. That will help to raise standards by encouraging schools to develop distinctive strengths, whether in teaching particular specialisms or teaching particular types of pupil. Those are the freedoms that were opposed last night.

Many parents want to send their children to selective schools, but for most people that opportunity exists only in a few parts of the country. We want to give many more parents access to schools that select some or all their pupils by ability or aptitude, either generally or for particular specialisms. Therefore, the Bill gives admission authorities more scope to introduce or extend selection by ability or aptitude without central approval.

Grant-maintained schools have a leading role to play in extending choice and diversity. They are the schools that, with parents' support, have chosen to take full responsibility for their own affairs. They have shown that they can use that responsibility well and they are getting good results. Thus the Bill gives them extra freedoms to open new sixth forms and nursery classes without central approval.

The Government are determined that the Bill should also allow grant-maintained schools more power to expand without central approval. We voted last night on whether to reintroduce the clause that would allow popular and effective schools to offer more parents the education that they want for their children. Checking last night's voting figures has shown that that vote was tied. Following discussions today, we shall reintroduce the clause in another place.

The debate on diversity and choice can be summarised briefly. We believe in it; Opposition Members do not. In contrast, however, and more happily, other parts of the Bill have attracted a high degree of cross-party support. They include the measures to improve school discipline. Obviously, schools must be orderly places, and the Bill

[Mrs. Shephard]

will help to secure that. It requires governing bodies to state their policies for promoting good behaviour and LEAs to set out how they support schools in that task. It gives schools clear legal authority to detain badly behaved pupils without their parents' consent and to use the 45-day annual limit for pupil exclusions more flexibly. As a result of an amendment passed yesterday, the Bill will now support the position of teachers in maintaining good discipline, by confirming and clarifying their powers to use physical force where that is needed to prevent injury, damage or disruption.

Good discipline creates an environment in which effective teaching and learning can take place, but the Bill also includes specific measures to raise standards, and there has been general support for those. The Bill requires every primary school to assess pupils on entry. It also requires schools to set targets for improving their pupils' performance. Many schools already set such targets; the time has come for all to do so.

Targets will be based on performance in assessments and qualifications, so it is important to have a framework for those assessments and qualifications that guarantees high standards. Combining the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority and the National Council for Vocational Qualifications will help to achieve that, and the Bill paves the way for the merger. It also includes measures to ensure that every 14 to 16-year-old has a properly planned programme of careers education, access to impartial advice and guidance.

Finally, the Bill enables the Office for Standards in Education to inspect the work of LEAs. LEAs still have important work to do in supporting schools and they must carry out that work effectively. Inspection of schools is helping to raise standards; inspection of LEAs will do the same. It is not fair to children to tolerate the truancy rates of Nottinghamshire, the negligence of Calderdale or the appalling GCSE results of Islington—all, of course, under the control of the Labour party. Yet when we ask Labour Members to condemn those low standards, the silence is deafening.

Parents want a school with good discipline and high standards that provides education suitable to the talents and needs of their child. The Bill will help them to get it. Let us ensure that children are not deprived of their opportunities by the Labour party, practising the politics of envy and privilege, as we saw last night, and reserving for its chosen few the opportunities that the Conservative party would make available for the many. I commend the Bill to the House.

9.41 pm

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): I should like to put on record my considerable thanks, appreciation and congratulations to my colleagues, not only those who have served on the Front Bench, but those who served on Standing Committee D. Over the past two days, they have contributed to a magnificent effort and ensured that, last night, we were able to expose Conservative Members' real commitment.

If there was hypocrisy, the hypocrites were the 45 Conservative Members who were so in favour of the former clause 3 that they could not turn up to vote for it. If there is hypocrisy, it is the hypocrisy of those who proclaim in national newspapers that they are favour of a general teaching council—in fact, they get the journalists to parade it as a Conservative idea and display it as new thinking that will feature in the Conservative manifesto—and then vote it down in the House, as they did today. There is hypocrisy when those who claim that they are not in favour of selection for primary education then refuse to put that on the face of the Bill and vote it down. The real hypocrites are those who pretend that they will give to the many what they are prepared to deliver only to the very few.

Let us take the idea that Labour Members are not in favour of diversity because we do not want a free-for-all that would make the gridlock described by the Audit Commission in its report before Christmas look like a children's tea party. The truth of the matter is that, over the past century, we have devised a system of co-operation and checks and balances precisely to ensure that one person's choice is not another person's disaster. That is why we believe in ensuring that there is genuine diversity within one campus, and collaboration and co-operation within the family of schools so that people have a real opportunity to choose. I make it absolutely clear that the Secretary of State uses words such as "abolition" on her own behalf: we have no plans to abolish or threaten schools—we plan to open the best of our schools to all children who are able to take advantage of them. Access will not be blocked by the 11-plus test—which the Prime Minister has pledged that the Conservatives will not retain, but to which they appear wedded. According to the nature of selection, the 11-plus test excludes children from the school of their choice in their neighbourhood.

In the next three months—up to the general election and after it—we shall continue our programme of raising education standards and quality for all. We shall offer genuine diversity and ensure that quality education, a disciplined environment and a commitment to community genuinely lift standards for everyone.

Let us examine the Conservative party's promise that it will allow a handful of schools to increase their student intake by 50 per cent. There is no promise to provide any extra cash. That pledge will therefore result in some schools expanding at the expense of other neighbouring schools and of parental choice. The latter schools will inevitably wither on the vine: they will not improve—they will close.

Let us examine the Government's pledge that would set school against school—not state local education authority school against state grant-maintained school, but grant-maintained school against grant-maintained school—in places such as Hillingdon or Kent. Clusters of GM schools are competing with each other in those areas. There is no publication of statutory requirements and no consultation or information. The schools cannot object and the Secretary of State cannot intervene. It is a free-for-all—or 24,000 corks bobbing on a murky sea, as the Chairman of the Education and Employment Committee, the hon. Member for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton), aptly described it. It is an ideological free-for-all that has nothing to do with diversity and everything to do with rather silly dogma.

We learned today that there has been a staggering reduction in the number of surplus places—from 883,166 to 875,000. What kind of fraudulent Government would suggest that they should increase the number of surplus

places, further widening the gulf between what could be spent on education and what is being spent keeping unused premises open? What kind of Government would delude the public into believing that the £100 million identified by the Audit Commission would not assist every child in every school to receive the education that he or she deserves?

Tonight is not the time to reveal once again the paucity of Conservative party education policy: we have done that during the passage of the Bill and throughout the past five years. People will soon have a chance to judge whether education standards have improved. Improvement at GCSE level between 1992 and 1997 was only half the rate achieved between 1988 and 1992. The British people will judge whether, in setting school against school, we have ended up with cut-throat competition rather than collaboration between schools; and whether, by choosing to include in the Bill the expansion of the assisted places scheme, the Government have denied schools the opportunity of reducing class sizes at that crucial early stage, key stage 1, to ensure that the basics can be acquired by all children as a foundation, so that they can go on to get a foothold on the ladder of lifelong learning, which opportunity at that early stage can afford.

In simple terms, the choice is whether to subsidise the very few in private education, or to ensure investment in the many in state education, and to ensure that we can repair and maintain our schools with an imaginative programme that will tackle the current £3 billion backlog. The choice is whether we provide places in early years and family education rather than a voucher scheme and whether we set aside the expansion of selection, which no one wants, and ensure instead that children and their parents have direct access to the school in their neighbourhood and the school of their choice, whatever its status and whatever the background of the parents.

We should be able to expand and provide diversity through the coming together of academic and vocational qualifications, to offer new ways of bringing in the disaffected and alienated young people of our country. I say that in the light of Bishop David Sheppard's remarks today that we should be concerned—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is straying from the Bill.

Mr. Blunkett: I accept your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We should heed the words that are so important to lifting standards, at which at least part of the Bill is aimed, to ensure that there is hope that young people will have a job, training and a future to look forward to.

That is why we have suggested that we reach a consensus on the parts of the Bill on which the majority of hon. Members entirely agree—the provisions aimed at lifting standards, improving discipline and encouraging common sense—and set aside the provisions that divide the education service, return us to the past and are designed to look backwards rather than to a new century.

Let us ensure that the right hon. and hon. Members who served on the Committee have not wasted their time, and that the Bill can be passed by both Houses by consensus, instead of the continuing divisions in the run-up to a general election which represent the fag-end of a Government who have failed to deliver and failed in their ideas, and who are offering no new pledges of any worth to the British people.

The Government have no new ideas. Education authorities will not be abolished. The Secretary of State said that this evening, and spelled out the role of local education authorities at Harrogate on 17 January. There will not be a common funding formula, because it would immediately result in a cut of £600 million in the resources available to schools. That is the sum allocated over and above the Government's standard spending assessment. We know that there will not be the wholesale imposition of grant-maintained status because, to her credit, the Secretary of State has resisted it. We know that there cannot be 100 per cent. delegation, because that would wipe out key elements which ensure that support is available to children with special needs and which provide the services that all schools require, whatever their status.

That is why the issues of the moment are not status and structure, but the standards that we offer all our children. We stand for opportunity and choice for all, not for a few, and an obsession with giving a real life chance to every child, not just to a particular group of children in a particular group of schools. We represent no abolition, no attack and no dogma, but a commitment to improvement and quality. That is what we shall be happy to offer the electorate at the general election.

9.54 pm

Mr. Don Foster: It is a great pity that a lengthy and unnecessary debate on corporal punishment meant that many important amendments were not discussed today.

We are debating a Bill of two halves—the first half good, the second half bad. The first half deals with baseline assessment and inspection of LEAs and contains measures to improve discipline in schools and to improve careers and education guidance. I and my party entirely support and welcome those measures.

The second half, however, is thoroughly bad and will cause considerable damage to the education service. It is based on the fundamental philosophy that has underpinned so much of Conservative education thinking in recent years—that the marketplace will improve the quality of education. I do not agree. I believe that the introduction of the marketplace has damaged education and that we should be seeking to develop co-operation and partnership within the education service.

The Bill makes a sixth attempt to refloat the failed flagship policy of grant-maintained status, which British people simply do not want. That policy is not levering up standards, but creating a two-tier divisive system of education.

The Bill also attempts to introduce further competition through selection, which denies the parental choice that the Government are so proud to promote. Let us never forget that when schools select pupils, parents no longer have the choice. As so many Conservative Members have made absolutely clear, selection provides escape routes for the few, but it provides very little support and help for the many.

We desperately need an education system that is based on partnership and co-operation and provides high-quality education for all young people. That means increased investment in our education service. We need to introduce high-quality early-years education for three and four-year-olds. Those measures should have been included in the Bill, but were missed out.

[Mr. Don Foster]

Above all, if we are to lever up standards, we must recognise the vital importance of teachers and others who work in education. The Bill fails to give them the encouragement that they need to understand how valuable they are to the education service.

It is a Bill of two halves: half is thoroughly bad, but because half is good and we want that half to progress, we shall not oppose its Third Reading tonight.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

PESTICIDES

That the draft Plant Protection Products (Basic Conditions) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 10th December, be approved.

That the draft Control of Pesticides (Amendment) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 12th December, be approved.—*[Mr. Peter Ainsworth.]*

Question agreed to.

Gipsy Site (Weston-super-Mare)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Carrington.]*

9.58 pm

Sir Jerry Wiggin (Weston–super–Mare): First, I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency for taking the trouble to reply to the debate this evening. I am conscious that the hinge on which I have to hang ministerial responsibility is not the direct planning issue that I am about to raise. I hope that my hon. Friend will be tolerant when I describe the events that have persuaded me to draw ministerial attention to the history of the Willowmead temporary gipsy caravan site.

In March 1992, some hard-core arrived on the site. By the time of the general election, the gipsies had arrived on the site; they are still there in 1997. In the 1970s and 1980s, planning permission was given for about 17 caravans on that small piece of land, originally two acres with a two-acre paddock next door. Then the land was acquired for the new primary distributor road linking Weston-super-Mare and the M5.

In 1991, the then Woodspring district council revoked the previous planning permission and declared that the land should be returned to agricultural status.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Carrington.]*

Sir Jerry Wiggin: Avon county council, which has emerged from this matter with no credit, was a Labour-controlled council, supported and kept in power by a substantial number of Liberal Democrats. The council claimed that the Willowmead site had planning permission for holiday caravans. The truth is that most of the site had been used for the construction of the new highway. The amount that remained allowed space for only three static vans, and in any event the planning permission had been withdrawn.

That, in itself, was a scandalous misinterpretation of the planning laws. I am afraid that the theme of my debate must be that there has been so much precedent in planning law over such a long period—nearly 50 years—that it is now essential that someone, sometime, examine the general principles behind the planning laws. For some time, I have advocated that a royal commission on planning be set up.

If there is a Gilbert and Sullivan situation like that, where a local authority grants planning permission for gipsy caravans based on the fact that, once upon a time, holiday caravans were allowed to be on the site, it is pretty obvious that the local authority is contravening the spirit, if not the letter, of the law.

Avon county council got caught out. It had allowed gipsies on to a site that it had used for roadworks. It had leased the quarry from an astute landowner who well knew the terms of his lease and who took Avon county council to court. The council was forced to eject the travellers from Racecourse quarry, and it had to find somewhere else to put them. In a desperate move, it put them on that tiny bit of land.

The county council made a planning application for emergency temporary use of the site. There were objections from Woodspring district council, Locking parish council, 50 local residents and me, and a petition with more than 10,000 signatures. Nevertheless, Avon granted itself permission to use the site for three years, expiring at the end of 1995.

Part of Avon's plan was to use Willowmead until the permanent travellers' site at Hewish was available. That was a privately owned site. An application had been submitted by a private owner and, although I received a petition of about 700 signatures, I am happy to say that I believe that site has settled down and is causing no difficulty. It appears to be well run.

One would have thought that, during the three years, Avon county council, knowing that the site had only temporary planning permission, might make some provision to resite the travellers from the Willowmead site. To the best of my knowledge, Avon county council made no effort to relocate the travellers from Willowmead to Hewish and, despite the fact that there was only temporary planning permission, it made no effort to find an alternative.

Avon council's structure plan contains policy H12, which identifies the need for about 100 pitches on either permanent or transfer sites throughout the whole of the former county of Avon. Without Willowmead, there are already 26 permanent pitches. There is no provision for a travellers' site within the Locking castle area local action plan.

It may be asked, "Why is all this so awful?" I have it on record that there are endless complaints about the site. Principally, they are about dogs trespassing on the neighbouring caravan site—the legitimate one that is used by one of my constituents as a commercial enterprise—chickens digging up flowers, bonfires, all-night parties, verbal abuse, blocking the entrance of neighbours and trespass. That has led to a reduction in business, and, sadly, even a drop in the grade of Airport View caravan and camping park, which has been in place for many years and was a great asset to the town. Rubbish is deposited everywhere and fencing is torn up. There is even a record of a goat making a nuisance of itself. I do not suppose that information will come as any surprise to the House, because so often sites of the sort that I am describing produce such complaints.

The local government ombudsman was brought in in April 1995. He ruled against the local authority on several counts. Some modest compensation was paid to some of my constituents. Further applications have been made to him, because much of the nuisance has persisted.

In November 1995, bearing it in mind that the planning permission was about to expire, Avon county—it knew that it was going into oblivion in April 1996—had the gall to apply for a new extension running until 30 September 1996. Again, I complained to my hon. Friend the Minister, saying, "This is really not good enough. You must intervene and call a public inquiry."

My hon. Friend replied on 28 October. He wrote:

"I have noted your concerns about the latest application, and can understand your constituents' disappointment at the latest turn of events. However, as you are aware, the Government's policy is that planning applications are best left, as far as possible, in the hands of locally-accountable planning authorities. The Secretary of State is therefore very selective in deciding which applications to call-in, and would generally intervene only where issues of regional or national significance are raised. Although of local importance, I do not consider that this latest application raises issues which are significant enough to justify the Secretary of State calling it in for own determination. Indeed, even were this not so, it is unlikely, given the time it takes to determine called in applications, that a decision would be reached much before March 1997."

That paragraph is a pretty permanent feature of the word processor that is driven by the Department of the Environment office for the south-west. It is by no means the first time that that answer—not in this case but in equally important planning matters which I have tried to raise—has been churned out. I urge my hon. Friend and others who are in charge of these matters in future to recognise, especially if they have some experience of these issues, that hon. Members do not seek to press Ministers for public inquiries, which are expensive and lengthy, unless they believe that a principle is involved. I believe that the principle involved in this instance is one of serious and long-standing injustice.

The saga has moved on a little and may well still be playing out in the next 24 hours. In January, North Somerset council, the successor to Woodspring, controlled by Liberal Democrats, applied for a six months' extension to 31 March. It did so two or three days either side of the previous permission running out. No one takes any notice of how long a permission runs: councils go flat-footed into it, ignore the dates, give themselves retrospective permission and away they go for another few months.

Whether North Somerset council will decide tomorrow to give or to extend permission—it is clear that that is what its officers want—is not a matter for us tonight. The problem is that, five years after the saga started, there is no change and no solution.

Various criteria are being used to find a new site. Those criteria are based partly on Avon's requirement that if the site be shut alternative accommodation be found. The traveller who clearly is not prepared to confine himself to the social customs of the rest of the population now seems to be treated infinitely better than the ordinary citizen. The council is considering spending between £350,000 and £400,000 to provide pitches on these 13 sites. It has selected two sites: one in Sandford and one in Hutton Moor road, both of which are entirely unsuitable. The latter is next to a large residential park of elderly people, who have suffered for many years because of trouble with itinerant gipsies; and the former is in a quiet backwater between two nice villages where gipsies have never been and have no business to be.

I question the parameters that have been set. Why must the new site be within five miles of a former school, and why should there be facilities for this, that and the other? The truth of the matter is that the gipsy problem is about integration. It has plagued me all my life—from the time I was a farmer, and throughout my political life. There has been bodging, hedging and dipping rather than facing up to the proper solution.

The Liberal Democrat council in North Somerset is finding practical difficulties. It was responsible for the 13 sites being placed in my constituency. The gipsies did not want to come there: they lived and worked near Bristol, and were imported by Avon county council, which was dominated by the city of Bristol, which did not want anything to do with the gipsies. It pushed them out to the

[Sir Jerry Wiggin]

peripheries, and now the cows will have to come home and the penalty will have to be paid. It is grossly and deeply unfair that my constituents should have to pay.

I appreciate that there is no easy solution to this problem. The Government have changed the parameters: councils are no longer required to find gipsy sites. Strangely enough, my morning paper contains a letter from Councillor Laband, who represents one of those areas. He says:

"Nothing is more likely to cause heartfelt anxiety to local residents."

He then says that he wants the true gipsy culture to survive, which I have always thought was rubbish. He finishes by saying that we must have true integration.

These matters are deeply felt by the population. I am glad that Councillor Laband has realised that local government is not all that easy. The solutions that the council is considering will be disruptive and distressing and will cause many of my constituents much heartache. I seek a sympathetic ear, and I hope that my hon. Friend can give me some comfort, or perhaps my successor, as this is certainly the last time that I shall have an Adjournment debate.

10.14 pm

The Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency (Mr. Robert B. Jones): I congratulate my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) on obtaining this Adjournment debate, which has given him an opportunity to make clear the strength of his concerns about the gipsy and travellers' site at Willowmead caravan park, near Weston-super-Mare. I have no doubt that those concerns are shared by a number of local residents, and have been since the site was first occupied as a temporary gipsy site in 1992.

My hon. Friend has demonstrated tonight that he and his constituents are aggrieved about the fact that, first, the Labour-run Avon county council and, latterly, the Liberal-controlled North Somerset council favour gipsy provision to which he and those he represents are strongly opposed.

Over the past four years, the Willowmead site has come to the attention of Secretaries of State for the Environment on a number of occasions—for instance, in May 1992, when Woodspring district council objected to its appropriation by Avon county council for the purposes of a gipsy site; in October 1995, when the county council sought to extend temporary planning permission for emergency travellers and the gipsy site by nine months, from 31 December 1995 to 30 September 1996; and in October 1996, when North Somerset council, the new unitary authority, sought to extend temporary planning permission by a further six months—from 30 September 1996 to 31 March 1997.

My hon. Friend will be aware that, on each occasion, the Secretaries of State, after careful consideration of all the available information, had to decide that, although the matter was highly controversial, it could not be said that the issues involved were of regional or national significance—which would have justified their intervention, whether under their then powers under the Caravan Sites Act 1968 or under their powers under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. In each case, it was decided that the local planning authority was the appropriate body to determine the proposals on the basis of the material planning considerations that were applicable at the time.

My hon. Friend will also be aware that the most recent planning application to which I have referred is still before North Somerset council. Propriety therefore forbids me to express any opinions on the planning merits of the circumstances that currently exist at Willowmead, or to pass any comment on the present application. I am sure that my hon. Friend will appreciate that to do so could prejudice the position of the Secretary of State for the Environment should the matter come before him formally in the future.

Nevertheless, I have listened closely to what my hon. Friend has said this evening, and will take it into account if the matter comes before the Secretary of State at any stage. Equally, I am sure that, if any new information comes to light, my hon. Friend will ensure that it is drawn to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. In particular, if the council were to continue extensions of temporary planning permission indefinitely without making progress towards resolution of the issue, it would be perfectly proper for my hon. Friend to take up his concerns again with my right hon. Friend, who would examine the case on its merits.

Although I do not intend to comment on the circumstances at the Willowmead site, I am not unaware of the types of general policy issue that have been touched on by events at Willowmead over the past four years, such as policy on gipsy site provision and on local authorities' own development proposals. I trust that my hon. Friend will be interested if I briefly explain the Government's position on each of those matters—and I hope that he will appreciate that I am not attempting to suggest or imply how these general policies might relate to the specific circumstances at the Willowmead site. That must be the prerogative of North Somerset council, in its capacity as the local planning authority.

Our land use planning policy on gipsy sites is set out in Department of the Environment circular 1/94, entitled "Gypsy Sites and Planning". We encourage gipsies to provide their own accommodation, applying for planning permission when that is necessary, like everyone else. A critical element is to ensure that, when provision is made, amenities and the environment continue to be protected. To help to achieve that, the circular sets out factors that should be taken into account in decisions on planning applications for gipsy sites. Those factors also apply to proposals for local planning authorities' own sites.

Our guidance on gipsy sites fully reflects the plan-led nature of the planning system. The guidance makes it clear that authorities should assess the need for gipsy accommodation in their areas. They should include in their development plans suitable location or criteria-based policies for meeting that need, by provision of local authority or private sites, to provide the statutory framework for determining individual applications.

The inclusion of policies in development plans provides greater certainty in development control. If the development plan does not contain relevant policies, applications should be determined in the light of all material considerations, including the advice in circular 1/94.

There is no longer a duty on local authorities to provide caravan sites for gipsies who reside in or resort to their region. That duty, which was contained in part II of the Caravan Sites Act 1968, was repealed in November 1994 by section 80 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

My Department's circular, which was issued when the 1994 Act came into force, does, however, stress the importance of local authorities keeping their existing gipsy caravan sites open and maintained. It also reiterates long-standing advice to local authorities that they should consider providing emergency stopping places for gipsies who visit their region regularly, and that they should consider the option of tolerating the presence of gipsies who camp on council land if—I stress this—they are not causing a nuisance.

It is for local authorities to decide how best to maintain their existing gipsy caravan sites and to consider whether it is appropriate to extend the planning permission for temporary sites where planning permission has expired. Local authorities will also wish to consider their statutory responsibilities towards children and homeless persons when taking decisions about the future of their authorised gipsy sites.

The procedures governing local authorities' own development proposals are contained in the Town and Country Planning General Regulations 1992. The general principle underlying the regulations is that local planning authorities must make planning applications in the same way as any other person applying for planning permission, and must follow the same procedures that would apply to applications that are made by others.

Local authorities may grant themselves planning permission for their own development on land in which they have an interest, but that is subject to several important safeguards: the proposals must be advertised and decided in public by a committee that is not responsible for land management; the public cannot be excluded from such a committee meeting; and, to avoid potential conflicts of interest, applications may not be determined by a committee or officer responsible for the management of the land or buildings concerned.

Another safeguard is that local authority development proposals must be notified to the relevant Government office for the region if they are not in accordance with the provisions of the development plan in force in that region. It is for the local planning authority to decide whether an application represents a departure from the development plan. When applications are notified in that way, careful consideration is given to all the issues raised by the proposal and to how they might relate to the Government's policy on call-in, as described by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment on 26 January 1995.

Although a decision on whether to call in an application is normally based on the importance of the issues raised by the application, rather than on the procedures followed by the local planning authority, we do consider whether the handling of the application might raise issues sufficient to justify making an exception to the general policy. Nevertheless, we believe that planning applications are generally best left, as far as possible, in the hands of the locally accountable planning authority, and we are therefore selective when deciding which applications to call in. I know that my hon. Friend regards that as a paragraph from a word processor, but I do regard local council democracy as stronger than just a few words churned out by electronic equipment.

Following amendments by the Planning and Compensation Act 1991, section 54(1)(a) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 requires that planning applications, irrespective of whether they are made by a local authority, must be decided in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

In general, the local planning authority's elected members represent the community's interests in planning matters, but, when determining planning applications, they must take into account any relevant views expressed by neighbouring occupiers, local residents and any other third parties, although only genuine land-use planning concerns are material. However, in some cases, there may be positive reasons in favour of development, which will outweigh local objections, however widespread or strongly felt they might be.

Local authorities must of course act within the law, and it is open to any third party who is aggrieved by a local authority's decision to grant itself planning permission to apply for judicial review if they believe that the decision was wrong in law. If they consider that they have suffered personal injustice as a result of maladministration by the council, they may also ask the local government ombudsman to investigate the matter.

Sometimes, local planning authorities will be required to consider whether to grant planning permission for development or change of use of land that has already taken place. I would expect local authorities rarely to find themselves in that position for their own development proposals or land, except in exceptional circumstances.

Where this does arise, however, retrospective planning applications submitted by the local authority, like those submitted by others, should be considered in the same way as other applications. The fact that the development has already taken place should not influence the final decision one way or the other. The same is true for applications that seek to renew or extend planning permission.

I am grateful to my hon. and gallant Friend for drawing the matter to my attention. I have noted the strength of feeling locally about the Willowmead site. At the end of the day, however, the councillors on his local council are accountable for such decisions. He will no doubt want to remind his constituents of that fact. I am grateful to him for bringing the matter to the Floor of the House, and I hope that what I have said this evening will be helpful to him and his constituents in understanding the background of Government policy and the options that are open to him and them.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-five minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 29 January 1997

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

European Union

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

9.34 am

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): In the words of the Foreign Secretary last week:

"The issue of flexibility is probably the most important issue that is being discussed at the intergovernmental conference."

It is on a par with monetary union. I consider the words "flexibility" and "enhanced co-operation" to be typical Euro-speak. They have all the characteristics of the gobbledegook of "subsidiarity". Such language is a cover-up for reducing our veto and increasing the power of the European Union. That is why I have initiated this debate, which goes to the heart of the European question. We are discussing sovereignty and enlargement. As the Deputy Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), said in his leadership speech to his constituents, "The issue is Europe." It was then, and it is now.

I have here the latest paper on flexibility and enhanced co-operation from the presidency of the European Union, dated 16 January 1997. It has not yet seen the light of day, but I shall put it in the Library after the debate. Referring to the Maastricht treaty—against which I voted 47 times on a three-line Whip—it states:

"EMU is probably the most highly developed form of flexibility"—

and what a mess that flexibility put us in. The whole concept of flexibility—which we then conceded—and its effect on us are now being taken into other areas of European government in the European Union.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): The hon. Gentleman makes a great virtue of the fact that he voted against Maastricht 47 times. What, then, possessed him to vote for the Single European Act?

Mr. Cash: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, because my next words were going to be, "Trade, yes; government, no." That is the distinction, and I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has not seen it.

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): But the Single European Act went way beyond trade. It was about co-operation as well as trade.

Mr. Cash: Trade and political co-operation are perfectly reasonable. The point that the hon. Gentleman is missing is that, under the rubric of economic and monetary union, title 2 of the Single European Act was specified in brackets and referred to co-operation, not co-ordination. That is the distinction, and the Maastricht treaty took it that stage further. It is a case of, "Trade and political co-operation, yes; government, no."

Ms Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): I am listening with interest to what the hon. Gentleman has to say. Is it true that, at the time of the Single European Act, he said in a debate in the House that he thought that the dangers of qualified majority voting were very much exaggerated?

Mr. Cash: In the context of a number of matters in respect of trading relationships, there are perfectly reasonable arguments in favour of qualified majority voting. Otherwise, it would be impossible to remove the logjam and to increase the competition that is necessary for an enterprise Europe. That is the distinction.

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): Does my hon. Friend agree that the strength of this Parliament is that, if we make mistakes and get things wrong, we can put them right? One of the great problems is that, under European legislation, we cannot do that. If we get it wrong, as we did with the Single European Act—which I did not vote for—we can put it right: we could have put that right in the House. That is what the argument is about.

Mr. Cash: I agree. It is, in fact, essential for us to apply ourselves to reforming the Single European Act. The principle may be acceptable, but the problem is that it has gone badly wrong in a range of areas, the most recent example being the 48-hour working time directive, which came in through the back door. A raft of matters require reform—but that is not to say that the principle of freeing trade in Europe is itself a bad idea.

Flexibility is a Heath Robinson idea. It is like a clock with differentiated and disconnected parts. We are not facing up to the absurdity that is inherent in the idea of variable geometry. For example, it is inconceivable that the European Union would work properly if three member states worked together in defence within a treaty arrangement, five or seven members worked together in monetary union, some worked together in transport and others in energy. The whole thing is complete nonsense. It reminds me of a famous book written by Edmund Burke, which included a description of the constitutional arrangements of Abbé Sieyès. Within the legal framework that has been created, it would be impossible for the European Court of Justice to deal with the differentiations as and when we had a pick-and-choose policy within the flexibility arrangements, as they are being proposed.

We are being seduced into a vast and complex labyrinth of current European policy, which is partly politico-cultural and partly lego-political, and from which we must find a way out. We are not. The continental political culture is alien to our political way of life.

Hon. Members may have come across a book written recently by Thomas Kielinger, a distinguished German commentator, called "Crossroads and Roundabouts: Junctions in German-British Relations". Page 209 quotes Adenauer, and states:

"Adenauer knew exactly what the British represented. To him they were an essential factor in building the future Europe. Britain's inherent stability and liberal tradition"—

[Mr. Cash]

and these are Adenauer's words—

"stand in clear contrast to continental Europe."

That is the point. There is a fundamental difference and it goes to the heart of the problem that we face today. There is a significant difference between what Conservative Members might call the Burkeian tradition—the British tradition—and the Napoleonic system. That difference was explained in Burke's famous memorandum, "Reflections on the French Revolution". There is a fundamental difference between our approach to politics and to law and that which prevails on the continent.

Mr. Giles Radice (North Durham): Of course it is right to say that there are distinctions between us as an island people and the continentals, but most Europeans have wanted the contribution that the British could make, and that is why they wanted us to join the European Union. For example, Brandt gave strong support, as did Adenauer and Erhard. That is why Europeans want us to play a constructive role. That is why Chancellor Kohl does. Just because we can bring a different perspective to the European Union does not mean that that perspective is not also valuable.

Mr. Cash: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I speak in Germany, in France and in other countries throughout Europe, as he does, and I have found much enthusiastic support for the ideas that we are advancing today. We are becoming not merely an economic role model for Europe, but a political role model for many people who are disappointed and gravely disturbed by the developments since the single market.

Continental Europe has a great tendency to be authoritarian. It lacks genuine accountability and abhors scrutiny. In the past century at least, that has led to the rejection of democracy and, in its worst form, to disorder, instability and even war. The proposed solution of flexibility, which is lego-political, aims to defuse the possibility of war by containing Germany, in particular, within a new acquis communautaire of a single institutional and legal framework, which has been established by Maastricht. It will not work. Far from it: it will hand over to Germany legitimated power on a plate, as those economically and politically dependent on her vote with Germany on all the crucial issues.

Enlargement would be damaged either by the fragmentation created by flexibility or by collapsing integration. It can be achieved only by a sensible balance of sovereign member states in trade and political co-operation. The Leader of the Opposition has expressed his opposition to the Government's notion of flexibility, because he is prepared to go along with federalism, deeper integration and the European notion of flexibility. That does not make our own tendency any better or more credible, for the very reasons that I gave in the debate on the confidence motion on Maastricht, where we sold the pass and when there was underlying collusion with the Opposition over its objectives. For some, we are back there again.

I did not vote against the Government on that motion because it would have let the Labour party in under John Smith and we still had time to change direction. The present Leader of the Opposition is clearly prepared, as is his shadow Chancellor, to go down the same unacceptable route. However, what I said to the Prime Minister on the day of the confidence motion debate was that, unless the Maastricht treaty was renegotiated, we would be faced with the unnecessary option of whether to leave the European Community.

Time is desperately short now, but we are still faced with the same option and, apart from some unclear shifts in phraseology, many of which I welcome, the need for renegotiation remains. The solution remains in the Government's hands. On last week's "Today" programme, following his meeting with our Prime Minister in Amsterdam, Mr. William Kok spoke of flexibility as a "compromise" solution. However, in reality, as with economic and monetary union in the Maastricht treaty, which should then have been fiercely resisted in the Conservative Cabinet and party, "flexibility" is not a "compromise", but an acquiescent, even appeasing concession to further and deeper integration and European government.

Mr. Dalyell: The hon. Gentleman uses the words "in reality". May I ask whether in reality the hon. Gentleman would be satisfied with anything less than our country leaving the Community?

Mr. Cash: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman made that point, because, as I have made clear time and again, and again today, my objective is not that we should leave the European Union. I am saying that the consequences of the direction in which we are being taken present a price to the British people, the electorate and the voters, which is taking us further and further towards that critical position. I am saying that, unless we renegotiate the treaties, we are set on a course that will lead us to the impossible question, which I put in the confidence motion debate, of whether we have to leave. That may be too high a price.

Mr. Randall: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that such talk is certainly not reflected in the opinion polls? The Gallup poll in *The Daily Telegraph* in December showed that there had been a 37 per cent. swing from the Conservative position in 1992, when we had the general election. Labour has a positive approach to Europe compared with such talk. According to the poll, the British people want us to be in Europe. There is no question but that they want us to play a positive role.

Mr. Cash: What complete rubbish the hon. Gentleman speaks. Apart from anything else, poll after poll shows that Britain wants a Europe that works within a single market, but that Britain does not want to come out. The tendency towards coming out is growing precisely because of the failure to clarify these questions. Much of the responsibility for that lies with the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): Is not the counter-proposal the case, because poll after poll shows that a growing number of people—still a minority, but a growing number—have determined that outright departure from the European Community is the only solution, which is worrying? Is not that my hon. Friend's

point? People recognise that there is an agenda and they do not wish to be part of it. That will grow if it is not faced up to.

Mr. Cash: My hon. Friend, who has fought many battles with me and other hon. Members who are in the Chamber, is right. The problem is the confusion and the lack of clarity, and the refusal to face the fact that the problem cannot be resolved unless we renegotiate the arrangements that are taking us deeper into the European Union. As that proceeds, it will lead us into greater difficulties.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): I do not want to anticipate the hon. Gentleman's speech, but he said in reply to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall) that repeated opinion polls had shown that people wanted Britain to remain in a single market. The Government have frequently stated that the completion of the single market to our satisfaction was made possible only by the use of the veto. In the new renegotiated relationship that the hon. Gentleman seeks, from which aspects of the current single market would he wish to reclaim the veto?

Mr. Cash: I have made it clear that some areas in the single market require reform and that those reforms cannot be achieved without treaty changes, which require unanimity. I shall come to that later. I should have thought that it was in the interests of everybody in Europe, let alone hon. Members, to try to make the European Union work effectively. That is the bottom line. I am saying not that we should come out but that we could reach the point—and we are getting close to it—where that became a serious possibility.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): Perhaps I may offer the House an example. In European Standing Committee B, we shall shortly consider a particularly short-sighted proposal by the European Commission for a compulsory levy on the resale of all modern works of art. Not only is that a tax, but it will drive business away from London and the European Union to other art centres such as New York and Geneva. The tax is being imposed by the Commission on spurious single market grounds and can therefore be decided by majority voting. The issue is not only to retain the unanimity principle in central areas of taxation, but to ensure that the Commission does not try to circumvent those rules by proposing fiscal measures on single market grounds.

Mr. Cash: I am delighted by my right hon. Friend's intervention, because he has enormous experience in those matters, not least because he has been Paymaster General and Minister with responsibility for Europe, and was deputy Chief Whip during the Maastricht debates. I am delighted not only by the clarity and logic of his argument, but by his Damascene conversion, on which I offer him my heartiest congratulations.

We are being seduced into the slipstream of the critical mass of a federal Europe while claiming that we are against it. If it looks like a duck, talks like a duck and walks like a duck, it is a Euro-duck. The rejection of the word "federal" means nothing if we allow the other member states to go ahead, as we did in relation to economic and monetary union under the third stage protocol. That accepts that the single currency cannot legally be vetoed by any one member state, including the United Kingdom. It also states that it is irrevocable, and we thereby condemn the United Kingdom to be on the sidelines.

It is ironic that it is we, the Euro-realists, who are often criticised by people who say that we are trying to put the United Kingdom on the sidelines. However, under the Maastricht arrangements, we were put on the sidelines by the opt-out. By failing now to insist on renegotiation, which we still have the right to undertake under article N of the treaty on European Union, we continue to sell the pass.

Renegotiation is not, as some of the more trivial commentators whom I shall not bother to mention have been stating, another way of calling for us to get out. However, renegotiation would wrong-foot the federalists. I hear siren voices claiming that we must renegotiate the treaty. I shall not mention names, because we have recently heard some of them. Stripped of all the camouflage, all that that amounts to at present is a proposal to renegotiate quota hopping or the 48-hour working week, while leaving intact the issue of economic and monetary union and the single currency, which would undermine our democracy.

We are prepared to veto the entire intergovernmental conference over issues such as quota hopping, but not on the question whether we can govern ourselves, which is what EMU and the single currency are all about. Why is that? I am afraid to say that it is simply because there has been an increasing concern that we are not admitting that we got it wrong over the disastrous exchange rate mechanism. That fed its way into our lack of credibility on tax and allowed the Opposition a field day, both on that subject, as we saw from what the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) said a few days ago, and on the whole question of vulnerability on public expenditure. All that is tied up in the issue and in our prospects for the general election.

There is also an agreement, accepted by the Opposition, to let the other member states, including Germany, go ahead with EMU, which is driven by the Chancellor Kohl's obsession with political union. This is an issue of political principle upon which there can be no compromise, but which, far from being renegotiated, is being extended under the current proposals for the extension of the treaty on European Union, under the same flexibility arrangements that are accepted in the paper which I have here. Dated 16 January, it states that the most perfect example of flexibility is economic and monetary union. We must say no to flexibility now.

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): In the context of renegotiation, would the hon. Gentleman care to look at article 107 of the treaty? That makes it plain that virtually all the major economic decisions will be in the hands of an unelected and unaccountable European central bank. Astonishingly, that article makes it plain that it will be illegal for democratically elected Parliaments or Governments to influence that unelected European central bank. If we allow that to happen or if the matter is not renegotiated, at the general election, those who are elected

[Mr. Llew Smith]

will not have the powers to implement their manifesto, and those for whom people cannot vote will have power to make the economic decisions.

Mr. Cash: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. The central bank arrangements, which are within the aegis of the European Court of Justice, specifically state that the governors of the bank may not seek or take instructions from member states. That cuts across section 4 of our Bank of England Act 1946 and makes it crystal clear that the umbilical cord connecting Parliament and the electorate—the people who vote in line with their priorities, thus exercising the freedom of choice for which people in this country have fought and died—would be handed over to completely unaccountable, bureaucratic bankers with no guarantee that they will deliver. We have only to look at the mess of the exchange rate mechanism to imagine what would happen if the entire system were placed in the hands of the people who are running that.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): My hon. Friend has been generous in giving way. Does he agree that one of the most sinister aspects of the matter is that those who are not even prepared to contemplate renegotiation are effectively saying that all the facts that my hon. Friend describes are so acceptable that one should not even contemplate renegotiation? What resonance does that have in the country at large?

Mr. Cash: My hon. Friend puts the matter well, and he is dead right. The problem is that, throughout the House, in the nation as a whole and elsewhere in Europe, concern has built up since the Maastricht treaty. That should lead us to re-evaluate the decisions that were taken at that time, but nothing is being done about that. I shall come to the mechanism that I propose to get renegotiation going. Everybody knows that the system is going ahead. Although the federalists are winning, there is a general protest that, somehow or other, we are doing something to stop the process. Some effective discussions are taking place, but they are neither negotiations nor renegotiations.

The Foreign Secretary—who, as I said, realises the importance of the issue—proposes to engage in a European tour, to explain to the peoples of Europe what is at stake. I entirely agree that we should do so. For what it is worth, for the past few years, I have spoken in Germany, France, Spain, Denmark and in other countries in Europe, at meetings and—as some may have noticed—in the media. The people of Europe are very receptive to the arguments.

I was very much encouraged by the Prime Minister's excellent interview with Hugo Young in this week's issue of *The New Yorker*, in which he rejected the idea that the United Kingdom would ever allow our right to determine our own electoral priorities at general elections—the very point made by the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith)—to be handed over to an unaccountable European central bank. As I have often asked—I asked the then Foreign Secretary, during the Maastricht debates—what could be more centralising than a central bank, despite the Government's and the Opposition's claims at that time that the Maastricht treaty was a decentralising measure? What could be more centralising and undemocratic than a central bank?

Mr. Dalyell: I had better say that my question is based on the point of view that we should enter into the single currency at the first possible opportunity. Having been candid about that, may I ask the hon. Gentleman to be candid on another matter? How would he and his friends react if the Foreign Secretary of Germany or of France came to London, Stafford, Edinburgh or wherever, giving lectures on what we should do? What on earth would he say? What does he think that the Germans, the French and the Italians will say when our Foreign Secretary goes round Europe lecturing them on what to do?

Mr. Cash: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has made that point, because, only a short time ago, Klaus Kinkel effectively said that he thought that the British people should vote for the Labour party, as a soft option—which is precisely what it is. I hope that those following the debate will take that point on board. The tour shows considerable determination and a desire to get the issues out into the open.

Are we a European Community or are we not? The hon. Gentleman may wish to reflect on that point. If we are a community, and if the decisions being taken within the developing legal framework equally affect us and others, we have an absolute right—as I said when I went to Denmark for its referendum debate—to get in there to put our point of view. Otherwise, we shall be only affected by the debate, which relates to my concern about so much majority voting in European government.

Earlier this year, I went to France and gave a speech to a thousand Frenchmen from across France.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Did my hon. Friend speak in French?

Mr. Cash: After I had spoken to them in French—which surprised them as much as it surprised me—they gave me the most tremendous reception. The speech was shown on "Panorama". Those people listened, because they know that their destiny is tied to ours.

How then do we resolve the contradictions? We do so very simply. We have the inalienable right—in line with the Prime Minister's comments in the interview—to put on the formal agenda the issues of a single currency and extension of the doctrine of flexibility. We should combine those issues with the issues of flexibility and the veto, and then, at the intergovernmental conference, take the issue of political principle into the heart of Europe. We should then combine the Foreign Secretary's approach with the Prime Minister's interview, and confront Chancellor Kohl and the political elite of the European Union at the IGC with the democratically expressed views of their own people and their media. If they subsequently did not listen, we would have to veto the entire conference.

The issues are causing much turbulence across Europe and much difficulty for the electorates of Europe. We would get a tremendous reaction from across Europe if we were not merely to walk around Europe speaking to single audiences here and there, but, as a function of government within the IGC, if we were formally to seek

to renegotiate the treaty by putting those issues on the agenda. Individual Governments and the leaders of the member states would then have to respond to the internal democratic pressures being exerted in their own countries. That proposal should answer the question of the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on whether we would be interfering in the affairs of other member states by raising the issues, as the Foreign Secretary is quite rightly proposing to do.

The Foreign Secretary, in raising those issues, will be participating in the European Union and in the European Community. Moreover, if we put the issues on the IGC agenda, the people in individual member states will rise up—as they are already rioting in some countries—against the political elite, forcing it to change the treaty so that it is in line with the people's wishes. There is no other way forward. If we do not raise the issues, we shall simply be helping—despite our protestations to the contrary—to create and even to encourage a federal Europe.

We must take a stand, and let the electorates of Europe have their own say—with the intense media interest that that would generate—as they move towards their own imminent elections. Consider the effect of Britain taking a lead in the IGC—as the Pandora's box is opened—on electorates across Europe. Opinion polls in the UK, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Austria already prove my point. There are riots and disorder in France and Greece. As the Maastricht criteria bite ever deeper, so my case will be proved. If we took a stand before our general election, whenever it takes place, our prospects would be transformed.

The March 1996 White Paper, however, pointed in exactly the opposite direction. Paragraph 12 stated:

"Revisions to the Treaty must be agreed by all. We must be realistic therefore about the sort of changes we can hope to achieve at the IGC, just as we are clear about the sort of changes we will not accept."

It goes on to say that, if we do not do so, an integrationist agenda will be imposed upon us. Such an agenda cannot be imposed upon us. However, we can put the items on the agenda for renegotiation.

The central and hopeless passage in the White Paper states:

"If we were to press ideas which stand no chance of general acceptance, some others would seek to impose an integrationist agenda which would be equally unacceptable from our point of view."

As I have said before, the White Paper is a monument to appeasement. It was endorsed by the Leader of the Opposition, who would not oppose it. The White Paper also endorses the principle of flexibility, promoted by the new paper of 16 January, from the presidency of the European Union, in line with the conclusions of the reflections Group. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office no doubt thinks back to his time as a participant in that group.

Paragraph 12 of the White Paper states:

"It is on this basis that the Government will be approaching the"

intergovernmental

"Conference."

It goes on to say that there is no serious or real prospect, and that it is not "expected", that the single currency issue will be on the IGC agenda. I do not care whether it is "expected" to be on the agenda. I am saying, for the reasons that I have already given, that it should be on the agenda.

There are merchants of doom, who see no way out at all; and there are merchants of despair, who subscribe to paragraph 12. A prime example of the merchants of despair is my right hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones). I invited him to come to the House to listen to what I have to say. I doubt whether he is interested and I do not know where he is at the moment. On 26 January, writing in the *Sunday Express*, my right hon. Friend falsely accused me of being "Europhobic". I suggested that he be here today because I am replying to him. In the newspaper, he is described as

"one of the Prime Minister's closest friends and advisers"

who

"calls for a Conservative pact with Labour"

on Europe. From the article, he seems to be comfortable with the Labour party on this subject, and he advocates a single currency.

I repudiate the proposal of a pact with Labour, and I repudiate my right hon. Friend's ludicrous assertion that I am Europhobic; my speech and my record show that I am not. My right hon. Friend should know that perfectly well because he was, after all, the deputy Chief Whip and he was the Minister with responsibility for Europe. I trust that he is no longer listened to by the Prime Minister.

I now come to the more important part of what I have to say about my right hon. Friend's article, the rest of which is of no importance. He is wrong in his assertion that the anti-Europeans, who, he says, will "squeal like stuck pigs", are a minority; they are not. When my right hon. Friend claims that, on a free vote, his ideas would prevail, he should take on board the fact that research by Professor Andrew Gamble of Sheffield university and our research in the House show that, on the fundamental Maastricht issues, a substantial majority of approximately 60 per cent. of Back Benchers who were whipped by my right hon. Friend had different views. Things had not been properly explained and certain circumstances had not arisen—I make no complaint about that. Despite that, 60 per cent. of those who replied to the private survey said that they did not agree with the Maastricht treaty. In a new Parliament, my right hon. Friend will be proved even more wrong and he knows it. That is the important point on which I wished to reply.

I now return to my fundamental theme. The 1970 White Paper claimed, contrary to the present assertions of my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), that we would not lose our sovereignty and that we would not give up our veto on matters that were of vital or essential national interest. In the light of my right hon. Friend's present views, I have challenged him on the Floor of the House to repudiate the statements made in the White Paper, but he has refused to reply. Indeed, the White Paper went further and said that for any member state to give up its right to use its veto in its essential national interest, even if in a minority, would

"imperil the very fabric of the Community."

That is the point.

In other words, the whole concept of flexibility, which means moving down the route towards increased majority voting—that is implicit in the EMU arrangements, which

[Mr. Cash]

the presidency paper says is the best example of flexibility—is in direct contradiction to the 1970 White Paper, which said that to go down that route would

"imperil the very fabric of the Community."

That comment is hardly surprising. Already, there are riots, disorder and all the rest of it. The unemployment rate is getting higher and there may be problems with defence and other matters. If member states create a compression chamber and then have majority voting inserted by treaty arrangement within a legal framework, who will be surprised if the fabric of the Community is destroyed? It is precisely for that reason that I repudiate the assertion made by hon. Members who oppose me when I say that I am in favour of the European Union—of the kind that I want.

Maastricht and its bedfellow, the doctrine of flexibility, will destroy the fabric of the Community. My criticism of those who advocate or acquiesce in the current proposals for the IGC—I include the proposals in paragraph 12 of the White Paper—is that they undermine our position in the United Kingdom and in the European Union. The treaty must be renegotiated in the present IGC and that requires a degree of political will among the political elite, who are far removed from present public opinion throughout the Union.

I invite hon. Members to look at the presidency conclusions of and the statement on the Dublin summit, which describe the single currency and the stability pact, which has yet to be debated in the House, in terms only of economic and not of political significance. That is a travesty. It is abundantly clear that the criteria are being fudged; that comes out in the Treasury paper and in my recent correspondence with Mr. Eddie George, the Governor of the Bank of England, which is referred to in *The Times*. We are seeing a welcome shift towards recognition of the fact that the criteria are clearly being fudged, even if people do not want to say so too openly. I am a plain speaker; I like speaking bluntly about these matters. The criteria are being fudged. Let us get them changed and let us renegotiate, so that we can start sorting things out.

We did not veto the stability pact when we could and should have done. The result is that, like the hard core of EMU, it has been allowed to go ahead, again under the doctrine of flexibility. One way or another, we shall pay for the stability pact as we have paid for so many other things. Indeed, even our opt-out from EMU is flexible and not permanent. Hon. Members may recall that the opt-out says that, even if we say no to begin with, we can say yes later.

The presidency paper of 16 January suggests that that approach would apply to all other policies brought within the doctrine of flexibility. Furthermore, as we already know with the social chapter and the European Monetary Institute, we are expected to pay for the running of policies under the doctrine of flexibility. That is made clear in the presidency paper under the heading "Financing". It says that it is expected that, if the doctrine of flexibility is introduced, member states within the general framework of the European Union will have to pay for the running of the institutions that service them. It is the same with the EMI and the social chapter; that is the name of the game. We are moving further and further down that route. We are allowing the whole federal arrangement to go ahead without using the veto when it really matters.

I come now to the areas of government now under threat and draw attention to an important distinction that must be made—the difference between trade and matters such as the social chapter, which are non-governmental, and those that are governmental, such as EMU, defence, foreign policy, justice and home affairs. It may be news to some that the new presidency paper includes defence as a "likely" candidate. I understand that the Government have, amazingly, not ruled that out. The reason is that, even if the other member states went ahead, they could not efficiently carry out a European defence policy without the United Kingdom. That idea needs to be hit on the head; it is dangerous stuff. If there is a serious intention that the doctrine of flexibility should be applied to defence, that is absolutely that. There is no question about it whatever. Monetary union, no; defence, no; foreign policy, no.

I recall Chancellor Kohl saying that the Union must not be slowed down to the speed of the slowest member. The U-boats knew all about that. No doubt their flexibility of movement was also regarded as enhanced co-operation.

Even taxation is mentioned in the presidency paper and there is a threat of action outside the treaty. In other words, if the federalists do not get their way, the gun will be put to our head and they will say, "We will carry on and we will do things outside the treaty if you do not do them inside." That is blackmail. Not only that, but it provides us with a perfectly reasonable basis not only to insist on renegotiation, but to veto the entire conference and put the federalists in the wrong. They are the ones who would say that they would do things on their terms, outside the treaty, whereas we would renegotiate under article N and would deal with all those questions in a proper and legal fashion. That is the difference. Why can we not take a lead on those lines?

Even the common agricultural policy is said to be inviolable under the proposed arrangements. My hon. Friend the Minister may shake his head; I hope that that is because he agrees with me that the CAP cannot be inviolable. However, my point is that that is the direction in which the presidency paper is taking us. It appears that the difference between our approach to flexibility and that of other member states is not one of principle.

We now know that EMU is regarded as the best example of flexibility. When I cross-examined the Foreign Secretary in the Select Committee on European Legislation in February last year, I asked him whether the single currency was a matter of principle. He said that he did not follow what I was saying. I know the Foreign Secretary too well to think that he could not follow what I am saying. I say that it is a question of principle and I am glad to note that even the Chancellor of the Exchequer has conceded that, saying that he has no objection to the idea of the single currency as a matter of principle.

All those issues are interwoven. I want the Government to win and I want Britain to win. I want us to renegotiate the treaty and to wrong-foot the federalists in Europe. If we do that, we shall be in line with the wishes of the people of Europe. We shall be performing a function of general benefit to the United Kingdom and to the people of Europe.

According to our White Paper, we are supposed to be against a hard core, but now we are refusing to rule it out. Perhaps we should not be surprised, in view of paragraph 12 of the White Paper, to which I have just referred. On 23 January—to show my hon. Friend the Minister that I have been following speeches on the subject closely—the Foreign Secretary said:

"Open to all, agreed by all should be our watchword."

I hope to hear from the Minister today that we shall veto the proposals now on the table, even if that means contradicting the thoroughly flawed policy of variable geometry, for the hard core is variable geometry. If we rule out one, we must rule out the other. Otherwise, we shall be letting the process of flexibility go forward.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. As one who is not on your list to speak, may I point out that the hon. Gentleman who opened the debate has now been going on for five minutes more than half the time available—for 45 minutes? Was it the purpose of these Wednesday morning debates, which were meant to be a substitute for short Adjournment debates, that the hon. Member opening the debate should take more than half the time available?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): To the best of my knowledge, there is no ruling on that. Certainly, it would be normal practice for the proposer to allow time for other hon. Members, but there is no ruling.

Mr. Cash: I issued an invitation to many of my colleagues, asking whether they wished to speak. Only one said that he wished to do so. I have had a series of repeated interventions from Opposition Members, which have delayed me, but I shall press on.

We are letting the process of flexibility go forward. There is a world of difference between having a veto and exercising it. The Leader of the Opposition gets away with his policy on the use of the veto by blurring that difference time and again. We do too little to stop him. There is a determination not to highlight the Maastricht treaty because it would show how much the Government sold the pass then and how much we are liable to concede.

In the White Paper in March last year, the Government said that there must not be a two-tier Europe with a hard core of countries or policies, but that is precisely what was agreed at Maastricht over EMU and that is the direction in which we are going. I warned the Conservative party manifesto committee against that six years ago in the paper that the then Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), asked me to write on Europe. I also warned against a two-speed Europe, because such a policy assumes that we have surrendered the principle of further integration. The same goes for words such as "variable geometry" and "multi-track".

That fits in with the concentric circles plan, which is what Germany wants in the pursuit of its national interest. It wants the European Court of Justice adjudicating over a federal Europe. Chancellor Kohl and his advisers, including Karl Lamers, make it clear that it is Germany's historic mission to use its will to achieve European integration. Karl Lamers even refers to one country, saying that the nation state is

"no more than an empty shell".

It is our historic duty to prevent them. That requires us to be at the table at the intergovernmental conference for the renegotiation of the treaty on European Union. The Government are not attempting to do that. That is as bad as the "wait and see" policy.

The Government are not negotiating or deciding at the IGC table on the single currency, despite what was said at the party conference; nor are they renegotiating or deciding on the essential issues. I should like to know why. If we do not renegotiate, either we are drawn further in by flexibility or we are faced with the question of getting out. That is why the sooner we stop pretending that we can live with flexibility, the better.

10.24 am

Mr. Giles Radice (North Durham): I thought that the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) was going to treat the House to an explanation of his position on the national veto, because that was what the debate was apparently meant to be about. Instead, he treated the House to his usual extremely lengthy, wide-ranging, anti-European Union rant, with which those of us who had the misfortune to listen through all the Maastricht debates are all too familiar. Perhaps he was trying to justify his right to write his own manifesto when the time comes—we shall see—or perhaps he is giving a hint to one or two of his colleagues on what they should put in their manifestos.

Mr. Duncan Smith: That was his manifesto.

Mr. Radice: I understand that.

I should like to say a few words about the veto. I am strongly in favour of the Labour party policy of retaining unanimous voting—and therefore a national veto—on issues that are vital to Britain, such as taxation, immigration, defence, treaty changes, enlargement and the European Union budget, because they are so important. However, qualified majority voting has been valuable to the development of the European Union.

The hon. Member for Stafford and others of his hon. Friends who argue in favour of retaining the veto in all circumstances forget that, with unanimous voting, Britain's veto is also Spain's veto, France's veto and Germany's veto, so other countries can block policies that we support. That simple fact persuaded the then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, to support qualified majority voting on the single market. She realised that it was in Britain's interest to extend the single market as quickly as possible, but that without qualified majority voting others might block its development in areas vital to British national interests. There are many examples of how right she was. Qualified majority voting has helped to open up banking, insurance and public procurement to British firms.

Last June, for example, the electricity liberalisation directive passed through the Council of Ministers only because it was subject to qualified majority voting. Had the national veto been retained, France would have been able to block that measure. Qualified majority voting will also be needed to open up the gas market.

Mr. Bill Walker: In practice, the so-called opening up has not happened. Qualified majority voting may produce

[Mr. Bill Walker]

a certain decision, as the hon. Gentleman claims, but the decision has not been put into effect: the two-way street in electricity is not in existence even now.

Mr. Radice: That, I am afraid, is totally incorrect. There is no doubt that the single market has been substantially successful. If the hon. Gentleman had read the European Commission report on the success of the single market, he would understand that many markets have been opened up to British exporters, among others. We have been one of the major beneficiaries of the single market, as Baroness Thatcher well understood. That was one of her sensible policies on the European Union.

The general agreement on tariffs and trade would not have been achieved if trade issues had not been subject to qualified majority voting. If the national veto had applied, France could have blocked the agreement and pushed for a more protectionist policy. For example, we would all like to see reform of the common agricultural policy, but the reforms achieved so far—the MacSharry reforms—would not have been passed without qualified majority voting. Further reforms will be achieved only with qualified majority voting.

Qualified majority voting has been extremely useful. The so-called Euro-sceptics are so defensive about these matters that they do not understand that it is possible to build up winning majorities and that Britain very often does so. I understand that the United Kingdom was outvoted only seven times out of 261 in 1993-94—the latest year for which figures are available. It is therefore sensible to consider qualified majority voting in a pragmatic case by case assessment of where the British national interest lies. That is exactly what the Foreign Secretary said in evidence to the Select Committee on European Legislation:

> "If there were an area of European Union policy which could only be advanced through majority voting and which we were convinced would serve important United Kingdom interests, then it would be foolish and illogical of us not to support majority voting in that area."

That is a sensible approach and one that we should adopt at the intergovernmental conference.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Is not the hon. Gentleman emphasising the case of those whom he describes as Euro-sceptics? Every example of qualified majority voting that he has cited has been in relation to trade. Conservative Euro-sceptics are in favour of a proper and full trade arrangement with Europe, but do not want it to trespass into matters that we consider to be of sovereign and constitutional importance to Britain.

Mr. Radice: The single market was always much more far-reaching than Conservative Members supposed. It always had certain political implications and subjected more decisions to what they call the "interference" of the European Court of Justice. If a single market has rules, there has to be some means of settling any dispute. The Euro-sceptics would like to rule out the European Court of Justice altogether. I will cite some more examples, which the hon. Gentleman may find more difficult to rebut.

First, there is a case for extending qualified majority voting to regional and structural funds, which account for 25 per cent. of the EU budget. If EU membership increases, the amount spent on structural funds will increase proportionately. If membership reached 27, for instance, those funds would double. Clearly reform is needed to prevent that from happening and to protect the British taxpayer. It will not be possible to reform regional and structural funds and keep them under control without qualified majority voting.

Secondly, we stand to benefit considerably from European research and development programmes, but the current system of negotiation works against British interests and denies us funds for which we would qualify on competitive grounds. Again, qualified majority voting in those matters would suit the British interest.

Thirdly, the Government say that they are in favour of tough anti-fraud measures; but these are subject to the national veto, and it is quite easy for national Governments to veto tougher measures if they consider them to be against their national interests. Again, qualified majority voting would help us and safeguard the British taxpayer.

I have drawn attention to three areas in which the extension of qualified majority voting would help our national interests. If the European Union accepts more members, there is a case for the extension of qualified majority voting; otherwise, the EU will be brought to a halt. I appreciate that that is exactly what certain Conservative Members want, but the vast majority of European people do not agree with them. That is a further argument for extending qualified majority voting.

I will not follow the hon. Member for Stafford down the path of flexibility, although I share his view. I am against the so-called French-German clause of strengthened co-operation as it will encourage a hard core, which would be against British interests. It was devised as a result of British obstructionism and I am not in favour of it; I share the concern of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition.

I have listened to the speeches of the hon. Member for Stafford on many occasions, so I am beginning to get the measure of the points that he makes. He boasts of having voted in favour of British entry into the European Union, but apparently he had not yet read the treaty of Rome. He says that he is in favour of a free trade area. The Common Market was always much more than a free trade area, so the hon. Gentleman misunderstood what it was all about.

The hon. Gentleman says that he is against British withdrawal, or at any rate that he is not in favour of it at the moment, but the problem is his attitude to the European Union. He says that in principle he is against Britain joining a single currency and he is quite prepared to wreck the intergovernmental conference on the veto, flexibility clause or any other issue, and that he wants to renegotiate our relationship with the European Union. That would amount, if not to total withdrawal, certainly to a semi-detached Britain. That is not a position for a major country to take.

As the hon. Gentleman knows—because his family has suffered, as has mine—anything that happens on the continent is vital to Britain, and it would be extraordinarily dangerous for us to detach ourselves from Europe in that way. The hon. Gentleman allows his anti-German prejudices—which he sometimes admits, and which he admitted again this morning—to cloud his judgment as to where Britain's national interest lies. Not only is he a danger to the Tory party—we do not mind

him splitting the Tory party, as he has been doing very effectively for the past four or five years—but he is a danger to Britain because he does not understand where British national interests lie. I hope that after the general election we shall have a Labour Government with a constructive policy on Europe to promote British national interests.

10.37 am

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Time is short, but that shows how quickly time passes when we are enjoying ourselves. I thoroughly enjoyed the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash). As he said so much that I would have said, I shall be brief.

My first point is that we cannot go on in this way. Essentially, we are in the European Community under false premises. When we joined, we thought that we were entering a common market, for that is what it was called, although the intellectual elite among us—or those who like to consider themselves as such—might have read the treaty of Rome and realised that, far from being a Common Market, it was actually a mere stepping stone towards a federal destiny.

The first time I read the treaty of Rome, it was in my red box when I had to go to Europe to speak on some matter because another Minister was ill. I realised then that we had been misled by the Government of the day.

Mr. Bill Walker: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Nicholls: I am sorry, but I have very little time.

When I read the treaty, I realised for the first time that we would have to have a great deal more sympathy with our European partners' perception that we were not very good Europeans. We joined what we thought was a common market, but it was no such thing. At the time, we were assured by my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) that any idea that we were moving towards a federal Europe was scaremongering. He said:

"There are some in this country who fear that in going into Europe, we shall in some way sacrifice independence and sovereignty . . . These fears, I need hardly say, are completely unjustified".

We know now, under the 30-year rule, that the advice tendered by the Lord Chancellor of the day was that there would be an inevitable and crucial compromise of sovereignty.

Although it may be our fault that we went into the European Community under false premises, that is the position that we are now in. We have to say to our European partners, "You have a vision of the future and if you want to follow it, that is entirely right for you; there is nothing ignoble about wanting a federal destiny, but it is not right for us." We must say that the Europe in which we could participate as good and enthusiastic Europeans is essentially a trading arrangement.

I and others like me say that we do not want to leave the Community, and indeed we do not. In some ways, it would be much easier for people like me to say, "Yes, I am in favour of leaving the Community," but I am in favour of a European relationship with which we can feel comfortable—and that means renegotiation. Before there can be any possibility of such renegotiation, however, one crucial event must take place: the Conservative party must win the next election. Despite what people try to suggest about some great split in the Conservative party on Europe, there is more than sufficient in common in all shades of opinion in the Conservative party for us to be able to offer a unique and distinctive alternative to the Labour party.

Whatever differences the Chancellor of the Exchequer and I might have on Europe, we would be at one in saying, "This far, and no further," on federalism. That is my position and that of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor and it is completely distinctive from that of the Opposition parties. As we have seen today, their idea of renegotiation is to put in a pre-emptive cringe and go along with federalism because, they say, we cannot stand on our own two feet in the world. I look forward to a time when we can renegotiate and when we can have a relationship with Europe that is good and comfortable for both sides, but the prerequisite for that to happen is a Conservative victory at the next election.

10.41 am

Ms Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) on his success in winning the ballot. This seemed a surprising subject for an Adjournment debate as it is so wide-ranging, although I could understand it if the hon. Gentleman felt that there had not been enough occasions to debate the issues on the Floor of the House. I share the criticism that the Committees which scrutinise European legislation and others have made that the Government have not allowed enough time for many of the wide-ranging European issues to be discussed and have tended to hide the discussions away in Committee rather than allow them to take place on the Floor of the House for more widespread scrutiny and debate.

We heard a lengthy speech from the hon. Member for Stafford, which I regret, as there were certainly Opposition Members who wanted to speak. The hon. Gentleman said that he had ascertained which of his hon. Friends wanted to speak and that there was not much demand. If he is really as keen on democracy as he says he is, it would have been courteous to ascertain how many Opposition Members would have liked to contribute to the debate. I have come to the place in my notes where I noted that I should refer to the speeches made by other hon. Members. Unfortunately, there were only two because of lack of time, but I welcome the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice), who showed himself to be more of a Euro-realist, to use the hon. Member for Stafford's term, than the hon. Gentleman himself.

I also listened with interest to the contribution of the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls). He referred to his right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), who played such an important role in this country becoming part of the European Community. I must point out, however, that the right hon. Gentleman contests the view put forward by the hon. Member for Teignbridge. A recent article in *The Daily Telegraph* pointed out that at that time—as those of us who followed to debate will remember—it was not simply a question of joining some kind of free trading agreement or common market. Many speeches were made by right hon. and hon. Members from all political parties pointing to the issue of sovereignty. I remember those debates taking place in my party and I remember reading about those debates taking place in Parliament.

Mr. Bill Walker: I remind the hon. Lady that between 1972 and 1975 those of us who had read the treaty of Rome

[Mr. Bill Walker]

and pointed out what was involved were constantly told that we were wrong. We said that the treaty of Rome was much deeper and much more than just a common market, but we were told that we were wrong.

Ms Quin: The fact that the hon. Gentleman says that he pointed out those issues shows that they were raised in the debate, and anybody who took an interest in European policy at the time knows that they were raised by many people. The most perfunctory reading of the treaty of Rome, especially the preamble on the first page, would have made the position completely clear.

Mr. Randall: Did not the heads of state refer in that preamble to the ever closer union of their peoples?

Ms Quin: My hon. Friend cites the preamble, with which we are all familiar. The hon. Member for Stafford said that he was proud of his record in having opposed the Maastricht treaty, although he seemed less forthcoming about his role in supporting the Single European Act, which, as we know, was guillotined through the House of Commons by the Government, led by Baroness Thatcher.

Mr. Cash: Will the hon. Lady give way on that point?

Ms Quin: No, I will not give way any more because of lack of time.

At the time of the Single European Act, the hon. Gentleman said that he believed that the dangers of qualified majority voting were much exaggerated. It is, of course, fair for him to change his mind, but it is not fair for him to claim that he has been entirely consistent on the matter.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to the working time directive and said that it had come in through the back door. I have to contest that, as the working time directive is based on the health and safety provisions contained in the Single European Act, which the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends supported. The fact that the Government then negotiated an opt-out from the social chapter does not negate the other legal possibilities for social and employment legislation, including the health and safety provisions of the Single European Act. Far from being a back door, that is an obvious route if one is concerned that excessive working hours and lack of holidays have an effect on health and safety, which has been well proved even by information from by the Department of Health.

The Government now tell us that the working time directive is a make-or-break issue for the intergovernmental conference, although somewhat confusingly they tell us that quota hopping is also a make-or-break issue. Other issues raised in the Government's White Paper also seem to be make-or-break issues. When the Minister replies—I appreciate that he has not so much time to respond to the debate as he might have wished—perhaps he will tell us what support he is getting from other Governments on those various make-or-break issues, so that at least the House can be better informed by the Government than we have been up to now.

Many hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Stafford, have raised the issue of flexibility and I agree with the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham on the subject. Certainly, if "flexibility" is simply a code for a two-tier Europe in which Britain loses influence, we would not approve, but at this stage most of the discussions about flexibility are not entirely clear and we must see exactly what is proposed.

Mention was made of the Foreign Secretary's tour of Europe to appeal to the peoples of Europe over the heads of the Governments. I appreciated the intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on that subject. As he pointed out, when Mr. Kinkel made similar comments about the United Kingdom's position, that was criticised by Members on both sides of the House as interference. It therefore seems strange that the Foreign Secretary is embarking on that tour of Europe.

It is also rather strange because the Foreign Secretary seems to have a great deal to do to convince his own party and the British people that he is representing them effectively in Europe. He seems unaware that we shall be having a general election, and proposes to spend most of his time abroad converting European populations to his cause, or perhaps he has already admitted defeat in the general election.

The hon. Member for Stafford also referred to the Government's White Paper. He was one of those who were most vociferous in calling on the Government to produce a White Paper, but was of course extremely disappointed when it was produced. In an earlier debate, he called it

"a whited sepulchre . . . dead on the inside."—[*Official Report*, 21 March 1996; Vol. 274, c. 567.]

Today he even seemed to consider it a monumental mistake. We believed that the White Paper was schizophrenic because it was trying to appeal to two different audiences. It was trying to placate the remaining Europhiles in the Conservative party while at the same time placating Conservative Euro-sceptics. Not surprisingly, therefore, it failed woefully.

One of the issues of which the Government made great play in the White Paper was the role of the European Court of Justice. The Government were again schizophrenic in saying on the one hand that they wanted a strong European court to defend the rights of countries in the single market and to ensure that countries were compelled to live up to their obligations, while on the other hand they wanted a weak European court where obligations would have to be fully complied with only in serious or manifest breaches of Community law. Those two attitudes seem completely inconsistent. Will the Minister resolve that inconsistency and tell us how much support other countries have given to their comments on the European Court of Justice?

We believe that the dangers of some conspiracy against the British veto, which the hon. Member for Stafford seemed keen to point out, are not present in the European Union in the way that the hon. Gentleman described. During the Government's policy of non-co-operation in Europe, we saw the large number of issues that are decided by unanimity. We do not propose to make those issues not subject to the veto—certainly those that came up during the period of non-co-operation.

I recommend that the hon. Gentleman studies the list of proposals that were blocked at that time. The number of issues that are dealt with by unanimity in the European treaties may give him some comfort. The draft document being put forward by the Irish presidency, which looks ahead to the intergovernmental conference, is cautious, pragmatic and realistic in tone rather than super-federalist, and does not fulfil the conspiracy theories of which the hon. Gentleman seems to be so fond.

Although the veto is obviously important, it is also important in the European Union to build alliances. In many ways, whether something is determined by unanimity or qualified majority voting is not always the point. Despite the fact that QMV operates in agricultural policy, which has been mentioned in this debate, in practice countries tend to talk around the issues to reach a consensus. That is very often a sensible way forward in the European system.

I very much agree with my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham that we need a different approach to the European issue. We need an approach that will give the British people a better deal from their EU membership and make for more constructive co-operation on economic, environmental, employment and social matters, all of which are important. The British people will get that better deal only under a Labour Government.

10.53 am

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. David Davis): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) not only on securing this debate but on the best speech that I have heard him make on this subject in all the many years I have listened to him. I grant that it was not the shortest speech, but then that is a pretty difficult race to win. Although I obviously do not agree with everything that he said—not least his apparent comparison between Neville Chamberlain and myself in respect of appeasement—I certainly felt that he addressed the issue vigorously, as did the whole House.

A number of very perceptive interventions on my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford highlighted how important and central the issue of flexibility is. I am sure that flexibility will be the central axis of the negotiations in Amsterdam, and there will be a great deal of movement around it at that time. I am delighted that he has taken the role of John the Baptist in going around Europe before my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary, preparing the way for him. I trust that my hon. Friend will have a better fate than the original John the Baptist.

The speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) highlighted perfectly the issue that is at the heart of flexibility: the difficulty of squaring the circle between those who want one vision of Europe and those who want a federalist Europe. His input was very good. I also enjoyed the speech of the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice). He and I do not agree on many aspects of Europe, but I recognise how hard he has fought his case in his own party over the past decade.

Mr. Dalyell: How would the Minister feel if Klaus Kinkel went around Britain lecturing us?

Mr. Davis: I was asked that question on the radio. After five minutes of discussing what Mr. Kinkel said, the radio interviewer attacked me for not being more critical of him. I think that the hon. Gentleman is trying to ask what right my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has to put his views. The answer is a very great right. Our argument is recognised and supported by many of the peoples in Europe, and it is perfectly right for my right hon. and learned Friend to say, "This is a better future for Europe than the one being offered by some distinctly federalist Governments around Europe."

The debate has largely focused on flexibility, which has been hung on the hook of enlargement of the Union in the past. Enlargement to include the new democracies of the Union is certainly this generation's greatest challenge and opportunity. It is a vital vocation for the Union. Flexibility within it is driven by two views of the future after enlargement. On the one hand, there are those countries which argue that widening should mean deepening, to use the jargon of the art.

That view is virtually adopted by the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), who in December attacked the idea of maintaining Britain's veto after enlargement on a number of grounds. He said:

"let's disentangle those two quite separate concepts . . . let's take first the issue of majority voting and then we can look at the issue of centralisation".

He missed the point entirely, of course, because majority voting is quintessentially about centralisation. By definition, majority voting means overruling nation states, and overruling nation states means moving power from the nation state to the centre. However, I shall not labour that point for too long, as I have only a few minutes to address the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford.

The other view of Europe is our view: Europe's strength lies in its diversity. That is the British vision. The approach that we support is designed for a Europe which respects the differing political traditions, social cultures, historical experiences and geographical features of member states, a Union with which all member states feel comfortable, which develops on the basis of consensus as well as diversity—exactly the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge.

Flexibility is already a reality in Europe. Not everyone agrees with it, and my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford highlighted that. The obvious examples are the provisions on monetary union and the United Kingdom's social protocol opt-out, but there are other, less obvious, examples of flexibility. The issue of zero rating of value added tax has been somewhat controversial recently. Britain and Ireland are the only two countries in Europe to maintain a derogation on zero rating on VAT on food and various other items. That demonstrates flexibility within Europe.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford raised the question whether flexibility would make Britain a second-class citizen and aid the on-rush of federalism in Europe. We differ on that issue. However, if he was describing the effect of the Franco-German proposal, I would agree with him wholeheartedly. That would certainly have the effect that he described. France and Germany have proposed a form of flexibility in which no member state would have a right of veto: it would be a veto bypass—there is no other way of describing it—and we oppose that wholeheartedly. That is—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. We must move on to the next topic.

Cold Weather Payments (Scotland)

11 am

Ms Roseanna Cunningham (Perth and Kinross): I am grateful for the opportunity to express my concerns and the concerns of the Scottish National party about the operation of the cold weather payments scheme and the problem of fuel poverty in Scotland. The scheme was intended to ensure that our most vulnerable citizens had enough money to finance extra fuel requirements over winter. I aim to highlight the fact that it has failed on several fronts to achieve its aim.

To be eligible for a cold weather payment, an individual must be entitled to income support or income-related jobseeker's allowance and either be in receipt of a pension or disability premium or have a dependent child aged under five years. Payments of £8.50 a week are triggered only if the average mean daily temperature is 0 deg C or below for seven consecutive days or if such temperatures are forecast for the next seven days. The Meteorological Office monitors temperatures on behalf of the Benefits Agency at 70 weather stations in the United Kingdom, 18 of which are in Scotland.

It is widely recognised that anomalies in the existing system mean that it is failing to meet the requirements of those in need. The cold weather payments scheme was intended to prevent our most vulnerable citizens from getting into the dreadful position of being unable affordably to heat their homes during the cold winter. Its success or failure must be measured against that aim. The prevalence of fuel poverty among Scotland's poor therefore reveals the inadequacy of the current system.

Fuel poverty is defined as the inability to afford adequate warmth in the home because of low incomes and energy-inefficient dwellings. Energy Action Scotland estimates that about 800,000 households in Scotland still experience fuel poverty. That represents a staggering one in three Scottish homes. Poorer households tend to live in the least insulated and hardest to heat homes.

The 1991 Scottish house condition survey found that single parents, large families, the unemployed and retired people were far more likely to live in properties affected by condensation and damp, in both the public and private sectors. To achieve adequate warmth, such housing requires more fuel, so the poor have to designate a greater proportion of their disposable income to fuel costs.

An accepted definition of affordable warmth in purely monetary terms seems to be that no more than 10 per cent. of disposable income should be spent on fuel, yet Energy Action Scotland estimates that poorer families and individuals generally spend as much as 20 per cent. of their weekly income on fuel, compared with the UK average of only 5 per cent.

Research conducted by the Scottish Consumer Council has confirmed that low-income families tend to have electrical heating systems, which usually consume more fuel and are more expensive to run. The imposition of value added tax on fuel therefore has a proportionally greater impact on those who can ill afford to pay it. Once again, the Government have revealed their twisted priorities, adding to the misery of the poor instead of alleviating it.

Fuel debt is also a major problem in Scotland, representing the second largest form of debt after rent arrears in the social rented sector. In May 1995, 44,805 income support claimants—8 per cent.—had fuel costs deducted at source from their weekly benefits, to assist debt recovery.

Although the number of electricity disconnections has decreased, there has been a significant increase in the installation of prepayment meters, which are often offered as a last-resort alternative to disconnection. A study conducted by Scottish Power in 1993 found that each year about 7,500 households repeatedly go without electricity for more than 24 hours. That is effectively a system of self-disconnection. Almost half the respondents to the survey explained that they could not afford to buy power cards, which is a cause for great concern.

All those factors have a devastating impact on the health of the nation. The number of deaths from hypothermia significantly increases during the winter months. It is widely recognised that official records grossly under-record such deaths and gravely underestimate the problem.

During the debate on the Cold Weather Payments (Wind Chill Factor) Bill, the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron), said:

"Wearing my medical hat, let me say that hypothermia . . . affects many people who die of chronic heart failure or chronic obstructive airways disease. I have no doubt that for thousands of people death is hastened by hypothermia even though it does not appear on their death certificates."—[*Official Report*, 17 January 1997; Vol. 288, c. 586.]

A more accurate measure of winter mortality rates is to assess the number of excess winter deaths by comparing the number of deaths from December to March with the number in the four months on either side.

I asked the Library to provide me with those figures, and I was told that the number of deaths in December 1994 to March 1995 was more than 600 per month higher than in the adjacent months, giving a total excess of 2,500 deaths for the December-March period. A survey of preceding years shows similar figures. Research has confirmed that most of the excess winter deaths are accounted for by elderly people, most of whom die of respiratory or cardiovascular disease. I am certain that those deaths are cold-related, and the fact that many of them could be avoided enhances the horror of the Government's tolerance of fuel poverty.

The present Prime Minister acknowledged the fact that there was a problem as long ago as 1986, when he was a junior Minister in the Department of Health and Social Security. He said that the excess winter deaths had

"perplexed successive Governments for years. . . The real problem, then as now. . . is not hypothermia, but the additional deaths from all causes, particularly heart disease, strokes and chest infections, which tend to occur in winter. It is a long-standing problem that our excess winter mortality rate is higher than that in other countries with severe winters, such as Sweden."—[*Official Report*, 2 December 1986; Vol. 106, c. 834-35.]

Nothing has changed. If the Prime Minister and his Government have not learnt the lessons in the intervening 10 years, I hope that he will take the time to read the debate and to listen to the voices of the numerous voluntary and professional organisations campaigning to eradicate the obscenity of fuel poverty.

During the winter of 1993-94, a group of Scottish doctors undertook a study of urban hypothermia in the west of Scotland. The results were published in the *British Medical Journal* in September 1995. The group studied patients coming to hospitals in Glasgow, Paisley,

Coatbridge and Airdrie. It estimated that, because of the difficulty of determining the cause of deaths in the home, there could be an under-recording of deaths from hypothermia of more than 300 per cent.

The report confirmed my fear that excess winter mortality in Britain is greatest among socially deprived people with the worst heating. The majority of the patients—53 out of the 93 studied—were found inside the home, and most lived alone. All but two of the patients had heating, but two thirds of them had it switched off when they were found. The report noted that one of the explanations for the reluctance of elderly people to use heating in winter was the cost or perceived cost of fuel.

The prevalence of fuel poverty and cold-related deaths clearly demonstrates the extent to which the cold weather payments scheme fails to meet immediate need. One major problem is that there is no guarantee that payments will be made when the freeze comes. Without that predictability, people will simply not take the risk of running up fuel bills that they know they cannot afford to pay.

It is conceivable that we could experience five or six days of freezing temperatures, followed by a thaw that significantly increases the temperature for only a short time, bringing the average temperature for the seven-day period to above 0 deg C. In this lottery, is it any wonder that the elderly are too frightened to turn up the heat when they are left with the worry that they may not be able to meet the payments?

The scheme's eligibility criteria are far too restrictive. If we take the number of households on means-tested benefits as a measure of poverty, it includes 35 per cent. of households in Scotland, compared with 28 per cent. in England. I have already noted that fuel poverty is compounded by low income, yet the Government's scheme falls far short of providing assistance to Scotland's poor. In addition, the Department of Social Security estimates that between 34 and 41 per cent. of pensioner households eligible for income support fail to take it up, so they are denied access to cold weather payments.

Thus, the amounts paid out, even in the exceptionally cold winter of 1995-96, understate the need for extra help. It is not enough for the Government to make excuses and do nothing about it. If the Minister's conscience does not bother him and he does not share our sense of moral responsibility, perhaps he prefers to view the problem in financial terms. Scottish hospitals spent an estimated £20 million last year alone on treatment of respiratory illnesses.

A fundamental flaw in the existing scheme is its failure to take account of climatic variations in different parts of the United Kingdom. The payment, when it is triggered, is a flat rate of £8.50, regardless of whether the temperature is 0 or minus 15 deg C. That failure arises in spite of the Department of the Environment's admission in response to a parliamentary question in 1994 that it took more fuel to heat a house in Scotland than elsewhere in the United Kingdom. To heat a typical semi-detached house with gas central heating takes 23 per cent. more fuel in Glasgow than in Bristol; 28 per cent. more in Edinburgh; 32 per cent. more in Dundee—I see the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) here this morning; he may be interested in that figure—41 per cent. more in Aberdeen; 52 per cent. more in Lerwick and 66 per cent. more in Braemar. Those figures may underestimate the real costs.

Using the climatic severity index, independent experts found that 69 per cent. more fuel was needed in Lerwick in the Shetland isles than to heat a house of the same standard in London. It is worth considering that it is roughly the same distance from Lerwick to Southampton as it is from Southampton to Madrid. No one would deny that the latter was significantly warmer.

The location of the designated weather station is a key issue. People who live in upland villages and towns are sometimes linked with weather stations in lowland areas many miles away, where the temperature is warmer. It is too early to judge whether the recent increase in the number of weather stations, following a recommendation by the Meteorological Office, has adequately dealt with the geographical anomalies. It is interesting that the Met Office review included a proposal to provide post code-specific weather reports at no extra cost, which could allow a far more localised trigger. I wonder why the Government chose not to introduce such a system.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): I am sure that the hon. Lady will develop her and her party's argument for a fundamental change to the system, but does she agree that she, the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) and I have seen some interim improvements, and that more sensitivity has been displayed in terms of location of weather station, although glaring anomalies are still very much to the fore? I could cite several from my area, such as the Isle of Skye, mid-west Ross and Inverness. Does she agree that, at least as an interim measure, the Minister should consider a review short of a fundamental, wholesale review of the system?

Ms Cunningham: Absolutely. That is a fair point. My party would like to see a complete change, but there is no doubt that even the present system could be made far more responsive.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Although on 18 December we discussed the new stations and, for example, Salsburgh in the uplands of Lanarkshire was supposed to be substituted for Turnhouse, I checked with the research department of the Library this morning and found that Turnhouse was still used for the calculation of the January payments. Does the hon. Lady realise that my constituents and others in central Scotland may have been denied payments as a result of that?

Ms Cunningham: That is clearly a matter of concern. I am grateful for the information. I hope that the Minister will respond to the points that we are making.

Wind chill is a measure frequently used in weather forecasts on the broadcast media as a means of expressing how cold the wind will make us feel. As the British Medical Association noted in a press statement on 17 January this year, even a moderately windy day, with a wind speed of 9 mph and an air temperature of 5.5 deg C, produces an effect on the body equal to freezing point.

In its review, the Met Office confirmed that, if it were taken into account, the wind chill factor would have a significant impact particularly in the Scottish isles and the

[Ms Cunningham]

far north of Scotland. I understand that it proposes to pilot a study of six weather stations in Scotland, which will cost only £600, to assess the appropriateness of including wind chill in the assessment of cold weather payments. The Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for North Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald), noted in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) that the Government were consulting the Met Office on the issue. Will the Minister say today whether the proposed pilot scheme is to go ahead?

I understand that last Friday, Conservative Members behaved appallingly when they deliberately made long and unnecessary speeches to prolong the debate and to deny a Second Reading to the uncontroversial Cold Weather Payments (Wind Chill Factor) Bill, promoted by the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise). That hardly leaves us with confidence that the Government will proceed with even moderate reforms.

Within the constraints of the existing scheme, the right to warmth campaign group recommended that the Government should consider using the climatic severity index to determine cold weather payments. The index measures the energy stress on a house rather than a body and, for that reason, may be a more effective measure than merely the wind chill factor and air temperature combined. It takes into account not only air temperature, wind and degree of sunshine but the standard of the house, the size and orientation of its windows, the degree of draught-proofing and so on. The weather factors can be obtained at the touch of a button, and the house factors can be found in any energy rating of a house such as the national home energy efficiency rating system, which local authorities now widely use to audit their stock. Those measures would improve the scheme. I should welcome the Minister's comments.

Unless, however—this is a crucial point—the inherent uncertainty is removed from the system, it will remain fundamentally flawed and will continue to act as a disincentive to turn up the heat. To alleviate the problems inherent in the existing scheme, the Scottish National party has long advocated an additional cold climate allowance. We are committed to introducing such an allowance paid from December to March—the coldest winter months. We recognise that, even within Scotland, there is significant climate variation. The payment would be £7.40 a week in central and southern Scotland and £11.15 in the colder north and the island communities. The payments would be made automatically to all those on a retirement pension, income support, family credit or housing benefit. By that means, our elderly and vulnerable citizens will be guaranteed the help that they need.

The policy that we advocate builds on the good practice of SNP-controlled local authorities such as the former Tayside regional council, which included my constituency. It successfully operated a "warm up for winter" campaign in the winter of 1994-95, with a comprehensive package of assistance worth £503,000 to provide extra help for the elderly and others in need. Even now, faced with a Scottish local government financial crisis on an unprecedented scale, Angus council has recently launched a cold weather initiative to provide free home care and lunch clubs for two months.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): My hon. Friend has made a powerful case and has shown the inadequacy of the Government's provision for winter warmth. Will she, by contrast, point out what SNP-controlled Angus council has done in providing a two-month free home help and care package, and the fact that, during February and March, free lunch clubs will be provided for all pensioners and groups at risk in Angus. Those are practical measures that show what can be done to give warmth and sustenance to pensioners and other groups and how inadequate the Government's scheme is. We need a national cold weather payments scheme for the whole of Scotland. The sooner it is created, the better.

Ms Cunningham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving further details of the Angus scheme. It will obviously result in great savings for individuals within that period. It is worth a great deal of money to those in receipt of the benefits which accrue to them from living in Angus.

In Scotland, a cold climate allowance scheme along the lines that I have described would cost £170 million a year. That may sound like a lot of money, but it is not much when one considers that Treasury accounts show a £27 billion surplus paid from Scotland to the Exchequer since 1979. Although we are committed to introducing the allowance in the first year of an independent Scottish National party Government, we have also campaigned for such an allowance to be available UK-wide. Since 1984, the Scottish National party has introduced cold climate allowance Bills in Parliament on no fewer than six occasions, and I commend the relentless efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) in her campaign over the years.

Such a scheme is not without precedent. Our closest European neighbour—the Republic of Ireland—operates a national fuel scheme, which provides an automatic payment of £5 per week to those in receipt of any one of 15 qualifying benefits, including the state pension. In comparison to Scotland, Ireland has next to no resources, yet its Government manage to provide guaranteed cold weather assistance to those in need. It is not a lack of resources that prevents a similar scheme operating in Scotland or the United Kingdom but a lack of political will on the part of the Government. I am sorry to say that such will is also noticeably absent among Labour Front Benchers.

Although we strongly believe in the necessity of such a scheme in the medium term, we recognise that any cold weather assistance scheme can be viewed only as a short-term solution to ease the existing situation, and must be accompanied by long-term solutions to address the root of the problem. For the most part, the root problem in Scotland is the standard of housing and it is that factor which most clearly explains why winter mortality rates in Scotland are about 16 per cent. higher than in the colder Scandinavian countries. One in 20 houses in Scotland are below the tolerable standard; one in eight suffer dampness; and one in five suffer the effects of condensation and, in some cases, mould growth. Those factors contribute to the fact that, on a scale of one to 10, the average energy rating of a Scottish home is only 3.3.

Despite those staggering statistics, the Department of the Environment imposed a 31 per cent. reduction in funding for the home energy efficiency scheme last year, with the result that 20,000 fewer Scottish homes will receive basic insulation or draught-proofing measures. In

addition, this year the Secretary of State for Scotland imposed the most devastating cut to date in the housing budget, forcing local authorities to use 75 per cent. of their capital receipts for debt repayment and effectively cutting the budget by 30 per cent. in real terms. Those cuts leave little scope for the improvement of deteriorating housing conditions, which are widely recognised as being a major cause of fuel poverty.

Considered alongside the limitations of the cold weather payments scheme, those cuts reveal the Government's complete lack of a strategy to address both the causes and the effects of fuel poverty. Many of the problems of fuel poverty are associated with poor insulation and housing standards. It stands to reason that a commitment to upgrade and expand the housing stock and a determined effort to tackle dampness and disrepair would go some way towards eradicating fuel poverty and could reduce the number of elderly people who needlessly die every winter. Eradicating the misery caused by fuel poverty is not only a moral obligation for elected politicians, but makes sound economic and environmental sense. The connection between fuel poverty, bad housing and ill health is obvious.

The Scottish National party considers that the right to a warm, dry and affordable home is a fundamental human right. Eradicating the misery of fuel poverty requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes while alleviating the effects. At the bare minimum, it is for those responsible for the social security of our citizens to ensure that assistance is available to all those who need it. That is clearly not achieved by the existing system, which leaves too many needy people without assistance and discourages people from adequately heating their homes.

In conclusion, I quote the observation made recently by Energy Action Scotland:

> "The next millennium is only four years away and yet Scotland still has an estimated 800,000 households experiencing fuel poverty while the country is rich in fossil fuels and sources of renewable energy."

Scotland has more than enough fuel to meet the need. The Chancellor will rake in £3.5 billion in North sea oil and gas revenues in the current year. What we in Scotland lack is the power to ensure that our vast resources are used to eradicate poverty in Scotland. The prevalence of fuel poverty in energy-rich Scotland is testament to the fact that the cold weather payments scheme is utterly failing to meet essential need. The Government are failing the Scottish people.

11.24 am

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I am glad to follow the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham). All hon. Members would agree with her objectives: we all want Scotland's elderly and vulnerable residents and others who are infirm and require additional heat to be looked after in the best possible way that the country can afford.

The hon. Lady was less than gracious about cold weather payments. Between 1964 and 1970, there were no cold weather payments under the then socialist Government; and between 1974 and 1979 there were no cold weather payments under a socialist Government. The Scottish National party and even the Liberal Democrats are fairly closely allied to socialism today. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] I thought we had a new Lib-Lab pact to hound the Government, albeit without success.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: Because the right hon. Gentleman has such a reputation in the House for decency, the record should show that even he could not keep a straight face when making that last comment.

Sir Hector Monro: I am simply thinking of the practical results of what is going on among Opposition Members—they seem to be hounding away together, trying to defeat the Government.

The hon. Member for Perth and Kinross gave scant details of the cost of what she had in mind or, indeed, of the cost of the present system. In fact, in 1995-96 there were 7.2 million payments at a cost of £62 million, which shows that the Government provided a substantial amount of money for cold weather payments—and rightly so. I am strongly in favour of cold weather payments, but those figures show that, if the scheme was extended to a global system, such as the hon. Lady mentioned, without first calculating the cost, it could run to many hundreds of millions of pounds. She did not indicate from where that money would come and what might be dispensed with in exchange.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for displaying his characteristic courtesy in giving way to me. The statistics he quoted plainly show the extent of poverty among elderly people.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: The right hon. Gentleman is remarking on my speech and I wish to point out that I clearly put a cost on our proposed scheme—£170 million per year.

Sir Hector Monro: It seems to me that it would cost considerably more than £170 million to run the cold weather scheme continuously from the end of November through to March, given that it cost £62 million last year for a comparatively short winter, albeit one in which conditions were extremely severe around Christmas.

I want to concentrate on the importance of removing anomalies, and I am glad that my hon. Friend the Minister and the Meteorological Office carried out a comprehensive review of the number of weather stations that resulted in an increase in their number from 55 to 70 and thus improved local sensitivity. I was involved in these matters when I was a Minister and when my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott) was responsible for cold weather payments.

We all know that Eskdalemuir is the premier meteorological station in Scotland. It is located in the highest part of my constituency, yet the triggering station for my constituency was not, as one might expect, at Eskdalemuir, but at Cargenbridge near the ICI factory to the west of Dumfries, which is not in my constituency and is on very low ground. That meant that payments to my constituents were triggered by temperature measurements at a site about 100 ft above sea level. Many of my constituents live at a much higher level and therefore missed out on payments. They found it equally provocative that payments to people living in the area of

[Sir Hector Monro]

southern Scotland stretching from the Borders to the east coast were triggered by Eskdalemuir in my constituency, yet they were not allowed to use measurements at that station.

I am glad that that problem has been sorted out. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea changed the triggering station so that payments for the high ground in my constituency are now triggered by Eskdalemuir. We are rightly fine-tuning the system to ensure that payments for the higher ground in Scotland are triggered by the nearest possible meteorological station.

As the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross said, the £8.50 addition is triggered by the seven consecutive days forecast as well as by recorded temperatures. That is done automatically and there is no need to claim. Once a householder is on the benefits list for cold weather payments, payments are made automatically and no further action is needed. That is an important step in the right direction.

I am very glad that we have started to fine-tune the system and I believe that we should continue to do so for as long as possible, so that we make the most accurate possible meteorological map of the country relative to height above sea level.

Usually, the higher one is the colder it is, but that does not always apply. Some years ago, I learned that the coldest part of the United Kingdom is not, as one might expect, in Scotland, but on the north-east coast of England between Newcastle and Norfolk, where there is a fiendishly cold chill from the north-east wind whipping across the North sea. We must take local conditions into account, and aim to make our map as accurate as possible.

I am sure that Opposition Members will call for cold weather payments to be much enhanced. One would love that to happen if it were financially prudent and if the Government could do it. If Opposition Members call for that, the House has every right to hear from whence that money will come, bearing in mind that the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer has made it clear that there will be no additional expenditure. It would be wrong of Opposition Members to say, "We want another £100 million on cold weather payments," without saying how they would provide it.

No doubt the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) will give us an idea, but I very much doubt it, because I heard him make some astonishing erroneous statements on the radio this week, which made me wince, even at 7 o'clock in the morning. I hope that he will not say things like, "The Conservative Government will put VAT on food," when they most certainly will not do so. That is the sort of thing that he is saying, now that he is becoming a professional operator in the Labour party policy making that attacks alleged Government policies that are not in place.

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): May I ask the right hon. Gentleman two things? First, perhaps the windfall tax will pay for the wind-chill factor to be taken into account in the new formula. That is a possibility, certainly for the first year of a Labour Government, and we would all welcome it. Secondly, he talks about VAT on coal. In 1995, the House voted against the Government's proposal to impose the second tranche of the increase in VAT on domestic fuel. Scotland was immediately penalised for that, because the shortfall went on the cost of whisky.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Before the debate continues, may I say that I hope that there will not be a wide-ranging debate on taxation, which I would not regard as being in order?

Sir Hector Monro: I would love to answer the hon. Gentleman's question, but in view of your comments, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will not do so.

The Government deserve a great deal of credit for introducing cold weather payments, which were not available under Labour Governments, and for doing their best to fine-tune the system to bring it up to date with the latest thinking of the Meteorological Office. Although we want cold weather payments to be extended and old and vulnerable people to be helped as much as possible, we should not denigrate what has been achieved.

11.34 am

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) on being conscious at 7 o'clock in the morning. That is a notable achievement for a man of his age, and wincing at my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) is even better.

Sir Hector Monro: Any farmer listens to the farming programme at 6.10 every morning.

Mr. McAllion: That is a very good put-down; I accept it entirely. The right hon. Gentleman normally speaks very well.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham) on initiating this important and serious debate which, even if it is not gathering much attention in the House at the moment, will receive a lot of attention in Scotland. People who live in Scotland and suffer from the cold weather there will be interested to hear what Parliament says about it this morning.

I am astounded that, with the honourable exception of the right hon. Member for Dumfries, not one Conservative Member of Parliament from Scotland has bothered to attend the debate. There is no Scottish Office Minister on the Treasury Bench—Scottish Office Ministers have sent one of their English colleagues along to deal with the Scots, much in the way that Edward I tried to deal with us a long time ago. Scottish people will notice that, on the eve of a general election, Scottish Conservative Members of Parliament show a complete lack of interest in a very important subject such as this; that is to be deplored.

I thank the right hon. Member for Dumfries for talking about socialist Governments. It brought a nostalgic tear to many an eye on the Opposition Back Benches.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: The hon. Gentleman is an historian.

Mr. McAllion: I am not an historian; I am an optimist. We may again see a socialist Government like the one that was in power from 1945 to 1951, although I suspect that that may be some way off.

I shall discuss some of the key characteristics of the current cold weather scheme organised by the Government, and start by discussing who qualifies for payments.

When the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross introduced the debate, she gave us a list of the people who qualify under the present scheme, describing them as perhaps the most vulnerable people in society—those in receipt of income support and income-related jobseeker's allowance, people who receive a pensioner's premium or a disability premium and people with children under five. Those are important groups, but they are not the only vulnerable groups in Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. Many vulnerable groups are currently excluded from cold weather payments.

The right hon. Member for Dumfries referred to the figures for last year. I have looked up the figures. If we study those for 1990-91 to the present day, including those given by the Under-Secretary of State yesterday during Question Time, we find that about 20 million cold weather payments have been made in the past six and a half years—an average of about 3 million a year. Some of those will have been repeat payments so, each winter, fewer than 3 million people in Scotland receive cold weather payments—but every poverty group will tell us that more than 10 million people are living in poverty. The vast majority never qualify under the cold weather payments scheme devised by the present Government.

Statistics published by Ministers tell the same story. Every year, they publish a document called "Households Below Average Income," which examines the income of all groups in society. It says that, between 1979—the year, unfortunately, the Conservatives came to power—and 1993-94, the last year for which figures are available, those in full-time work or self-employment declined as a percentage of the population. They decreased from 71 per cent. of the population in 1979 to only 59 per cent. in 1993-94. The figure is probably lower today.

Meanwhile, the unemployed—or, as the Government describe them, "others not in work"—increased from 8 per cent. of the population in 1979 to 17 per cent. in 1993-94. The unemployed are now the fastest-growing section of the population. Some of them, of course, receive a disability premium, and some have children under five, but many do not have such qualifications and are not eligible for the Government's cold weather payments.

The unemployed are the only group in society whose incomes, after taking housing costs into consideration, were lower in 1993-94 than they were in 1979. The poorest and most vulnerable section of the population is excluded from the cold weather payments scheme. The Minister should reflect on that. The scheme is not comprehensive, does not cover enough poor people and leaves far too many of them at risk of having their power supply cut off.

The right hon. Member for Dumfries claimed that the scheme was generous. He mentioned the year 1995-96, when £62 million was paid out under it. He did not mention the previous year, when only £77,000 was paid out, or the year before that, when the figure was £12.4 million. The scheme is nowhere near as generous as Ministers pretend. They tend to pick the year when most payments were made and give the impression that every year the Government dole out £62 million under the cold weather payments scheme, when nothing of the kind happens.

About £164 million has been paid out by the Government over a period of six and a half years, which works out at £20 million a year on average. I know that the sum of £20 million cannot be dismissed—it is a great deal of public money—but we should compare it with some of the public spending priorities that the Government have announced recently.

The Government spend just under £70 million on cadet forces. We understand that that sum is about to be doubled—another £70 million a year is to be allocated to make kids go to school and learn how to shoot rifles. That has suddenly become a bigger priority than looking after people who are vulnerable to the cold. A sum of £60 million is to be spent on a royal yacht. A luxury yacht for the monarchy is a greater priority for the Government than looking after the poor, the old and the frail who are suffering all round the country.

The Child Poverty Action Group has pointed out that, since 1979, £31.8 billion has been given away in tax cuts to the better-off, and almost one third of that sum—more than £10 billion—has been handed across to the top 1 per cent. of earners in the United Kingdom. I cannot believe that any Government can justify handing £10 billion over to the richest in society while claiming that they cannot afford to keep the poor warm in their own homes. That makes no sense.

The Government's own family expenditure survey has shown that the fuel bills of the rich are falling, while the fuel bills of the poorest are rising faster than those of any other section of the population. The bottom 10 per cent. in terms of national income spend 10 per cent. of their total income on trying to keep their homes warm. It is very different for the rich.

The point about the state of the housing stock in Scotland was well made by the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross. That is why it is a tragedy that the Minister responsible for housing in Scotland could not be bothered to be present and take part in the debate. Housing is central to whether people can keep warm in winter.

We know from the national house condition survey, which the Government commissioned and published, that the state of Scotland's housing stock is a disgrace. There is dampness and mould growth in more than half a million homes. As a result, asthma among children is on the increase, and there are excess winter deaths every year. What a terrible phrase that is. There were 7,000 excess winter deaths in Scotland, according to Shelter: 7,000 people who died not from natural causes, but because it was cold and they could not afford to keep themselves warm.

I remember attending one of the Scottish Grand Committees—the one in Hamilton, I think—where groups were lobbying hon. Members as they came in. Leaflets were handed out by the Edinburgh Tenants Federation, which stated:

"Our world has cold, damp homes which need new windows and new heating systems . . .

Our world has health problems caused by cold damp homes . . .

In our world we need public investment in public sector homes to improve health, to reduce benefit dependancy by putting people back to work, to raise educational standards.

[Mr. McAllion]

Our world has politicians too stupid to see the need—are you one of them?"

I hope that I am not one of them, but I suspect that there are a number of stupid politicians on the Conservative Benches, who cannot see the simple logic of the Edinburgh tenants' case.

Since that meeting, the Government have announced a 28 per cent. cut in housing investment in Scotland. There is a 75 per cent. rule which states that, of the receipts gathered by the local authorities across Scotland—about £227 million in the past year—75 per cent. must be diverted to reducing local authority debt, and taken away from investment in housing.

In other words, £170 million has been withdrawn from investment in new heating systems and double glazing to keep people warm in their homes. Shelter reckons that, if spent through the public sector, £170 million would make more than 72,000 homes in Scotland warm, dry places where people could survive, rather than places where they are likely to die.

I realise that there are other options. The hon. Member for Perth and Kinross put forward on behalf of her party an alternative that should be debated seriously by all parties. I accept the comment of the right hon. Member for Dumfries that, if we speak about improving the scheme, we must specify where the money is to come from.

Britain is a wealthy country. My hon. Friends are fond of saying that, through the public sector, we spend £300 billion every year. We have a £700 billion economy. There is far more in the private sector than in the public sector. At some point, the House will have to make up its mind where its priorities lie. Do they lie in stopping the poor dying from cold in the winter, or in giving the rich more to spend on luxury yachts and luxury life styles? That is what the debate is about and, like the right hon. Member for Dumfries, I look forward to the return of a socialist Government who will do something about it.

11.46 am

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham) on securing this debate, and on the excellence of her speech and the arguments that she deployed.

I shall intrude on the time of the House for only a minute to amplify a point that the hon. Lady was kind enough to allow me to touch on in an intervention.

The Minister was kind enough to meet the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) and me in advance of last year's review. Subsequently, there have been some greatly appreciated—let me put that clearly on the record—improvements as a result of more sensitive monitoring locations for the highlands and islands. There are, however, other anomalies, which arise from those changes which I bring formally to the Minister's attention for further consideration in due course. If he could indicate at the appropriate time that that will happen, it would be appreciated.

A written parliamentary question from me last year elicited the response that, in the history of the scheme, the island of Tiree had never triggered payments. As a result, a substantial chunk of my constituency was linked to different monitoring stations at Loch Glascarnoch and at Aultbea. *Hansard* will love me for my map references this morning.

The island of Tiree continues to be used as a monitoring station for the Isle of Skye. Although someone looking at a map might think that an island such as Tiree bears some resemblance to the Isle of Skye, anyone who has looked at them from ground level knows that there is a vast climatic difference between an island that boasts, for example, the Cuillin hills and a rather severe climate, and Tiree, which is firmly located in the gulf stream. Will the Minister look into that? It would make more sense for Skye to be linked to a mainland monitoring point, or to the monitoring point that is available at Waterstein on the Isle of Skye itself.

My next concern is the town of Inverness. Parts of Inverness have been securing cold weather payments over the recent difficult period of weather, but others have not. Because of the postal code structure, they are linked to different monitoring stations. That causes fury in Inverness, because people who may live only one mile apart, and who experience essentially identical climatic conditions, find that some are eligible and receive payments, while others are ineligible and receive none. Would it not make more sense to use a common monitoring point?

Finally, it would be more sensible to link mid-Ross and places such as Achnasheen—that will add to my popularity with *Hansard*—which are presently linked with Aultbea on the west coast, with Loch Glascarnoch as that is geographically closer. If we remain tied to postal codes, anomalies will be inescapable. That is why I echo the plea of the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross for a more imaginative system of allocating cold weather payments. Despite the efforts to improve or tinker with the present system, people will always be on the wrong side of a line or will be linked to the wrong weather station given any set of climactic conditions. I would appreciate a positive response from the Minister.

11.50 am

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): I am glad of the opportunity to speak this morning, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham) on securing a debate on cold weather payments. This is our third opportunity in recent weeks to discuss the issue—we discussed it in a Delegated Legislation Committee and, a few weeks ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) introduced the Cold Weather Payments (Wind Chill Factor) Bill, which the Government deliberately talked out.

The hon. Member for Perth and Kinross highlighted two issues: first, the fact that we must consider cold weather payments in the context of poverty and, secondly, the question of political will. The Government lack the political will not only to address the problem, but to take it seriously. The problem of poverty in Scotland is obvious. In a so-called civilised society, in 1997, people must choose between heating and eating from November to February or March every year. More than half a million Scottish people claim income support. If we add dependants to that figure, we are talking about 1 million people—20 per cent. of the Scottish population—who depend solely on income support. That is a scandal; anyone can see that.

According to Government figures, 35 per cent. of Scottish households rely on one or more means-tested benefit. One in five of all non-pensioner households in Scotland have no one in work. It is scandalous—and it is clear from those statistics, supplied by Government sources, that poverty is an immensely important issue for every political party in Britain. Cold weather payments should be viewed in that context.

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): I have followed the hon. Gentleman's argument carefully. Is he saying that it is wrong to provide more public money, means-tested or otherwise, and that the Government should change their policy?

Mr. McLeish: I am conscious of the fact that the hon. Gentleman has just entered the Chamber, and I regret allowing him to intervene. He misses the point completely. The Government's economic failure has resulted in the largest increase in poverty in a generation. There has been an explosion in the number of people who depend on the state, and the Government have sought to use taxpayers' money to support them. We object to that morally, socially, politically and economically. That view is shared by hon. Members on both sides of the House, and we are trying to address the problem.

I have highlighted the extent of poverty in Scotland, but another factor is even worse. Some 100,000 pensioners in Scotland who are eligible for income support do not claim it. The Government do not pursue that issue; they have not introduced a take up benefits campaign. Despite the fact that nearly 10 per cent. of Scottish pensioners are below the breadline, as defined by the Government, they cannot claim cold weather payments.

I shall explain why cold weather payments are necessary. As the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross said, income poverty is linked to fuel poverty and poor housing. Government must institute a practical programme. Fortunately, within weeks—certainly within months—a Labour Government will start to address the issue seriously. The Government use data matching to intensify their attack on fraud; we must ensure that that technology is used to try to link pensioners who do not receive income support with resources. That would allow more Scottish pensioners to access not only income support, but cold weather payments. That must be a priority for any Government with a sense of justice—even a Government as mean and miserable as this one.

We must remember that the Government imposed value added tax on fuel. They told people that they would have to pay more for fuel not because their incomes had increased, but because they wanted to raise revenue. The Labour party in government has pledged to reduce VAT from 8 per cent. to 5 per cent.—the lowest possible rate under European law.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Not a cynical ploy any more, then?

Mr. McLeish: I shall ignore the hon. Lady's sedentary intervention.

Another key issue is home insulation. The hon. Member for Perth and Kinross and my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) referred to poorly insulated and damp housing. Low-income households may spend up to 10 per cent. of their incomes on fuel, compared with middle income households who spend 4 per cent. Home insulation would prove a significant practical benefit for everyone. Labour intends to use the environmental task force, funded by the windfall levy on privatised utilities, to ensure that people are employed to insulate pensioners' homes.

Our strategy will include a review of the cold weather payments scheme. It is instructive that hon. Members who have spoken in the debate have referred to injustices, anomalies and inconsistencies caused by the current system. It must be reviewed. The right hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) referred to the weather stations that are used to trigger payments in different localities. The Government have improved the situation slightly by increasing the number of weather stations from 52 to nearly 70, but some fine tuning must be done, and there is consensus in the House about the Department not dragging its feet.

Linked to the review is the issue of wind chill factor, which was raised in the recent Meteorological Office report to the Government about cold weather payments. The Government are always keen to draw attention to the negative parts of that report. There are clear problems with the wind chill factor. As the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross said, the Meteorological Office offered the Government a trial in Scotland comprising six weather stations at a cost of £600—that is not a large sum when compared with a social security budget of nearly £100 billion. When given an opportunity to take the matter seriously, why is the Minister dragging his feet?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Roger Evans): It is utterly baffling that the hon. Gentleman should make that comment. Before Christmas, I made it clear to the Standing Committee of which we are both members that the Government will continue the annual review, investigate the wind chill factor and conduct the trials mentioned in the report. The cost is rather more than the mere £600 for the data, but the Government have promised to examine the matter this summer as part of the ordinary annual review. That has been our position for some time.

Mr. McLeish: It is slightly warmer in the summer. If the people of Britain were to elect this Government again—that is highly improbable—they would consider the matter during the summer, the tests would not be run in Scotland until the winter, and a report would not be published until next year.

Mr. Evans *rose—*

Mr. McLeish: I want to finish my point.

I want to know from the Minister whether the Government will now accept the Meteorological Office's offer and whether the trials will start immediately. Will the Government then urgently consider the implications for cold weather payments of the results of the trials?

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman is blathering. We have said yes. He should be aware of the fact that the annual review will lead to statutory instruments being laid by the time the autumn scheme comes into effect. The process of examining this problem will be complete by

[Mr. Evans]

the time it is necessary to lay the statutory instruments for next winter. If it is practical and sensible to introduce a wind chill factor, we will consider it.

Mr. McLeish: I am grateful for the Minister's intervention. If I understand him correctly, the trials are now under way in six stations in Scotland.

Mr. Evans: It is a matter of modelling existing data: it is not a question of opening six weather stations to perform an experiment.

Mr. McLeish: I am grateful to the Minister for intervening again. The Meteorological Office's report suggested that a trial would take place involving six weather stations in Scotland—Scotland was the key target—at a cost of £600. Are those trials—in whatever form; either practical or theoretical and based on modelling—under way today: yes or no?

Mr. Evans: They will be under way to the extent that they will be complete by the time it is necessary to make a decision next summer.

Mr. McLeish: The answer to my questions was no, the trials are not going on—so the Government are dragging their feet.

In this debate, insult has been added to injury. The hon. Member for Perth and Kinross laid out her case. We have put cold weather payments in the context of poverty, and we have put the wind chill issue in the context of cold weather payments. Even the small concession that we hoped the Government had made does not exist.

The Government are not interested in poverty or in giving cold weather payments priority, and now we learn from the Minister's interventions that no trial is taking place on the wind chill factor. As they would say in the other place: I rest my case. We argue that the trials should be carried out urgently. However small their impact may be, that would send a positive message to pensioners' organisations and to families living in poverty that the Government are anxious to improve cold weather payments. I suspect that the Government will not act. A Labour Government will soon be in office, and we will review the cold weather payments scheme as quickly as possible.

12.4 pm

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I am aware that the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) wants to speak, so I shall try to be brief.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham) on securing a debate on this important subject, and I thank hon. Members who have participated in it.

The Scottish National party has pursued this issue for many years. I should like to point out to the right hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) that the six Bills that were introduced by Dr. Gordon Wilson or me had the full support of the House and the whole country. Every part of the country and every party was represented. We have always argued that this matter must be considered in an overall context. This debate is about cold weather payments in Scotland, but I am as worried about a pensioner in Elgin as I am about a pensioner in Ealing, Perth or Preston. We are genuinely concerned about the implications of how we deal with fuel poverty throughout the United Kingdom. None the less, this issue has a particular importance for Scotland.

The hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise), whose Bill on the wind-chill factor I sponsored, had hoped to attend the debate, but I spoke to her yesterday evening and she has caught the dreaded lurgy that many of us have suffered. She gave her apologies, because she had wanted to be here.

I endorse the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross. This is a matter of conscience and morality. Every legislator must search his or her conscience and decide how funding should be allocated.

I go back many years on this subject: when I first raised it in the House in the 1970s, there was a Government with a different perspective. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) laughs wryly at the memory of that socialist Government. In the 1970s, I was accused of scaremongering: people said that I should not raise this subject because it would frighten people who lived on low incomes, especially pensioners. I was then a much younger Member of Parliament—like you, Mr. Deputy Speaker: indeed, we came into the House at the same time—and I was new to the procedures of the House. It took a long time for this issue to come on to the political agenda in the House of Commons and in the other place—Lord Gray of Contin works hard on behalf of Energy Action Scotland and has raised the issues in the other place.

The problem was not taken seriously until much later, when people began to realise that excess winter deaths were related to cold weather and to the poor quality of our housing stock. We have made massive strides forward and the problem is now recognised. I do not deride the cold weather payments scheme, although it could be much improved.

I refer the Minister to the 1991 United Nations demographic book. Excess winter deaths were earlier called an obscenity. The study examined various aspects of life styles, and the book shows that Sweden had a 14 per cent. excess winter death rate, Norway had a rate of 10 per cent., Germany 12 per cent. and Great Britain 31 per cent. That is a massive figure of excess winter deaths. Yesterday, I referred to the comparison between Scotland and Finland: Scotland has a 16 per cent. excess winter death rate, whereas Finland has a rate of 9 per cent.

Those statistics are frightening. They involve our elderly people, our disabled people, unemployed people and people who live in poor quality housing, all of whom are the most vulnerable members of our society. In cold snaps we probably turn our heating up or put it on for a bit longer, but we often forget that many of those families cannot do that. For many people, winter means living, eating and sleeping in one room, because they can afford to heat only that one room. The Government claim to value family life. What kind of family life can people have if they are forced to live, eat and sleep in one room?

The situation was exacerbated by the imposition of value added tax on domestic fuel. I noticed that the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) did not like my sedentary intervention, but, when the Scottish National

party tabled an amendment to reduce VAT to 5 per cent., we were told by the shadow Financial Secretary—the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling)—that it was a cynical ploy. We have also argued that standing charges should be removed from those on the lowest incomes, particularly pensioners. I am sure that all our mailbags are full of letters making such points.

Let me repeat that we want to hear from the Minister how the Government are dealing with the offer from the Meteorological Office, which my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross raised in her competent, wide-ranging and definitive speech. The Meteorological Office has offered to carry out a pilot study of the wind chill factor in Scotland, and I was not sure what the Minister's response was. One of my hon. Friends said, "I do not think that I would buy a second-hand car from this gentleman."

What the Minister said was confusing. He said that the cost would be considerably more than £600, but how much will it be? When will the pilot study be conducted? I can assure the Minister—living, as I do, in Lossiemouth, where we have a substantial wind chill factor—that there would be no point in conducting it in June, July and August; it should be carried out during the cold winter months. What is happening to that experiment? The offer seemed very logical to me, and I do not understand why the Government have not taken it up. The Met Office has also proposed the use of postcodes as local triggers. Every speaker this morning has mentioned the anomalies in the present system.

This has been a long-running issue, and, while I do not deny that improvements have been made, we need a long-term strategy. We need to improve our housing stock, for instance. The poorest people usually live in the poorest housing, and are the least well insulated. Energy efficiency should also be improved; the home energy efficiency scheme has been cut substantially. Furthermore, we should keep these matters in mind not just during the winter months but throughout the year. In July, members of the all-party warm homes group—of which I am convener—went along to the Department of the Environment, complete with a polar bear which nearly melted in the July heat, to point out that the issue should be considered all the year round rather than just between December and March, and that we needed to find ways in which to improve the lot of our people.

Our resources should be used properly. Scotland is an energy-rich nation; why should so many people die of cold there? People in my area look out on to the Moray Firth and the oil and gas platforms that bring so much money to the Exchequer. What a contrast they must see!

The SNP also has policies relating to the redistribution of wealth—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The debate is about cold weather payments, not the redistribution of wealth.

Mrs. Ewing: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I did not mean to be out of order. I was trying to put the matter in a general context, because I do not think it can be viewed in isolation. I was merely going to say that my party is not afraid to consider the redistribution of wealth through, for instance, tax policies.

The Government must deal with the points raised by my hon. Friend in her excellent speech. We are prepared to discuss our own views and recommendations with them, and I hope that we shall hear a positive response today. The entire debate has been underpinned by the argument in favour of an egalitarian society and valuing people's lives.

12.14 pm

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Thank you for calling me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I congratulate the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham) on securing this debate on an important subject that must be discussed. It is not just a party matter; it is not the domain of just one Opposition party. It concerns everyone, and the Government are not doing enough. There have been too many partisan comments today.

Local government has introduced many innovations in an attempt to prevent the tragedy of death and impoverishment. My local council, when I was its leader—having taken the seat that had belonged to the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh)—introduced double glazing and central heating in every council house, which is now being provided in much of Scotland. In my council area there is heat leasing, because the Government will not give the council enough money to introduce other schemes to deal with bad housing fabric and inadequate insulation. Everyone is trying to innovate, and we should not become involved in a Dutch auction to keep rents down in order to challenge the opposition when that means that homes cannot be properly heated.

The real problem is the system that the Government have introduced. People are becoming more aware of the fall in temperatures, and the cost of trying to maintain decent heating. The seven-day system is entirely inadequate. In my area—as I have told the Minister, I checked this with the House of Commons research department this morning—Turnhouse was still being used rather than Salsburgh, which was specified in the regulations that we discussed on 18 December. It was claimed that, over a seven-day period in January, the average temperature was 1.2 deg C, so no payment was triggered in my area.

In November, there were high winds—so high that they tore five windows out of the summerhouse in my garden—and temperatures dropped sharply, but the average did not fall below zero in a seven-day period. In Turnhouse, it was 0.5 deg, so again no one received a payment. That is nonsensical: if the wind-chill factor had been taken into account, as we were told in the debate on 17 January, 1.5 deg would have become minus 6.5 deg in Yeovilton, and it would have been similar in my part of central Scotland. As I have said, this is not a party matter; nor is it merely a Scottish matter. I am as concerned about Yeovilton residents as I am about people in my area.

According to Age Concern, if the wind chill factor had been taken into account, only £20 million would have been added to the bill for cold weather payments. That does not seem much to me.

I was shocked by the estimate given by the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross, who said that between 34 and 41 per cent. of elderly people who could receive income support do not claim it. According to research that I have consulted, the percentage is much lower, but it is at least 10 per cent., which means that as many as 1,000 to 1,200 people in every constituency in the United Kingdom are not claiming. More than 1,000 are not claiming in my area. Age Concern also estimates that

[Mr. Michael Connarty]

50,000 elderly people in the UK have died because of cold-related factors. If we accept the 10 per cent. estimate, that means that 5,000 have died in Scotland—far too many.

We must get together at local and national level to work out a cold climate allowance. I hope that the next Government—a Labour Government—will find a way of obviating the problem of deaths in cold weather.

12.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Roger Evans): I have only a short time in which to reply to this full and detailed debate. During the three minutes in which I was able to speak on Friday, I did not have time to deal with the Cold Weather Payments (Wind Chill Factor) Bill, which has featured in today's discussion.

I am grateful for the recognition that practical improvements have been made. I know that some people want much more money to be spent, and others want a different type of scheme; but we have attempted each year to "fine-tune"—the expression that has been used—the modern version of the scheme, which has operated since 1991, and to improve the links with particular postcodes and weather stations.

The hon. Members for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) and for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) came to see me last spring to make representations about their constituencies. As a result of that discussion, we introduced two new weather stations in Ross, Cromarty and Skye. I stress that any hon. Member is most welcome to see me if he or she has detailed points. Of course, any representations made in writing or otherwise will be most carefully considered as part of the annual review.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) made some important points. He said that the scheme was an achievement of the Conservative Government and that, if we moved to some other scheme, the costs would be considerable. He welcomed the fact that we were sorting out the anomalies, and mentioned one involving Eskdale.

Mrs. Ewing: Eskdalemuir.

Mr. Evans: I am obliged.

My right hon. Friend mentioned an anomaly in Eskdalemuir, which arose before I was in my present position, but which has been happily resolved. He also made a forceful point—in relation to which I was a little puzzled by the comment of the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham)—on the importance of forecasting. That is one of the crucial elements of the present scheme. People do not have to wait for seven days when the temperature is below the limit. When the Meteorological Office in their region forecasts that the temperature will be below the limit for seven days, they know that the payment will come, normally shortly thereafter, probably before their fuel bill.

As that is done automatically, without a claim, by computers, which use postcodes as a convenient way of dividing the country by local area, it is possible to run an automatic system that gives comfort, because people know that, if it is advertised locally that the temperature will be low for seven days, and if they are in one of the qualifying groups, they will receive their payment. That is an important feature, which I stress.

Some criticisms were made of the scheme. Figures were quoted in respect of quality housing, for example. I appreciate that there is a long-running argument about the quality of Scottish and British housing. Through the home energy efficiency payment scheme, however, the Government have spent £350 million in Great Britain since 1991 and have improved the insulation of about 10 per cent. of total housing stock. That is a dramatic improvement, because insulation is the other side of paying for heating bills. I think that everyone agrees that, the better insulated the home, the more likely it is that people will be both more comfortable and have a more economical system.

Various hon. Members, including the hon. Members for Perth and Kinross and for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), mentioned excess winter mortality. The figures are shocking and a matter of concern, but there is no simple, easy scientific explanation for the link. The hon. Member for Moray did not mention the fact, if it is a question of cold weather, that the figures are even higher in Portugal and Israel. In the past five years, they have been higher in England than in Scotland, so, although that important scientific matter should be investigated, it is a little unfortunate and overstates the case to put the figures quite as high as certain hon. Members did.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Is the Minister seriously saying that, in his opinion, the excess mortality, a well-observed scientific fact through the winter months, bears no relation to the coldness of the climate and ability of certain people to afford heating?

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman was not listening. I said that it is not possible to correlate this in the simplistic fashion in which that has been done by certain hon. Members. For example, there is no doubt that cold climate has an impact on winter mortality—no one challenges that for a moment—but waiting at a bus stop on an icy day is likely to have more effect than many other factors, and obviously there also is the incidence of disease and such matters. It is a matter of concern, but it is being studied and there is no consensus on it.

Mr. Connarty: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Evans: No. I am going to move on, because I have noted well over two dozen points, which I want to answer quickly in the time left to me.

The basic problem of eligibility was raised by various Opposition Members, but my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries put his finger directly on the difficulty: if we increase the groups, we will have to pay much more money. Let me make that clear. If, during a winter of last winter's severity, we extended the present system to all recipients of income support, the additional cost would be £100 million; if we extended it to all pensioners, the cost would be £150 million to £200 million. Therefore, there would be a £300 million to £350 million extra cost on a winter of last winter's severity, which, it is fair to say, was one of the more severe.

It is all very well for the Scottish National party to make pledges in Scotland. It is not likely to have responsibility for the United Kingdom Government. It pledged £170 million of expenditure, apparently in Scotland, but, again, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries said, there will be anguish in parts of England, particularly on the east coast, which sometimes has colder weather than Scotland.

Mr. Bill Walker: When we discuss these matters, it is important that we study all the facts. My hon. Friend will know that the Royal Air Force built bases at Dalcross, Lossiemouth and Kinloss because of the weather factor—the best in the United Kingdom—and because of the fact that, on the east coast, for instance at Binbrook in Lincolnshire, the wind chill factor is bound to be much higher. The RAF would not be able to fly there at given times of the year.

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend makes important points, with which I respectfully agree.

Mrs. Ewing: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Evans: May I make a little progress before giving way? Let me pursue the matter.

I have discussed the problem of fine-tuning the present scheme, but I have not yet come to the wind chill factor, which my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) has mentioned. I notice that the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross referred to last Friday's debate and said that the Cold Weather Payments (Wind Chill Factor) Bill was uncontroversial. I point out to her that the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) spoke for 47 minutes. I had three minutes to reply. The hon. Member for Perth and Kinross says that the Bill is uncontroversial, but it appears to be controversial with the Labour Front-Bench team.

The Bill—I will explain what is wrong with it at the moment, because that will illustrate the difficulties with bringing the wind chill factor into account—is too vague to cost with any particular accuracy.

Mrs. Ewing *rose—*

Mr. Evans: Let me continue, please.

The difficulty with the Bill is that the cost, again on a winter of last winter's severity, would be several hundreds of millions of pounds. I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) explain what the Labour party would do. He did not promise to support the Bill. It is easy for Back Benchers to raise expectations, but the difficulty is that those who pretend to government have to make some pretense that they have some ability to add up.

The difficulty over the Bill is simple. It sounds a good idea—we are all used to the graphics that appear on televised weather forecasts—to bring the wind chill factor into account. The Government are aware of that argument. That is why last summer we commissioned the Meteorological Office to report to us specifically on the issue and to review the state of the arguments. We not only obtained that advice, but published it and placed it in the House of Commons Library. Paragraph 9.7 of the advice summarises as follows:

"for much of the country the additional domestic heating requirements generated as a result of the effects of exposure of houses to wind are too small and too highly variable"

to be incorporated into the scheme. The difficulty is that that is the basis of the advice.

The difficulty with the Cold Weather Payments (Wind Chill Factor) Bill is that it instructs the independent adjudicating officers, first, to take wind chill into account in respect of assessing the necessary temperature. It does not tell them how to do it. If that had come to pass in the middle of this winter, the only result would have been chaos, because the Bill did not explain how such an assessment was to be done, and there is no consensus on how it should be done.

Secondly, and more seriously, the Bill instructs the independent adjudicating service to take into account forecasts of seven days. That cannot be done to the requisite standard with the present state of technology. That is why the Government are commissioning further research on the matter—to find out whether this is practical and sensible.

The Bill is wholly unnecessary, because, under section 138 of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992, we have the statutory power—the power that we use to make the regulations each year—to fine-tune the scheme. We are able, if we wish and if we are persuaded that it is right and proper, to take that into account. The difficulty is whether it is right and appropriate to do that. *[Interruption.]* I have tried to introduce an element of clarity to show the absurdity of the proposal. I shall now explain the matter, because it is obvious that the hon. Member for Moray is impatient.

Mr. Salmond: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister is making the speech that he did not make on Friday. Is it in order to reply to this debate with such a speech?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows quite well that that is not a point of order.

Mr. Evans: Hon. Members have repeatedly mentioned wind chill and it is important to explain that we are studying that matter. Officials will ensure that the necessary inquiries are made in time for the matter to be properly assessed by next autumn, when the orders have to be laid.

There has been a misunderstanding. The Meteorological Office data form only a small part of the analysis. The difficult questions relate to what scientists recommend on the way in which wind chill affects buildings and whether that can be measured in a way that will enable it to be sensibly incorporated in a practical—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We now move to the debate on elective ventilation for kidney transplants.

Kidney Transplants

12.30 pm

Sir John Hannam (Exeter): I am pleased to have this opportunity to raise an important issue of public health—the transplantation of kidneys and other organs, and the decline in the number of organ donors which is being experienced in the 1990s after a steady rise in the 1980s. Some 20 years ago, in the 1970s, there was a great deal of optimism about an abundance of kidneys for transplants—we just had to go out and get them. Some 20 years later, it is plain that such optimism was very wide of the mark.

During the 1980s, various factors combined to increase the number of kidney transplants from 814 in 1981 to 1,736 in 1990. Despite that, the waiting list of patients doubled from 2,000 to about 4,000, and the latest estimate is of more than 5,000. We need about 3,500 transplants a year to meet the demand. Since 1990, the number of transplants each year has fallen despite intensive efforts by the Government and health authorities to obtain kidney donors. The current refusal rate in the United Kingdom for organ donation is 25 to 30 per cent., but that is radically corrected if relatives know that a potential donor had wished to donate organs.

The excellent report by a working party of the British Transplantation Society makes several suggestions for improving the situation. However, I should like to concentrate on a method that was introduced in the Exeter transplant unit in 1988 but which had to be abandoned in 1984 after ethical objections, which resulted in a ban on legal grounds by the Department of Health.

The system is known as elective ventilation or interventional ventilation. Under it, patients who were dying, mainly from strokes, were put on ventilators in the intensive care unit until they were declared brain-stem dead, at which point their organs were retrieved for transplantation. That was done with the full permission of the patients' relatives and of clinicians, and in accordance with the Exeter protocol.

The Exeter unit achieved significant success with elective ventilation from 1988 to 1994. Whereas, throughout the country, dialysis numbers were steadily increasing, in Exeter they remained constant and under control, and the number of transplants went up year by year. In 1993, the Exeter unit performed 43 transplants and was one of the busiest in Europe, based on transplants per head of population. It had an 80 per cent. increase in donors. In 1994, when the system was banned in the second half of the year, there were only 23 transplants. In 1995, the figure dropped to 20, and was down to only 10 last year.

In 1993, with optimism running high at the unit, the Exeter and district community health council reported,

"a patient in Exeter could almost be guaranteed a transplant within 12 months."

Sadly, that has now radically changed, and, as the transplant rate has gone down, the number of patients on dialysis has grown. There is a national shortage of donor organs, because the number of deaths among those whose organs are suitable for transplantation has decreased. For example, because of increased car safety, there are not as many road accidents.

Renal units are full of people who cannot receive transplants because of difficulty over the supply of kidneys. The consequences of that for patients' quality of life and for the effective use of resources has been devastating.

In October 1994, as a result of a medical practitioner in, I think, Bristol complaining that, under existing legislation, it was illegal and unethical for a patient to be kept on a ventilator when there was no hope of survival purely to accommodate procedures of contact with relatives to gain approval for organ donation, I took a delegation of renal experts to see the Under–Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville), to try to find a solution to the problem.

The Minister was sympathetic but was reluctant to move towards a change in the law on this ethical problem in the absence of consensus within the medical profession. He suggested that the profession should consult and seek such a consensus, following which the Government might legislate to bring us more into line with most other European Union countries in which procedures allow seriously ill, comatose patients to be routinely admitted to intensive care units while undergoing investigation, often while ventilated. In those countries, interventional or elective ventilation is not necessary: patients already receive such treatment.

We are caught in an ethical trap. Our common law principles state that patients have the right to give or withhold consent to treatment, but that such consent extends only to treatment that is intended to benefit the patient. If, as in these cases, the patient is unconscious, treatment may be given in the absence of consent, but only to the extent that is necessary to save the patient's life, and provided it is not against the patient's known wishes. If the clinician considers that there remains any possible benefit from intensive care, the treatment is lawful. The problem is that of obtaining the consent of a patient who is effectively brain-stem dead.

Throughout the country, thousands of relatives and renal consultants would like legislation to re-establish elective ventilation as a possible avenue to organ donation in cases where both the transplant and intensive care unit teams are in favour; where the next of kin agree; and where pressure on the unit's facilities permit.

The working party of the British Transplantation Society, in taking account of ethical concerns in the medical profession, proposed that certain precautions should apply. For example, it proposed that a clinical trial by a nationally agreed protocol could assess the risk of persistent vegetative state, which is one of the worries that has been expressed. In 1995, the British Medical Association asked the Government to introduce legislation, and, on the issue of ethics, both the BMA and the Royal College of Physicians have approved of elective ventilation, as have health trusts and health authorities.

The report by Exeter and District community health council, which was compiled between April and September 1996, states that the council did not meet a single individual, whether patient or professional, who supported the current ban on elective ventilation. I have a letter from Frank Howarth, the co-chairman of the National Kidney Federation, which represents more than 24,000 renal patients in the United Kingdom. The letter states:

"The current waiting list for kidney transplants in the UK at 31 December 1996 was 5,421; therefore, it is imperative every avenue is explored to ensure this waiting list is reduced.

I was fortunate enough to receive a kidney transplant in 1991, which still functions well and will testify to the difference it makes—it really is the 'Gift of Life'—and the most cost effective method of dealing with end stage renal failure.

Elective ventilation was the subject of a discussion document published by the British Transplantation Society in September 1995. This paper outlines a recommended protocol and, amongst other recommendations, recommends the Government should introduce legislation to enable elective ventilation to be re-introduced as an avenue to organ donation by making specific exemptions from the requirement to treat for the patient's own benefit."

I also have a letter from Professor Fabre, of the Institute of Child Health, and should like to quote a couple of important passages from it. He writes:

"elective ventilation remains a potentially extremely valuable additional avenue to organ donation and, most importantly, it is a source of donors entirely distinct from and additional to the current pool of potential donors. Every single donor obtained by elective ventilation is a donor that could not possibly have been obtained by any initiative other than elective ventilation (or a massive increase in intensive care facilities). When"

the Minister

"says that there is no evidence that elective ventilation increases organ donation, it is clear that he does not understand this fundamental point."

Professor Fabre continues:

"The Department says that it will not contemplate changes in the law for elective ventilation while the medical profession is divided. This is a transparent cover for sitting on their hands. They know that the medical profession (and indeed any other group) will always be divided on any ethical issue. Abortion is a good example where differences of opinion (strongly held) do not preclude legislation on the basis of a broadly held consensus, with doctors and patients proceeding as their individual consciences dictate.

Elective ventilation has the support of the BMA, the Royal College of Surgeons, the Royal College of Physicians, the Royal College of General Practitioners and several other august bodies. This hardly represents a divided profession. However, the Department has not taken a single constructive step or made any suggestions whatsoever as to how we might proceed on this issue. My feeling is that it does not matter how many influential medical organisations support elective ventilation. Fear of the vocal minority will keep the Government from acting."

Powerful bodies of medical opinion have found the procedure ethically justifiable, yet the clinical practice has been stopped by a point of law raised by some medical practitioners.

On an emotional level, I remind the House that many families with a terminally injured loved one would prefer to have the opportunity of saying their farewells while their loved one is still on the ventilator, with blood circulation maintained, rather than when he or she is completely brain-stem dead and with the ventilator switched off. Those relatives might also take solace from the thought that organ donation gives life to several other desperately ill patients, and that some good will come from their personal tragedy. It is well known that such thoughts sometimes help grieving relatives to come to terms with their loss.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to accept the case for giving elective ventilation a chance—to enable a substantial increase in kidney transplants and many more heart, lung and liver transplants. By doing so, the overall benefit to patient care in Britain will be considerable, and the anguish of many sufferers will be relieved.

Last weekend in Taunton, a young man was admitted to hospital suffering from a massive brain haemorrhage. He was obviously going die, but his wife—who was extremely well informed on the transplant crisis—asked that his organs be used to help others. That young wife was most aggrieved when she was told that, under current law, her husband, because he was going to die, could not be put on a ventilator. Her sense of bereavement was intensified.

I hope that my hon. Friend will take the initiative now in asking the leaders of our esteemed medical colleges to set up without delay a working party to secure a consensus on this matter, which we all desire.

12.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) for providing this opportunity to speak about organ transplantation—which is a wonder of modern medical science and has, as he said, truly been the gift of life for so many people. I appreciate his long interest in health and disability issues. In this debate, he spoke with his customary eloquence and feeling.

It has been little more than 30 years since people diagnosed as having end stage renal, heart or liver failure were bound to die within a few months. Thanks to the marvel of organ transplantation, it is now possible for such people to live long and active lives—to work, to enjoy taking part in strenuous sports—and to do all those things that fully fit people can do. I pay tribute to the doctors who regularly perform those modern miracles, and to the nurses, transplant co-ordinators and other support staff who contribute to transplantation.

I should also like to express my deepest gratitude—I am sure that all hon. Members in the Chamber, although they are few in number, will join me—to those who have donated their organs so that others might live. In the United Kingdom each year, more than 1,500 kidneys, 300 hearts and 600 livers are transplanted, thanks to the selflessness of others. Lungs, pancreas and bowels can also be transplanted, and increasing numbers of those operations take place every year. Moreover, each year about 2,500 corneal transplants are performed, giving precious sight to others. All that is due to the generosity of those who have died, and of their families. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter will agree that it is a wonderful success story.

We should not forget, however, that 6,000 people are currently on the waiting list for organs, and that 5,000 of them are waiting for kidneys. My hon. Friend rightly drew attention to those figures. The number of those waiting is due not to a lack of money or of clinical expertise but to a shortage of donor organs. Usually, only organs from people who have died from sudden brain injury are suitable, but, as my hon. Friend pointed out, vastly improved road accident figures and improvements in neurology have reduced the pool of potential donors. Furthermore, the organs of some of those in the pool will be unsuitable because of damage or disease. Sadly, the chronic shortage of organs is a worldwide problem.

It is for those reasons that we continue to encourage people to become organ donors. The Department of Health currently spends over £1 million a year on publicity to achieve that goal, and the publicity's value can be judged from the fact that almost 4 million people have joined the NHS organ donor register since we launched it a short time ago, in October 1994. A tremendous amount of publicity is also provided by voluntary organisations. I am sure that the House will join me in thanking them for their splendid efforts on behalf of organ donation.

[Mr. John Horam]

After all the publicity, the number of transplants is being maintained. Demand is rising, however, and supply is not keeping pace. It is therefore unsurprising that radical solutions to the problem have been suggested, including the procedure known as "elective ventilation".

The majority of organs for transplant are taken from people who, having suffered sudden brain injury, have been taken into intensive care and placed on life support systems—with the object of saving their lives—but who, sadly, have died there. If they or their families have agreed to organ donation, their bodies remain in intensive care and their lungs remain artificially ventilated so that blood can continue to circulate until the organs can be removed. That has to be done, or the organs would rapidly deteriorate and be unsuitable for transplantation.

Some people who might be suitable as organ donors die in hospital, although not in intensive care. A few years ago, doctors at one hospital devised a protocol under which patients on ordinary wards who were expected to die shortly were—with the permission of their families, as my hon. Friend said—taken to intensive care and placed on life support systems, so that their organs could be maintained until they could be removed for transplantation after death was pronounced. That is a description of the procedure known as "elective ventilation", which is the subject of this debate.

In 1990, details of the elective ventilation protocol and the results obtained were published in *The Lancet*. The article suggested that the procedure could achieve a significant increase in the number of transplants performed. However, many people, both inside and outside the medical profession, had grave reservations about the ethics and the legality of subjecting a patient to invasive procedures that were of no benefit to that patient but aimed solely at maintaining organs for eventual transplantation into others.

As far as I am aware, elective ventilation was practised very little outside the hospital where it was originally devised, probably because of the concerns about the ethical and legal position. My hon. Friend is slightly at variance on that, because he suggested that it was rather more widely practised than I understand it to have been.

In 1994, an independent research study team informed the Department of Health that they had received a legal opinion that elective ventilation was unlawful. The Department of Health therefore sought and obtained an opinion from Queen's counsel, which was that elective ventilation was indeed unlawful, because any intervention made without the patient's consent must be in the patient's best interests, or it could be judged to be an assault. Clearly, elective ventilation is of no benefit to the person receiving it.

The United Kingdom Health Departments informed the national health service of counsel's opinion, and the practice of elective ventilation ceased at that point. To have done otherwise could have left health authorities, NHS trusts and individual clinicians open to prosecution. I am sure that none of us would have wanted that to happen.

Understandably, the supporters of elective ventilation, especially the people at the hospital that pioneered it, which is in my hon. Friend's constituency, were unhappy about the effect of the legal opinion. A number of them met my predecessor, as my hon. Friend said, and put to him their arguments in favour of the procedure. In essence, those were that, under the protocol, the procedure was carried out only with the fully informed consent of the patient's relatives, and that, without elective ventilation, the number of transplants would fall. The supporters of elective ventilation also suggested that a change in the law might be sought to enable it to take place.

For the law, the issue hinges on consent to treatment. As I have said, legal advice is that any intervention, if it is not done in the interests of the patient, could be judged an assault, even though the patient's relatives have given consent. There are sound reasons for that: the patient would not, for example, otherwise have protection against unnecessary major surgery. Intubation of a patient in intensive care is not a minor procedure, and the question of anticipated death is worrying for many people.

At what stage is it possible to say that a patient will inevitably die? Placing people in intensive care under such circumstances also carries the risk, albeit probably a small one of inducing persistent vegetative state in the patient—a subject to which my hon. Friend referred. Such a scenario could do great harm to the cause of organ donation, as other bad news—and, indeed, rumour—has done in the past. It would, of course, also be a cause of great distress to the family, and would place them under additional stress.

The general principle that a person may not, without consent, be given treatment that is not in his or her own interest is clearly important. Anyone attempting to alter that principle would find themselves in a minefield. They would have to find a way of modifying the principle without leaving a breach through which others might gallop. It could be argued, for example, that a patient expected to die should, before death, be subjected to treatment that would facilitate research on his or her body after death. Justification for such treatment might be claimed on the ground that the research might result in saving other lives. Many people will find that argument unacceptable.

In 1994, when the NHS was informed of the legal opinion on elective ventilation, some people expressed fears that the number of transplants would drop. Happily, that did not happen. In 1993, there were 1,571 cadaveric kidney transplants in the United Kingdom; in 1994, there were 1,601; and in 1995, there were 1,645. Heart transplants, including heart and lung transplants, rose from 338 in 1993 to 366 in 1994; in 1995, there were 349. In 1993, there were 534 liver transplants; in 1994, there were 620; and in 1995, there were 667. The cessation of elective ventilation does not appear to have had an effect nationally, although I accept that the story may well be different in the hospital in Exeter that my hon. Friend knows so well.

Having made that point, I make it clear that we are not complacent—indeed, we are far from complacent—about the transplantation figures. The numbers of kidney and heart transplants have not increased greatly in recent years, although the figures for liver transplants have been somewhat better. The so-called plateau effect

in kidneys and hearts is being experienced in other countries which, like the UK, have been performing transplants for a number of years.

We have therefore introduced a number of measures aimed at maintaining and, if possible, improving the transplant figures. Apart from the NHS organ donor register, which I have mentioned, we have introduced donor declarations on driving licences, a reimbursement scheme for hospitals whose intensive care units maintain organ donors, multi-organ retrieval teams which have resulted in more organs being retrieved per donor, and support for the education of hospital staff involved in organ donation and transplantation.

We continue to monitor and review provisions for organ procurement and publicity for organ donation. Together with the medical and nursing professions, the transplant co-ordinators and the voluntary organisations, we will continue to consider carefully all suggestions put to us that might result in more transplants and the gift of life, about which my hon. Friend spoke so eloquently, for many more people. In that context, I welcome my hon. Friend's specific suggestion about discussions between the royal colleges. Such discussions could be extremely valuable, and I will look into the matter sympathetically.

Neurological Disorders

12.55 pm

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford–on–Avon): I am grateful for the opportunity to draw attention to the needs of people suffering from neurological conditions, and the needs of their families and carers. Early-day motion 252, in my name and supported by 55 right hon. and hon. Members, briefly states the issues on which I would like to enlarge. The words of the early-day motion are:

"That this House notes that some 1.8 million people in the United Kingdom are significantly affected by a neurological condition, that the needs of many of them for both health and social care are complex and inadequately met and that organisational structures and interests may obstruct the provision of appropriate services; and calls upon local authorities, health authorities and NHS trusts to apply both the letter and the spirit of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 through joint planning and commissioning of services for people affected by a neurological condition."

I am indebted to the Neurological Alliance for encouragement and advice in pursuing these matters. The Neurological Alliance is an umbrella group of 30 charities concerned with individual neurological conditions. It contains household name charities concerned with certain disorders that are common: Alzheimer's, epilepsy, stroke, migraine, Parkinson's and multiple sclerosis. Other charities within the Neurological Alliance represent sufferers from uncommon conditions, such as Huntington's disease, forms of muscular dystrophy and hereditary ataxias.

Research shows that, in an average health district of 250,000 people, there will be 4,000 to 5,000 people aged over 16 with a disabling neurological condition, and of them, perhaps 1,500 will be so disabled as to require help for most of their day-to-day activities. People with neurological conditions make up 20 per cent. of acute admissions to medical wards. A minimum of 3,285 people will be seen annually in outpatients' departments in each health district. People with neurological conditions are 13 per cent. of disabled people living at home and 30 per cent. of disabled people living in residential institutions.

It is useful to consider neurological conditions together, despite the great variety of those conditions, because the needs of sufferers, their families and carers have certain things in common. People with neurological conditions are a major responsibility of the health service and of social services departments, yet for that large group of people deserving of the best care we can give, we have not—I use the phrase advisedly—got our act together.

I will not dwell on how much more might be done to prevent some of these conditions. Of course we should do more to promote better health care. Alcohol and drug abuse, including smoking, can result in neurological damage. Improved road conditions and better lighting could prevent accidents that lead to neurological damage. Genetic information and counselling need to be available to people who may pass on a genetic condition.

At the onset of medical conditions—for example, after an accident—there is a short interval in which it may be possible to arrest or limit major brain damage. Whether that can be done depends on access to accident and emergency units, quick and accurate diagnosis in them, and the availability of scanning and intensive care equipment. A survey of consultants in 1995, however, found that only 17 per cent. of consultants worked in

[Mr. Alan Howarth]

a hospital where there was a physician or neurologist with special responsibility for stroke. Although a brain scan is a critical element in diagnosis, the Stroke Association reports that an estimated 30,000 patients a year with acute stroke are admitted to a hospital with no CT scanning facilities.

I want to emphasise the complexity of the needs of sufferers from neurological conditions. The disorders cross the boundaries of health and social care and hospital and community services, and the divisions of physical disability, mental health and provision for children, adults and the elderly.

Many neurological conditions have a range of symptoms that require specialist expertise for recognition and treatment. Early and accurate diagnosis is of great importance. Undiagnosed neurological symptoms cause enormous insecurity.

Certain conditions are so rare that a general practitioner may see only one or two cases, or even none, yet specialist services are in short supply. The Association of British Neurologists tells us that we need one neurologist per 100,000 of the population. Even if we had that many, a large number of stroke victims would still be seen by a practitioner in an alternative discipline, and the majority of those with Alzheimer's disease and some with late onset disorders such as Parkinson's would still be seen by geriatricians and psycho-geriatricians.

The Multiple Sclerosis Society points out that only a consultant neurologist may prescribe beta interferon, but, because of the long waiting lists, patients who would benefit from that drug cannot have it for long periods.

With the shortage of neurologists and the inevitable lack of specialised knowledge among most general practitioners, it is all the more important that there should be guidance for referral and re-referral, and systems for exchanging information and advice on management.

Neurological conditions have an impact on all aspects of people's lives. Some conditions are variable and unpredictable. Some are slowly degenerative. All require timely and appropriate input, ranging from information and counselling through to rehabilitative treatment, special housing and respite care. A range of disciplines and services needs to be involved, supported and co-ordinated. Each sufferer and each sufferer's carers need comprehensive and co-ordinated care.

People with neurological conditions have an array of problems that need to be recognised and addressed. They have needs for appropriate medical intervention, including therapies for improvement and maintenance, monitoring the side effects of drugs, avoidance of pressure sores, incontinence aids, optimal nutrition, comprehensive information, mobility equipment—the Government's withdrawal of the mobility component of disability living allowance for adults who go into hospital for more than 28 days does not help—communication aids, opportunities for employment and leisure.

Patients require a holistic approach to their needs—medical, social and emotional. They are bewildered by the array of agencies and professionals. Without co-ordination, they will not receive timely and appropriate treatment and services and continuity of care. Co-ordination is often lacking. The work load of neurologists is such that they have little opportunity to explore beyond the medical needs of their patients. Service provision is fragmented, and liaison between neurology departments and social services departments is too often poor.

We should be able to expect that a neurological team will have a spectrum of expertise—neurologist, rehabilitative physician, occupational physio and speech therapists, psychologist, nurse, social worker, dietician and, very importantly, a designated co-ordinator with responsibility for ensuring that the right things happen at the right moment. The co-ordinator, as the central point of contact for the patient, the patient's family and the professionals, should be able to ensure proper communication between all concerned, continuity of care and ready access to information or services from the appropriate person. Evidence makes it clear that those stroke patients, for example, who are helped by a multi-disciplinary team tend to make the best recovery.

That model is not, regrettably, what we generally find. The reality is too often a deficiency of relevant expertise and a passing of the buck, particularly between health and social services. The concentration in the health service on acute needs is too much at the expense of proper attention to long-term, progressive, but less acute, needs. The market trading system in the NHS is not suitable to achieve the teamwork and co-ordination that neurological sufferers need.

In 1995, only 21 per cent. of consultants worked in hospitals with a stroke multi-disciplinary team. There is a lack of neurologists and of specialists in rehabilitation—in 1995 only 44 per cent of consultants had access to a stroke rehabilitation unit—and the distribution of rehabilitation centres is unplanned and arbitrary. Some areas do not have such a service, while others can provide help only to acute cases. Lack of access to multi-disciplinary rehabilitation teams is the result not only of lack of funding but of lack of understanding by other professionals of its importance, as well as lack of co-operation between different health and social care agencies.

Social services departments do not generally consider people with neurological conditions as a distinctive, though varied, group, but usually bracket them with the physically disabled or the elderly. Neurological conditions pose challenges to structures and working practices that most social services departments are not meeting. In spite of that, the Government are pressing local authorities to privatise social care.

If social services departments are unable to establish proper procedures and standards, how can we have any confidence that they will insist on them from private contractors? The Carers National Association has recorded its concern with the wholesale contracting out of services for accountability, quality of standards, choice and monitoring.

The 7 million carers in our society—1.5 million of them caring for a person for more than 20 hours a week—do not receive the support they should. The aspirations of the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act, introduced two years ago by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North–West (Mr. Wicks), need to be turned into reality.

The additional personal tax allowance for people who work as well as care is available only to men. It is extraordinary that women are not eligible. Invalid carers

allowance is an exiguous benefit of only £36.60, with no taper, hedged about with restrictive rules, which were recently tightened by the Government's new regulations on computation of earnings.

Some 20 per cent. of carers have never had a break. More respite provision is urgently needed. The predicament of young carers needs special attention, and is often a particular anxiety for a patient suffering from a neurological condition. A thorough review of support for carers is needed in the context of an overall review of the funding of long-term care.

Let me illustrate how things can go wrong in our present pattern—or lack of pattern. My first example is of a sufferer from Huntington's disease, about whom I learned from the Huntington's Disease Association. Huntington's presents a uniquely grim combination of mental health problems and profound physical problems.

Philip was 37 years old when he died, having been diagnosed with Huntington's disease for 12 years. He was cared for at home by his wife, who received the help of a carer for four hours in the morning and a night sitter. When she needed respite, social services said that Philip would have to stay in a long-stay geriatric hospital as it could not afford hospice fees. Philip's wife visited the hospital, and decided that that would not do.

Philip's condition deteriorated fast. Social services suggested nursing home care, but, after two weeks, the nursing home said that it could not cope. The suggestion for his future care was the long-stay geriatric ward. Philip's wife asked again if he could go to the hospice. Social services again said no, because it could not fund that. At that point, the health authority said that Philip did not fit into its criteria for continuing care.

A case conference was called. Everyone agreed that Philip needed terminal care, and an assessment in a unit specialising in Huntington's disease, so that his needs could be clearly established. Then, when the issue of funding arose, came disagreement. Eventually, the health authority agreed to fund the assessment, but Philip died in a general ward in a hospital on the day that he was due to be transferred to the unit. He had spent the last three months of his life being transferred in and out of hospital while people decided whether he met the continuing health care criteria.

The Alzheimer's Disease Society tells me of the case of an elderly woman in the advanced stages of Alzheimer's—deaf, blind and virtually immobile. Her husband was told last year that, with the introduction of new eligibility criteria, she no longer qualified for NHS continuing care, because she was neither unlikely to die in the next six weeks nor in a coma. He was therefore asked to move her to a private nursing home, where he would have to pay.

Shortly after being informed of the decision, the husband fell seriously ill and has been diagnosed with cancer. The health authority continued to insist that his wife must be moved, and that

"the health of the carer, regardless of the severity of the illness, is not a consideration in the decision to move her."

She is still in the ward, and it remains to be seen what will happen.

Finally, let me describe a case reported to me by the South Warwickshire Council of Disabled People. AD is a 37-year-old woman who has suffered from multiple sclerosis for a number of years. She developed psychotic behaviour. She was treated in hospital, and her condition settled. She was given a date for discharge. One week before that date, the social services department informed her that it was unable to fund her care package at home and that her case needed to be reviewed between the social services and the health authority. There ensued an argument between social services and the health authority so protracted that it was another five months before the woman left hospital.

I strongly endorse the words of the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People in Bradford on 7 January about the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. He said:

"The first rights of access under the Act place duties on service providers not to refuse service and not to provide it on less favourable terms."

The Government, however, have a duty to ensure that health authorities and social services departments have the means to fulfil their duties. I quote from the findings of a joint review team from the Audit Commission and the social services inspectorate on Warwickshire's social services:

"Because of financial constraints, the Department was in danger of reducing its role to a minimalist reactive one, concentrating only on its statutory obligations to those most at risk and neglecting those capable of rehabilitation, which is not a viable long term strategy."

We can only be ashamed of the inadequacy of current service provision. Against the inevitable financial constraints, the need for the cost-effectiveness that properly combined and co-ordinated holistic provision could achieve in the support of sufferers from neurological conditions is all the greater. The Government should set national standards and models; they should also, I suggest, top-slice funds from the health service and social services to support the network of regional specialist centres that is needed, and to provide financial leverage to ensure the co-ordination and co-operation of the various services involved.

I pay tribute to the voluntary organisations—those in the Neurological Alliance and others—that play such an invaluable role in supporting sufferers from neurological conditions. Voluntary organisations play a vital part in representing service users, providing information, advice and guidance, and establishing local support groups. In many cases, they directly provide advice, comfort and support—often including equipment and sometimes financial support—working alongside the statutory services.

The organisations work at all levels—individual, local and national—and across all boundaries. Their work, which is vital today, will become of increasing importance as the number of people requiring long-term care is likely to increase. In many cases, advances in treatment and management will not produce a cure, but will stabilise or slow down the decline of patients so that life is prolonged. Today, there are more than 670,000 people with dementia. By the year 2021, the number is expected to be nearer 1 million.

The charities are working to promote the collection and exchange of information on neurological conditions, to organise and participate in training programmes, to act as channels for mutual collaboration on models of care, technology and research and to inform and influence policy makers about the needs and circumstances of people with neurological conditions.

[Mr. Alan Howarth]

The Government need to be clear in their own mind about the role that they expect voluntary organisations to perform. They need to be consistent in the manner in which they work with voluntary organisations. Voluntary organisations, as expert representatives of sufferers, should play a key role in partnership with the Government in policy formation. As they know better than any of us, in all too many respects, we have a long way to go to reach the standards of care for sufferers of neurological conditions that we could and should provide.

1.13 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Simon Burns): I thank the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) for raising this important subject. I was particularly interested to hear the valid and important points he raised, although I suspect that he would not expect me to accept his interpretation or analysis of certain issues.

As the hon. Gentleman said, neurological disorders affect large numbers of people. The Neurological Alliance estimates that about 1.8 million people suffer from them. Whether they are relatively common conditions such as Alzheimer's, stroke, epilepsy or Parkinson's disease, less common ones such as motor neurone disease, or very rare conditions such as progressive supranuclear palsy, they impose an enormous burden on sufferers and their families. In addition, statutory health and social services clearly have a vital role in providing appropriate and effective services and treatment.

The Neurological Alliance has produced a very useful document: "Living with a Neurological Condition—Standards of Care". I am more than happy to endorse its broad thrust and its general message, as my predecessor did with the alliance's 1992 document—of which it is a revision. I am sure that health authorities, NHS hospital and community trusts and GP fundholders will find it a useful aid when they are drawing up contracts for services for people with neurological conditions.

Patients with neurological disorders—and their carers—are the real experts in what it means to live with neurological conditions. That is why one of the six medium-term priorities for this year and next requires the NHS to give greater voice and influence to users of NHS services and their carers in their own care, the development and definition of standards set for NHS services locally and the development of NHS policy locally and nationally.

As far as the development of policy nationally is concerned, Ministers and officials of the Department of Health have close contacts with the Neurological Alliance—which includes nearly 30 charities representing people with neurological conditions and their carers. Indeed, my predecessor formally launched the alliance in the House in February 1994.

The alliance is receiving five years' core funding from the Department, amounting to £91,000 in total, and in 1996 we funded the production of its document, "Providing a service for people with neurological conditions", that includes a model of care which purchasers and providers of health services may wish to adopt. The alliance contributed to the NHS executive's listening exercise on the primary care-led NHS, and provided some very helpful comments.

We attach great importance to the need to involve users of services and their carers and representative bodies in the development of policy. We also have close contacts with many of the Neurological Alliance's member organisations, several of which have received funding from the Department under the section 64 general scheme of grants.

For example, officials at the Department are working closely with the epilepsy charities on the Department's epilepsy initiatives, for which funding has been provided amounting to more than £300,000 so far, including more than £30,000 to NHS epilepsy services development projects. The MS Society was closely involved in the guidance we issued last year on the introduction of beta interferon to the NHS.

Some people argue that the Government should prescribe at national level what treatments the NHS should provide, including treatments for people with neurological disorders. I do not believe that that would be right. No such list of treatments could ever hope to accommodate the range and complexity of the different cases that individual clinicians face all the time. It would be entirely inappropriate to take decisions out of the hands of the clinicians treating patients and into the province of others who possess neither the experience of caring for patients nor the expertise to make such decisions.

The role of the centre is to set the strategic direction for the NHS—as we do in the annual priorities and planning guidance and in other documents such as our recent White Papers on primary care and "A Service with Ambitions". We said in "A Service with Ambitions":

"the NHS and its partners should give increasing priority both to the prevention of physical and sensory disability, and to the problems associated with disability where it has been diagnosed. At the point of diagnosis people should be informed honestly, sensitively and fully of the nature and consequences of the disease and given access immediately to counselling, advice and support."

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Is it not a disgrace that, in some parts of the country, it can take up to six months from examination by a general practitioner to examination by a neurologist? My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) made a key point about the shortage of neurologists. In Lancashire, it can take six months to get an appointment to see a neurologist.

Mr. Burns: If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, I hope to address later in my speech the question of the number of neurologists and what is being done to increase it to provide greater care for people suffering from neurological diseases.

The White Paper continued:

"The NHS should be leading the way in changing public attitudes towards disabled people."

I am sure that no hon. Member would disagree with that. We all, regardless of our political views or prejudices, should work together to advance that cause.

Patients need to be confident that those working in the health service have the right knowledge and skills to do their jobs properly. The White Paper "Choice and Opportunity—Primary Care, The Future" sets out proposals to ensure that professionals working in primary health care have access to education and training that matches the needs of their patients. It responds to calls

for more opportunities for multi-disciplinary learning, for better continuous education, for more training outside hospitals and for improved research and development and clinical audit in primary care.

Primary care has developed rapidly in recent years. Advances in medical knowledge, backed up by new technologies, larger teams of dedicated staff bringing new skills to primary care, and increasing investment, have raised both the quality and the range of services provided. At the same time, many primary care teams have taken on a wider role in the provision, planning and management of services through GP fundholding and GP-led commissioning.

However, those changes and opportunities have also led to pressures on the service. Changes in the work force, including expectations and aspirations of those involved, have contributed to the pressures. Although services have generally improved, we acknowledge that the effect has been patchy. Some parts of the country and some groups of people continue to be less well served than others.

The hon. Member for Stratford–on–Avon raised a valid and important question about GPs. He was right to say that GPs may only once or twice during their working lives—a relatively short time—see patients suffering from one of the more complex or rarer problems that he described. Obviously, one cannot expect GPs to be experts on the subject and to be able to address the problems of those patients, but it is important—as I am sure the hon. Gentleman agrees—that they have the ability and the knowledge to refer such patients to the relevant neurologist or other clinician who can deal with those cases.

The hon. Gentleman also raised the question of the number of neurologists working in the health service at present. There are currently some 260 consultant neurologists in England and Wales, and their number has increased by about 4.3 per cent. in the past five years. I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that the Department of Health and the specialist work force advisory group will continue to monitor the need for additional neurologists and to seek to redress the problem, if the research shows that to be necessary.

The hon. Member also mentioned collaboration between agencies, which is critical for the provision of a first class service. Collaboration, both at a strategic level and at the level of individual care packages, is essential to meet the needs of people with chronic diseases, such as neurological disorders, and for older people with complex needs. Groups representing people with chronic conditions have emphasised the need for care co-ordination and management responsibility to be clearly assigned within primary health care teams.

The Department of Health, working with the Department of the Environment, has encouraged innovation in collaborative working, through guidance on joint commissioning and through training and development support. Further work is in progress to identify good practice in collaborative working across primary and social care boundaries.

People want and need information that will tell them about specific conditions and diseases, especially chronic conditions. The voluntary sector has developed a wide range of such information. For example, the British Epilepsy Association, the Motor Neurone Disease Association and the Parkinson's Disease Society all produce good, up-to-date, user-friendly literature to help to inform those who contact them. The freephone health information service puts callers in touch with appropriate support groups and provides condition-specific literature. The voluntary sector also provides people with information on appropriate services as well as advising what people can do for themselves to control or improve their condition.

I join the hon. Member for Stratford–on–Avon in paying tribute to the voluntary sector and to carers. They play an important role in providing practical and emotional support. In many ways, they are the unsung heroes of society, whose work all too often passes unnoticed because of their professionalism and commitment. They do not seek praise or attention: they get on with doing the job. By definition, people who are determined to get on with the job do not necessarily attract the thanks, support and praise that they richly deserve.

One of the principles of good primary care is that professionals should be knowledgeable about the conditions that present in primary care, and skilled in their treatment and in contribution to their prevention. Professionals need to be knowledgeable about the people to whom they are offering services, and services need to be co-ordinated by professionals who are aware of each others' contributions—including inter-professional working—and who know when to refer people for specialist care.

There should be no gaps in services. Necessary services should be accessible to people regardless of age, sex, ethnicity, disability or health status, and should reflect the needs and preferences of the individuals using them. Patients need to be confident that those working in primary care have the right knowledge and skills to do their job properly. That calls, in turn, for primary care staff to have access to high-quality professional education, training and development.

Such important issues cannot all be resolved overnight, but I am confident that we are working along the right lines and that what we are doing will benefit all people using the NHS, including people with neurological disorders and their caring families.

Engineering

1.27 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid–Staffordshire): I wish to discuss the Year of Engineering Success, which was launched by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade last Wednesday, and also to propose two changes in legislation that would encourage more students to become engineers. Before I begin, I wish to thank my constituent, John Evans of Lichfield, and Steve Potter, of the House of Commons Library, for their research, some of which I will be using today.

Engineering is big business. The United Kingdom engineering industry employs 1.8 million people, with forecast total sales for 1996 of £163.5 billion and exports of £81.5 billion. It is successful in comparison with other industries: the average share price of United Kingdom engineering companies rose by 120 per cent. between September 1992 and the middle of 1996, compared with a 70 per cent. rise in the FTSE share index during the same period. Despite that, engineering still suffers from a poor image, especially as a career choice among young people.

The Year of Engineering Success was launched on 22 January, and followed a meeting four years ago between the then President of the Board of Trade, now my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, and the Institution of Electrical Engineers, of which I happen to be a member. The initiative is the most recent of an on-going series to raise the profile of engineering as a career choice and as a significant contributor to the economy.

The Government state that YES recognises the potential impact of engineering on society from its traditional industrial applications to modern, applied technologies, such as keyhole surgery and virtual reality. It will co-ordinate a range of events that will take place throughout the year, is being supported by more than £1 million-worth of investment from the Government and the private sector—including companies that have recently been privatised, such as British Airways, British Gas, BP, National Grid, National Power, Rover Group and Vickers—and involves the engineering institutions.

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): As I am sure my hon. Friend knows, a launch of the Year of Engineering Success in Parliament in December—sponsored by the all-party engineering development group—made two points, on which I am sure he will touch. One is that every year should be a year of engineering success, and the second is that this year provides a chance to draw attention to the career opportunities of engineering and the requirement for better school education in mathematics and physics, and better further education to take advantage of those opportunities.

Mr. Fabricant: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Indeed, I recall attending that very opening ceremony in the other place last year. I shall be touching very shortly on the question of education, especially for those entering university. I support everything that he has said.

The events taking place during the Year of Engineering Success will be organised by a group of committees and will centre on the many key areas of engineering applications, including energy, construction, transport, agriculture, the environment and communications.

In fact, I understand from the Institution of Electrical Engineers that, today, it and GEC Marconi will be announcing jointly a new initiative to assist in-service training of teachers in electronics, which is one of the points that my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) mentioned. The scheme will be known as "Marconi Days" and is expected to provide training for up to 1,000 teachers annually. The detailed programme will be developed with the teaching profession, and pilots are expected to be launched in the autumn.

The application of engineering in industry is one of the central strands of the Government's science policy that was published in 1993. As my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes has said, this year should not be the only year of engineering success. Indeed, there have been previous such years, and I hope that there will be many in future. I shall point out the dangers that face us, which could result in years of engineering failure—but I shall reserve that until the end of the debate.

The practical and financial benefits that engineering can bring about when applied to industry are well documented. One engineer who invented a new type of metal nut to overcome a glitch in the air-powered starter motor of a type of jet engine, has saved his employers, British Airways, a potential £1 million a year in quicker aircraft turnarounds.

At the other end of the scale, many people have heard of the Scottish engineer who has designed an automated cash dispenser that uses friction rather than the present vacuum system to pick up notes. His invention, on which he worked during his university course work in mechanical engineering, has won several awards, and will double the speed that cash machines take to dispense money—which will not be pleasing to some of my colleagues whose wives use their cards to dispense cash.

One of the best publicised inventions by a British inventor in recent months has been of the clockwork radio, which was invented by Trevor Baylis. Baylis decided to invent the clockwork radio after watching a television programme about how difficult it was to get educational information on AIDS to people in Africa because batteries were expensive or unobtainable and electricity supplies erratic.

Through my former company, I supplied and installed systems for Radio Uganda and Uganda Television. Part of that work was funded by the World Health Organisation for the very purpose of conveying educational information on AIDS. How good it is that the output of my excellent radio studios will be well received on clockwork radios. Twenty thousand such clockwork radios are produced every month in a South African factory, which employs more than 150 staff, most of whom are disabled.

All is not rosy, however. A former colleague of mine, John Forrest, chairman of a working group established by the Royal Academy of Engineering, has said:

> "The UK produces some of the best engineers in the world but many firms, especially small and medium ones, are complaining they cannot recruit the right kind of engineer."

Encouraging more young engineers to train to the level to meet industry's needs is one of the main objectives of the YES campaign.

The Engineering and Marine Training Authority has recently produced a survey, which was conducted for it in December 1996 by MORI. Schoolchildren aged between about 14 and 16 years were asked, "How much do you know about engineering?" "Not very much," answered 45 per cent. of them, "Nothing at all," said 39 per cent. and only 11 per cent. said that they knew "a fair amount/a great deal" about engineering. That is a sad indictment of the present position.

More worryingly, when the children were asked, "How likely or unlikely are you to consider a career in engineering?", 62 per cent. said, "Very unlikely," and 14 per cent. said, "Fairly unlikely." That is worrying for a nation that became Great Britain through engineers such as Isambard Kingdom Brunel, who put the "great" into Great Britain and gave us the wherewithal to form an empire.

How can we overcome the problem? I should like to propose two remedies. The first is to broaden the education system, and the second is to raise the status of engineering in the United Kingdom. I understand that my hon. Friend the Minister for Science and Technology is not responsible for education matters, so I shall be relatively brief on the first issue. I ask him to pass on my comments.

I believe that Britain breeds inarticulate engineers and innumerate art graduates. Either way, Britain often ends up researching wonderful products and leaving the development to the Japanese or the Americans. Both research and development are important; the two go together. A broad base of knowledge is needed so that scientists and engineers can communicate the details of their work and financial accountants and marketing men can understand the potential of that work.

We specialise far too early in our education system. We have, of course, introduced national vocational qualifications, which have provided a port of entry into further and higher education for many students who might not otherwise have got there. But what of academic students? In England and Wales, the A-level system, the so-called "gold standard", forces 15 and 16-year-olds to choose just two, three or sometimes four subjects in which to specialise. That has to be wrong.

Scotland's system of highers and the German gymnasium matriculation all offer a wider choice of subjects to study before entering university. Fifteen-year-old artists do not abandon science and mathematics; scientists do not abandon history, languages or literature. Semi-A-levels, as I call them, such as "use of English" and "general studies" are merely tinkering with a flawed system and are no substitute.

The Department for Education and Employment argues that English and Welsh students could take GNVQs or AS-levels, but all universities say that they prefer the depth of A-level courses. I am not sure why that is. With the proliferation of examining boards and the variety of options available, there are about 253 alternative syllabuses—or is it syllabi?—for maths alone. *[Interruption.]* It is a gerundive, so it is syllabi.

Universities cannot begin their courses where A-levels leave off. Far from being the gold standard, A-levels have damaged our education and economy for years. The means of entry to higher education should be reassessed and reformed. One of our goals for the 21st century should be to say goodbye to the schoolboy specialist and greet the schoolboy polymath.

The question of raising engineers' status directly affects the Minister's Department. I believe that we could achieve that aim by the statutory registration of engineers. The Law Society was founded in 1825, followed in 1832 by the British Medical Association. Those and other professional groups secured statutory registration, but engineers did not.

We are all no doubt familiar with the proliferation of titles containing the word engineer. Examples include the sign, "Environmental Engineers" on trucks belonging to waste disposal companies; I believe that toll collectors on freeway bridges in America are members of the Brotherhood of Professional Engineers; and the lad who replaces one's car exhaust is often mistakenly referred to as an engineer.

Historically, "engineer" was the term used for military practitioners who dealt with all aspects of engineering. The word "ingénieur" was first used in 17th-century France as a professional title for a scientifically trained technician in the public service. In Britain, the title "engineer" was probably first used for a non-military individual in 1702, to describe a George Sorocold of Derby.

To avoid confusion and to distinguish themselves from their military colleagues, the civilians adopted the description of civil engineer. The first in Britain to use it was John Smeaton, in 1768, not long after he completed the Eddystone lighthouse.

The Society of Civil Engineers was formed in 1771. Soon, all non-military engineers adopted the title, regardless of whether they specialised in engines, canals, roads, bridges or other branches of engineering. We are all familiar with James Watt, Thomas Telford, George Stephenson and Isambard Kingdom Brunel. Who has not felt pride in the achievements of the canal era and the railway age, when British engineers led the world? Indeed, I recently visited Sweden and travelled on the railway line between Gothenburg and Stockholm; that line was built by British engineers.

The designers of many magnificent mediaeval cathedrals, including the glorious 800-year-old cathedral at Lichfield, which thousands of people visit, would, in today's terminology, be called structural engineers. As technology developed, the civil engineering profession gradually became subdivided, and today we have mechanical and other types of engineer. Gone for ever are the days when non-military practitioners were all called civil engineers.

Despite the long and honourable history of engineering in this country, engineers have been hard done by compared with architects. I shall explain that carefully, as the former chairman of my local Conservative association is an architect. The professional activities of architects have always been intimately linked with those of engineers. As late as the 1920s, there were architect members of the Institution of Civil Engineers, even though the Royal Institute of British Architects had been established in 1834.

There are other examples of the close relationship between engineers and architects. The *Civil Engineers and Architects Journal* was popular in Britain between 1837 and 1868, and the American Society of Engineers and Architects was founded in 1852. On the continent of Europe, the two disciplines remain to this day closely connected, and many practitioners are proud to describe themselves as architect-engineers.

[Mr. Fabricant]

In the construction industry worldwide, the initials AEC stand for architecture, engineering and construction, thereby testifying to the continuing close association between those related activities. In this country, the title of architect was safeguarded by the Architects (Registration) Act 1931, but the title of engineer remains unprotected. As a result, the law allows an unqualified or inexperienced individual to adopt the description, regardless of fitness for purpose.

In New Zealand, legislation was enacted 72 years ago for the registration of engineers, and several other countries have introduced similar provisions. Paradoxically, statutory registration is already mandatory in the United Kingdom for small groups of engineers. For instance, the Reservoirs (Safety Provisions) Act 1930 restricts the design and inspection of large reservoirs to suitably experienced civil engineers appointed by Government.

More recently, on 3 September 1985, the then Prime Minister, Mrs. Thatcher, addressing the first assembly of the Engineering Council, said:

"It is for the Government to create the right background conditions, but it is you engineers who can grasp the opportunities and make our future prosperous and I am here today for one reason: to show the importance this Government attaches to your work, your profession and your role in our future. Our country's success needs you."

The Minister should note the words

"It is for the Government".

In February 1992, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young), then Minister for Housing and Planning, announced an intention to review the Architects (Registration) Acts and appointed an assessor, Mr. Warne, who considered observations submitted by several professional organisations. He found that the Institution of Civil Engineers

"saw no major reason for maintaining the system of registration for architects alone",

and said that the institution envisaged

"a much wider issue of statutory registration of all professional members of the construction industry".

That would include civil engineers. However, nothing has happened.

On 2 February 1996, at the inauguration of the reformed Engineering Council, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister said:

"You know my view that engineers and engineering are exceptionally important but their full potential is not being realised in certain key respects. A number of steps are needed to remedy this, including: fundamental reform of the selection, education, training and use of engineers and technicians."

He went on to say that a subsidiary objective was

"to ensure that the importance of engineering to the British economy, as recognised in the Science and Technology White Paper, is properly reflected in Government policies".

I believe that the time is right to ensure that the term engineer is used correctly in this country, to raise the status of engineers and to encourage more students to study engineering. One valuable way of achieving that is to follow the path of other countries and adopt a statutory register of engineers.

The law and its administration need not be complex. We already have the title of chartered engineer. Corporate members of existing engineering institutions, such as the Institution of Electrical Engineers, the Institution of Civil Engineers and the Institution of Mechanical Engineers may all be chartered engineers. All those institutions have high standards for corporate membership: at least a first degree in engineering, and senior professional experience.

No new bureaucracy need be established. I propose simple legislation stipulating that only a chartered engineer may legally call himself, or herself, an engineer. I hope that the Minister will consider that.

What of the future? As my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes said, we want not only this year, but many years of engineering success in the future. The Engineering Employers Federation has produced a booklet entitled, "Engineering: Creating Wealth for our Future". Referring to the future of the United Kingdom within the European Union, it says:

"the UK should retain its Social Chapter opt-out because labour market restrictions should be reduced, and not increased. The best way to provide improved employment conditions is through enhanced international competitiveness, rather than legislation."

It also says that we require

"national rather than EU legislation".

I certainly agree with that.

The EEF also talks about creating a flexible labour market. It says:

"The EEF does not support the introduction of a National Minimum Wage since it would indirectly reduce the competitiveness of the engineering industry by increasing the costs of many contracted-out services. It would also have an inflationary impact upon pay structures as it would inevitably result in pressures to maintain existing pay differentials.

Furthermore, any regular increase in a National Minimum Wage will open the real possibility that, during pay negotiations, this will be regarded by employees and their representatives as the minimum acceptable increase, irrespective of their employer's economic and financial circumstances and labour market conditions."

These are the people who know. These are the people who work in the engineering industry. These are the people who employ people in the engineering industry. Yet the Labour party talks about the very policies that the EEF says would create unemployment and destruction of the engineering industry in Britain.

My saddest fear for engineering is that, if perchance there were a Labour Government, we would see not years of engineering success but years of engineering failure.

1.50 pm

The Minister for Science and Technology (Mr. Ian Taylor): This has been a truly excellent use of these short debates. A cornucopia of information about the engineering industry came forth from my hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant). I give him full credit for initiating the debate and giving us all the information, indeed for being a veritable polymath—an engineer who can correct his own gerunds. He is a great tribute to the House of Commons.

I genuinely congratulate my hon. Friend, because he is one of the people, a little like myself, who started life with the disadvantage of studying economics. But he rose above that and became a chartered engineer. He is a fellow of the Institution of Electrical Engineers—one of only two in the House. The other happens to be an Opposition Member, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker). I am reliably informed that there are only six chartered engineers in the House of Commons. I am sure that, if I have got that wrong, I will receive letters from colleagues.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) also took part briefly in the debate. I recognise all the work that he does as chairman of the all-party engineering development group in the House and elsewhere to advance the interests of the engineering industry.

The backdrop to the debate obviously has the support of the Royal Academy of Engineering and the Engineering Council, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire referred, as well as the various chartered institutes and many others with an interest in engineering. The Year of Engineering Success is one of those wonderful inventions which, while it uses the term "year", is slightly elastic. I have been participating in the Year of Engineering Success since last summer, but it will run until the end of 1997. Mary Harris, who is running it, is a fireball of energy, and is doing a wonderful job in activating people at all levels to support the cause.

My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade formally launched—any year has to have a formal launch as well as informal ones—at the BBC on 22 January. We decided that it was highly appropriate to launch the year at the BBC, because of the excellence of the engineering that has enabled us now to accept broadcasting as one of our daily pleasures; and we are about to anticipate the next leap forward in broadcasting in terms of the digital age. The BBC engineers and all those engaged in the 60 years since television began, which we celebrated only recently, are the embodiment of what engineering can do and how engineering at the forefront of technology enables something which is otherwise simply a good invention or a good idea to become something that we can all enjoy.

The importance of engineers in the translation of a brainwave into something which can go into mass production and become available at a price that people can afford is often underestimated. The skill of engineering at all stages of history has been most remarkable. I pay tribute to Trevor Baylis, who invented the clockwork radio, and the work that he has done for inventors, but many inventors need engineers to help them carry their ideas through to the marketplace.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Staffordshire made two central points, first about education and secondly about the status of engineering. In the few moments that remain, I should like to respond to those points.

As my hon. Friend rightly says, education is obviously broadly a matter for the Department for Education and Employment, but, as Minister for Science and Technology, I have a profound interest in the subject. We need to ensure that more of our young people have an opportunity to prepare themselves for a career in engineering. That means that they need to be numerate, although perhaps in the context of the House too much stress on numeracy this week is not appropriate.

Young people need to have an excitement about the opportunities available to them through the sciences if they are to meet the qualifications required and the hurdles set for them to go into engineering in later life. Therefore, at school it is necessary to trigger that enthusiasm and give young people the belief that the career they might want to follow will be worth while.

The education figures are not that discouraging. I do not have time to go through them all, but we have seen an increase in the past year, for example, in the number of students taking mathematics and computing at A-level. We have also seen a worrying fall in chemistry and physics. Biology was about even.

The figures are not absolutely clear. One of the things that Sir Ron Dearing will have to do in his review for the Government of the future of higher education is to take account of the work that he has already done on A-levels and vocational qualifications to see how we can increase the opportunities for our best young people to go into science, engineering and technology at university. A survey in 1992 showed that 29 per cent. of all degrees awarded in Britain were in science or engineering, with engineering disciplines accounting for almost half.

The other aspect is the status of engineers. It is worthwhile underlining the fact that the job opportunities for engineers are extremely good. That is part of the status. There are 84 chartered engineers on the boards of the top 100 companies. The Royal Academy of Engineering tells me that one has a higher chance of being a director of one of the leading companies in Britain if one is an engineer than if one is an accountant. That is a promising opportunity for those who are looking to come into the market.

Of the engineering graduates going into the job market, 37 per cent. secured places on graduate training schemes, compared with an average of 25 per cent. of all graduates; and 75 per cent. of engineering and technology graduates are able to secure first jobs in the career of their choice. Engineering graduate salaries are higher than those of many of their peers. The average starting salary of an engineer is £15,900, compared with an average starting salary for all graduates of £12,250.

It is important to bring such statistics out into the open, because too often it is thought that potential engineers will be in a difficult position. Not least, it is important to stress that the unemployment rate for engineers, at 2.5 per cent. in the United Kingdom, is significantly lower than general unemployment of 6.5 per cent. and graduate unemployment of 5 per cent. Those statistics underpin the good news about engineering.

The task for the Year of Engineering Success is to take that good news and broaden the appeal of engineering and increase the estimation of the value and status of engineers in our society and what they contribute. I understand the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Staffordshire made about the legal use of the term "engineer". I know that it is a regular subject for discussion. I pay tribute to all those people who have made the effort to become chartered engineers, and to the incorporated engineers who do a great deal of the day-to-day engineering tasks in industry and elsewhere. I also pay great tribute to those in the science world who do basic research in engineering and make a long-term contribution to the success of the economy. All of them have their merit.

[Mr. Ian Taylor]

I should certainly like to raise the status of engineers, and I shall consider carefully what my hon. Friend has said, but the Year of Engineering Success is a tremendous tribute to the work now being done by those companies which back it in conjunction with the Department of Trade and Industry. I hope that it is genuinely a success, because the British economy will increasingly need engineers to be competitive in this difficult world, adding value, coming forward with ideas, and making them available to members of the general public.

If more of the general public looked around their households, they would clearly see how many of the products on which they depended—

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

PRIVATE BUSINESS

Lever Park Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Tuesday 4 February.

Southampton International Boat Show Bill

Read a Second time, and committed.

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Disabled People (Employment)

1. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent representations she has received about the employment of disabled people; and if she will make a statement. [11724]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Cheryl Gillan): We often receive representations about a wide range of issues relating to the employment of disabled people, who now have important new rights in this area as a result of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

Mr. Thurnham: Is the Minister aware of the excellent work done by the Shaw trust, which has placed more than 2,000 people with disabilities in jobs at a cost of some £4,000 per job? Is she aware that the factory jobs at Remploy now cost three times as much? Does she not think that the subsidy of nearly £100 million to Remploy, if it were used as effectively as the Shaw trust uses its funds, could provide an additional 10,000 jobs for people with disabilities?

Mrs. Gillan: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has raised the Shaw trust as an excellent example of what can be achieved by an organisation to ensure that valuable members of our society, although severely disabled, can enter employment successfully. The work of Mr. Tim Papé is well known to the Department and he continues to have a good dialogue with my noble Friend Lord Henley, who has direct responsibility for these matters. Last year the Department provided nearly £9.5 million in support of placements with the Shaw trust, and the Employment Service has every intention of continuing to contract with the trust to enable it to continue its excellent work.

Remploy factories are expensive by comparison with supported placements, but that is because they provide different types of support. When we compare like with like, Remploy's version of supported placement into work delivers placements at a unit cost which compares favourably with that of other supported placement providers.

Mr. Alan Howarth: How many people who were on incapacity benefit have simply disappeared from the records rather than going on to jobseeker's allowance or moving into a job? Does the hon. Lady know? Does she care?

Mrs. Gillan: I think that that is a most ungracious question. Everybody knows that the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 strikes a balance between the disabled and the employer and we ensure that no disabled person receives less favourable treatment. I would have expected the hon. Gentleman to welcome the Act and to talk about the potential that it has provided for all disabled people in this country.

Jobseeker's Allowance

2. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what monitoring of the operation of the jobseeker's allowance that she is undertaking. [11726]

The Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): The Employment Service and the Benefits Agency are carrying out continuous monitoring of the operation of jobseeker's allowance and produce regular joint reports to the Secretaries of State for Education and Employment and for Social Security.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the Minister confirm that £10.7 million has already been spent on consultants to introduce the jobseeker's allowance? Can he tell us how much more is to be spent on consultancy fees in the future? From his monitoring of the operation of the jobseeker's allowance, can he tell us how many people have been denied all benefits as a result of failing jobseeker's allowance interviews? What monitoring is he undertaking of the low wages that many people are forced to accept for jobs that they are forced to take because of the draconian and inhuman way in which the jobseeker's allowance operates?

Mr. Forth: The answers to the hon. Gentleman's first series of questions are: yes, no, and I do not know at this stage. The answer to his last question is that, if he can produce any evidence to back up the ridiculous overstatement and hyperbole to which he is accustomed, we will of course consider it, but I am not impressed by wild accusations of that type made across the Floor of the House of Commons. They do not help the individuals allegedly involved, or anyone else.

Children's Homework

3. **Mr. Sweeney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent representations she has received regarding arrangements for children's homework. [11727]

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): I have received a number of representations on homework from various bodies and members of the public.

Mr. Sweeney: Does my right hon. Friend agree that if—heaven forbid—we end up with a Labour Government and a Welsh Assembly, we would be placed in a ludicrous situation in which Members of Parliament from Wales will be able to vote in Westminster on issues such as homework while Members of Parliament in England will have no say on education matters in Wales? Does my right hon. Friend agree that that would be a ludicrous result and gives every indication of why we need to reject the concept of a Welsh Assembly and of a Labour Government?

Mrs. Shephard: I thank my hon. Friend for his ingenious question. I am sure that the distressing situation that he describes will not arise. Conservative Members believe that it is quite clear that the most effective way to

encourage good practice on homework, whether in England, Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland, is to disseminate guidance based on research and practical experience.

Ms Estelle Morris: At least there seems to be some agreement that homework raises standards, but why do not the Government show some leadership in ensuring that all children can benefit from it? Does the Secretary of State not understand that the very half-hearted initiative that she announced recently, which will not benefit all children, is wrong, and that she should support Labour's policy of minimum homework targets and a national network of homework centres to support those children who have home backgrounds where homework is difficult?

Mrs. Shephard: It is neither necessary nor—perhaps more importantly—practical for the Government to introduce a legal framework to govern homework arrangements in all our 25,000 schools. The important thing is to disseminate good practice and guidance so that schools fully understand that it is in their interests and those of their pupils to have sensible homework policies.

It is perhaps typical of the Labour party that the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) says that he supports an approach whereby the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) would be given the task of checking that all the nation's 7 million pupils had done their homework, followed no doubt by his hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who would tuck them up in bed.

Mr. Pawsey: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, although homework is important, what counts is what is taught and the methodology that is used in schools? Does she agree that we have shown leadership in education, but all the education reforms that we have introduced have been opposed by Opposition Members, both Labour and Liberal Democrat?

Mrs. Shephard: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. A very important difference between our policies and practice and those of the Opposition is that we have consistently concentrated on measures to raise standards by means of inspections, performance tables, tests and the national curriculum. The Labour party, which actually voted against the setting up of the Office for Standards in Education, is less than convincing when it proposes homework by law.

Teachers' Early Retirement Scheme

4. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many representations she has received (a) in support and (b) against the Government's proposed changes to the teachers' early retirement scheme. [11728]

Mrs. Gillan: My right hon. Friend has so far received 36 written representations from consultees on the Government's proposed changes to the early retirement arrangements for teachers, and a large number of individual responses.

Mr. Williams: Why do 80 to 90 per cent. of teachers want to retire early? Is that not a sad comment on the morale of the profession after 18 years of Conservative Government? Would it not be wiser for Ministers to sit down with local authorities and teacher representatives to work out solutions to the problem? Has not the Government's handling of it been inept, turning a problem into a crisis and the exodus into a stampede?

Mrs. Gillan: No, I cannot agree with the hon. Gentleman that the handling of the matter has been inept. I would go so far as to say that there is much common ground between the Labour party and the Government on the teachers' superannuation scheme. A great deal of misinformation and dissembling has been going on, which has scared and unsettled many teachers and retired teachers.

I want to assure teachers from the Dispatch Box that we have no intention of ending the early retirement scheme, and that we are carefully examining the responses to the consultation. All those will be taken into account by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in due course.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: I thank my hon. Friend for modestly extending the consultation period. May I make a plea to her for it to be extended still further, to enable meaningful discussions to go on between the Government and all the teacher unions involved, particularly the National Association of Head Teachers, which undertook a constructive and positive lobby of Parliament last week? Does my hon. Friend accept that, if she can get Treasury permission, it would be more appropriate for the new arrangements to take effect from the new academic year in September rather than from 1 April?

Mrs. Gillan: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful question. I reassure him that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will give careful consideration to the representations that have been made by the teachers unions, local education authorities and others, including the National Association of Head Teachers, and that she will make an announcement shortly. We shall consider all the options that have been placed before the Government.

Mr. Don Foster: Further to that answer, why cannot the Minister give a straight answer to the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton)? Why cannot she tell him and the House that she will extend the consultation period to enable a wide range of alternative suggestions to be considered? Does she accept that, although changes to the teachers' pension scheme are needed, her Department's handling of the matter has been nothing short of a public relations disaster, and that as a result it has further reduced the morale of all those in the teaching profession?

Mrs. Gillan: I consider a 12-week consultation period sufficient. No teachers, unions or representative bodies could believe that their representations had not been taken into account. If there are any further representations, we shall be pleased to receive them before the end of the week.

During the Committee stage of the Education Bill, I challenged the Opposition parties to make representations and to put forward their solutions to the problems with the teachers' superannuation scheme, but

no such representations were forthcoming. Obviously, the Opposition parties have no solution to the problem, and we must act.

Mr. Nicholls: Does my hon. Friend agree that that is only part of the wider issue of teacher morale? Has she shared my experience that many teachers in the state sector believe genuinely, albeit wrongly, that the Government do not value their work? Will my hon. Friend take this opportunity to say that her experience is the same as mine—that teachers in the maintained sector in my constituency are overwhelmingly first-rate professionals doing a first-rate job?

Mrs. Gillan: I have no problem agreeing with my hon. Friend's remarks. I draw the attention of all hon. Members to an article by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that appeared in *The Times Educational Supplement* last week, in which she stated:

"The whole country owes a great deal to teachers. Teachers are highly skilled; they are dedicated; they work very hard. The improvement in pupils' achievement, and hence the increase in the skills of the population, could not have been achieved without the help of teachers."

No matter how often Ministers make such comments, the press never report them. We have never criticised the teachers and we seize every opportunity, from the Dispatch Box and from other platforms, to praise their skills and dedication.

Mr. Kilfoyle: May we now put to the Minister the questions that we asked in Committee, in the hope that perhaps today she will answer the most relevant one? Will she confirm that the Government have done a deal with local authorities to enable them to claw back the costs of early retirement from individual schools? Will she also confirm that on 18 December last the Funding Agency for Schools wrote to grant-maintained schools offering quite a generous settlement of 100 per cent. of retirement costs? Will she further confirm that the Government have a twin-track approach—one that is preferential to the grant-maintained sector and another for the rest of the teaching profession who are members of the teachers' superannuation scheme?

Mrs. Gillan: I shall not allow the issue of teachers' pensions to become an attack on grant-maintained schools. There is no doubt that the Opposition parties would abolish grant-maintained schools. How would that help the morale of teachers in those schools? The hon. Gentleman knows that it is untrue to claim that GM schools are receiving preferential treatment. The Funding Agency for Schools will support some premature retirements and the local authority settlement allows for a continuing programme of retirements at 75 per cent. of current levels. There is no reason why local education authorities should not continue to offer premature retirements under the proposals.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Will my hon. Friend confirm that her Department has received a large number of representations on this question and that it would therefore not be unreasonable to extend the consultation period somewhat? In light of the sheer volume of representations, will she consider that possibility, which was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton)?

Mrs. Gillan: My hon. Friend is right to say that the Department has received a large number of representations, and I have signed more than 1,000 letters to constituents. However, I believe that a consultation period of 12 weeks and the courtesy that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has extended to organisations to come to see her and me is sufficient. I assure my hon. Friend that the points reasonably made during the consultation period will be taken into account.

Unemployment Statistics

5. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the effect of the introduction of jobseeker's allowance claimants on the unemployment figures since October 1996. [11730]

Mr. Forth: Unemployment is falling primarily because more jobs are being created by enterprise and business in an environment created by the Government. The jobseeker's allowance will help unemployed people to find work and get better value for money for the taxpayer.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Minister aware that there is hardly anyone in Britain, apart from the Tory bunch opposite, who does not realise that the jobseeker's allowance is another one of the many fiddles—there have been about 30 in all—used by the Government to kid people that there are only 1.8 million people out of work? The truth, as the *News of the World* reported on 17 November, is that 4.1 million people are out of work.

However, I can tell the Minister that good times are coming: I have just left a meeting of the Labour party national executive committee and we have decided to keep the jobseeker's allowance just long enough to clear the Tories out of office and make them stand in line—unless they moonlight—so that they will know how it feels to have to queue up to receive the paltry amount of money that the Tory Government offers. After that, we shall abolish the jobseeker's allowance.

Mr. Forth: I assume from the hon. Gentleman's comments, while he still has a meaningful voice on the national executive committee—

Mr. Skinner: Consultations are still taking place.

Mr. Forth: The House eagerly awaits a statement from the hon. Gentleman about what occurred in the national executive committee today. Perhaps he will catch your eye, Madam Speaker. I assume from the hon. Gentleman's remarks that, were there to be a Labour Government, one of its first actions would be to declare that there are more than 4 million people out of work. That would be an interesting proposition. That is the logic behind the hon. Gentleman's comments.

The fact is that the Labour party believes what the International Labour Organisation and the European Commission have signed up to, which is that the labour force survey shows that about 2 million people in this

country are out of work. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to take that issue up with his hon. Friends on the Labour Front Bench: I will leave them to sort it out among themselves.

The jobseeker's allowance is a genuine attempt to ensure that unemployed people who expect support from the taxpayer through benefits are available for and actively seeking work. If they are, they will have the full support of the Employment Service. I am delighted to say that, as a result of that measure, unemployment continues to fall.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my hon. Friend agree that getting rid of a helpful allowance is an interesting proposition which would bring back the winter of discontent and the good time that we all enjoyed under the last Labour Government?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend is right. Most hon. Members remember very clearly what happened under the Labour Government—that is to say, the winter of discontent. It will be interesting to hear what the Labour party says in the next few weeks and months about its commitments on trade union and industrial relations law and on the jobseeker's allowance. That will be a key test of Labour's proposals. I await a statement from the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) to clarify the position.

Mr. Pearson: Is the Minister aware of the widespread dismay felt by jobseekers in the west midlands at recent reports that half of manufacturing companies are experiencing recruitment difficulties while those jobseekers have not had even the merest sniff of a job? Why does not the Government scrap crap schemes—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"]—such as project work and provide real assistance to people who are out of work?

Mr. Forth: That was obviously an example of new Labour, new language. I assume that the hon. Gentleman is in close collusion with his hon. Friends on the Front Bench, who are constantly telling us about literacy and higher educational standards. If what he has just said is an example of their drive for higher standards, it does not bode well for the future.

Education Funding (Lancashire)

6. **Mr. Atkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent representations she has received from Lancashire county council about education funding. [11731]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Robin Squire): Lancashire county council has recently made a number of representations to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about education funding. I met representatives of Lancashire county council's education committee on 20 November last year to discuss funding for education in Lancashire.

Mr. Atkins: Is it the case that Lancashire county council received a 3.8 per cent. increase this year on top of a 5.5 per cent. increase last year and earlier increases, largely as a result of pressure from the county's Conservative Members of Parliament? Does not the Labour county councillors' whingeing for more money fly in the face of the oft-repeated statements by the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Chancellor that there will no more money for local councils under a Labour Government? Should not Lancashire county council's Labour-controlled education committee rearrange its priorities so that it puts our schoolchildren before its dogma?

Mr. Squire: My right hon. Friend is right in every respect. I congratulate him and my hon. Friends in Lancashire on the representations that they have made to the Government on education funding. He is also right to point out that, in the past two years alone, Lancashire has received increases of some £45 million in its education standard spending assessment. It is now up to the council, given its total resources, to determine its priorities. I hope that, like the Government, it will put education first.

Mr. Pickthall: Will the Minister confirm that, during the lifetime of this Parliament, from 1992-93 to 1996-97—which is a realistic period to take—the weighted increase in primary and secondary standard spending assessments per pupil in Lancashire was 3.7 per cent., while during the same period cumulative inflation in the education budget was 13.3 per cent., so that under the Government Lancashire has had to wrestle with a reduction of 10 per cent. in its schools budget? To fill that gap, it has had to rip all its non-statutory education obligations to bits. Will the Minister advise the right hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) to talk to the treasurer's department in Lancashire, which will gladly provide him with those figures and a lot more besides?

Mr. Squire: I certainly will not confirm the hon. Gentleman's figures without notice, but if he wants confirmation from me, he need only table an appropriate written question. As for the wider issue, he clearly overlooks the fact that, throughout the period that he mentioned, and for many years before that, the county council has been responsible for determining its priorities. Nothing in the sums given by the Government requires it to make the cuts in primary expenditure to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Primary School Funding (Cheshire)

7. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on primary school funding in Cheshire. [11732]

Mr. Robin Squire: Cheshire's provisional standard spending assessment per primary school pupil in 1997-98 is £1,976. That is £73 per pupil, or 3.8 per cent. more than this year. Now it is up to the authority to ensure that the increase in spending power that we are providing reaches the schools.

Mrs. Winterton: Given that we are spending more per pupil than ever before, will my hon. Friend acknowledge that Cheshire county council has increased spending on primary education and is now halfway up the shire county league table rather than bumping along at the bottom, as it was under the last Labour administration at county hall? Will he now implement the recommendations of the area

cost adjustment review—notwithstanding the opposition of the four local government associations, which are dominated by Labour and Liberal administrations—so as to ensure that both primary and secondary schools in my constituency of Congleton receive further fully justified additional finance?

Mr. Squire: I congratulate Cheshire local education authority, under its Conservative chairmanship, on giving education higher priority. As for the review of the area cost adjustment, my hon. Friend will be aware that we decided not to implement the recommendations in 1997-1998 essentially because more work needs to be done on the review team's findings. My hon. Friend is also aware—she referred to it in her question—that, when we consulted the four local authority associations, not one of them wanted the review to be implemented in the coming year.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Is the Minister aware that Cheshire primary schools now have real problems because of consistent underfunding of the county? That has not just happened; it has been the case for a long time. Moreover, the imposition of the voucher scheme has considerable implications for both primary and nursery school places. Will the Minister now admit that his education policies are failing the children of Cheshire?

Mr. Squire: On the contrary—to cite, in particular, the policy to which the hon. Lady adverted, far from damaging education in Cheshire, the nursery voucher scheme gives Cheshire and every local education authority an opportunity to enhance current pre-school provision. In the hon. Lady's constituency, more vouchers will shortly be going out than there are currently places for four-year-olds. That will provide an opportunity for her local education authority, along with all the others, to play a part in the expansion.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: In connection with education funding in Cheshire, some of us are becoming tired of the continual argument between local authorities and Government about education spending—I certainly am. Does my hon. Friend accept that some hon. Members still believe that education funding should be taken out of local government altogether?

Mr. Squire: I note my hon. Friend's suggestion. It would clearly reduce the number of questions that I have to answer, so I can see an advantage there.

As my hon. Friend knows, thanks to his wide and long experience in education, there will always be discussions between Government and local authorities. We have a national system that seeks to distribute funds fairly throughout all authorities. Most important, since taking office the Government have increased funds per pupil in all our schools by nearly 50 per cent. in real terms. That is a tremendous achievement, of which I may need to remind Opposition Members continually.

Young People (Opportunities)

8. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will introduce measures to improve educational, training and employment opportunities for young people. [11733]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. James Paice): Our White Paper, "Learning to Compete", the first ever on policies for the 14 to 19 age group, sets out a coherent approach to maximise the potential of young people and their readiness for work.

Mr. Canavan: Is it not one of the great national scandals of our time that about a third of unemployed people are under 25? Is it not becoming increasingly obvious that this Tory Government offer no hope to those young people, who need the election of a Labour Government committed to using a windfall tax on the privatised utilities to provide real training opportunities and real jobs for 250,000 unemployed young people, whom the Government have deprived of the right to work?

Mr. Paice: The statistics with which the hon. Gentleman started his question are spurious. The proportion of young people who are unemployed is considerably lower than the figure that he gave. The figure that he and his colleagues continually quote includes a substantial number of full-time students who may be looking for a part-time job, but no one in any other country or in any walk of life other than that of a Labour politician would classify them as unemployed. Those are labour force survey statistics.

I am sure that we are all delighted to hear that the Labour party is at least sticking to its policy on the windfall tax, but the number of items that the tax is apparently going to pay for is amazing. Labour has clearly costed all the items that the tax will pay for, but it is unable to tell us how much it will be and who will pay it.

Sir David Madel: Will my hon. Friend confirm that, as long as standards go on rising in schools, the Government will continue to support the expansion of university education?

Mr. Paice: Clearly, we want standards to go on rising in schools and, as my hon. Friend says, our policies are achieving that. As he knows, we have asked Sir Ron Dearing to undertake a full study into all aspects of the future of higher education and, clearly, its expansion is one of the points that he will address.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does the Minister agree that there may be an opportunity for more firms throughout the nation to follow the example of a firm in my constituency, which brings in school children one day a week, employs them during holidays and pays them a reasonable wage? As a result, the children are trained in work skills in a real situation and are prepared to take jobs in that industry. Does that not help in relation to their training and opportunities?

Mr. Paice: The hon. Gentleman is entirely right. That is precisely the sort of arrangement that we envisage in part of the White Paper to which I have referred. Building links between individual businesses and their local schools enables young people to grow up and obtain the traditional academic skills from school while learning the essential skills that will equip them for work.

Mr. Hawkins: Will my hon. Friend confirm that youth unemployment in Britain is one of the lowest in the

European Union, entirely as a result of the Government's policies, but that that would be undermined by the Labour party's proposals? Did my hon. Friend see last weekend's interesting interview that Mr. John Humphrys conducted with the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), the Labour party spokesman, who made the astonishing claim that paternity leave as proposed by the Labour party would not cost anything because it would be unpaid? Does my hon. Friend agree that that astonishing economic illiteracy shows the bankruptcy of all the Opposition's plans?

Mr. Paice: I am afraid that I did not see the interview to which my hon. Friend refers—I try to avoid such nightmares—but I am not a bit surprised by the economic illiteracy that was apparently demonstrated. It is clear that many policies under the heading of European Union social policies, which the Government have resisted, but to which the Labour party is apparently committed, would destroy jobs and would cause youth unemployment to rise rather than continue to fall.

Mrs. Mahon: Is the Minister aware that Calderdale council, with all-party support, has twice tried to get a regeneration bid for Ovenden based mainly on employment and training? As Ovenden in my constituency is an area of high unemployment, will the Minister lend his weight to the next bid?

Mr. Paice: As I am sure the hon. Lady realises, no Minister can commit himself to supporting a bid that has not materialised. Obviously, I am interested in what she says, but she will appreciate that there are many competitive bids for single regeneration moneys. They are judged at regional level and on merit. Without further knowledge of the case, I cannot say more.

Mr. Garnier: Has the Department studied the likely effect of the removal of child benefit for over-16-year-olds on educational, training and employment opportunities?

Mr. Paice: I do not think that it takes a great deal of research to realise that the confiscation of more than £1,000 per family in respect of an offspring who is about to study for A-levels or enter post-16 education is bound to have a deterrent effect on the future of further education and the achievement of qualifications. It is confiscation—there is no other word for it. That is Labour's proposition, and it sits ill with the party's proposals to help young people to get into work.

Mr. Blunkett: That, of course, is not our policy at all. Did the Minister's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) constitute the Government's response to the heartfelt appeal by the Rev. David Shepherd, the Bishop of Liverpool, earlier this week in relation to unemployment and the despair and feelings of the quarter of a million young men and women under the age of 25 who have been out of education or employment for more than six months? Will he confirm that the use of our proposed windfall tax to put them back into work would not only give them hope of being able to earn their living and create families, but would give their younger brothers and sisters hope that, if they work at school they too will not be alienated and disaffected by being set aside by the Government and society?

Mr. Paice: It is interesting to note that the hon. Gentleman speaks of about 245,000 young people being out of work, whereas the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) said that it was somehow a third of 1.8 million.

Mr. Canavan: The total is 600,000 under 25.

Mr. Paice: I think that I detect a split coming on.

Of course we do not want young people to be out of work, but for the hon. Gentleman to use hyperbole undermines not only our efforts but the truth. The vast majority of young people who are out of work have had many jobs. They go in and out of work quite frequently: that is in the nature of being young. There is a hard core of young people for whom the education service has not fulfilled its obligations, and they find it difficult to break into the world of work.

We do not want such a hard core, and that is why we announced in the White Paper the relaunch strategy, which will bring together many good schemes that are already on the ground and encourage more. That will reach out to these people, many of whom have lost contact with what is going on in society and will bring them back into the world of work. By using hype and hysteria, the hon. Gentleman is devaluing the work that thousands of good people are doing to address this issue.

Primary School Funding (Staffordshire)

9. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much was spent per primary school pupil in Staffordshire in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what the figure was in 1978–79, at constant prices. [11734]

Mr. Robin Squire: In 1994-95, the latest year for which data are available, Staffordshire spent £1,645 per pre-primary and primary pupil, in 1996-97 prices. In 1978-79, the equivalent figure was £1,240.

Sir David Knox: Will my hon. Friend confirm that, although expenditure per primary school pupil in Staffordshire is lower than the national average, there has nevertheless been a very significant increase in expenditure under this Government, whereas there was a real-terms reduction in expenditure under the last Labour Government?

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend, who has been a Member of Parliament for many years, well remembers events under that Labour Government, and he is absolutely right. One can reach only one conclusion if one compares the Government's dedication to funding education and commitment to higher standards with our predecessor's: do not trust another Labour Government.

Mr. Jamieson: Does the Minister realise that primary schools in Staffordshire could be assisted greatly if the £2 million of taxpayers' money that is being paid under

the assisted places scheme to the St. Joseph's school and the Newcastle-under-Lyme school were redistributed to provide 100 more primary school teachers?

Mr. Squire: The hon. Gentleman repeats Labour's pledge—some would call it vandalism—to abolish assisted places. However, he has not repeated the fact that, in the first year, abolition of the scheme would save under £5 million. As he knows—because it has been reiterated by Labour spokesmen—that £5 million is somehow supposed to produce class sizes of no more than 30, whereas the minimum cost of doing so would be between £150 million and £180 million. It does not add up, and it is a deceit on parents across the country.

Mr. Stephen: Is it not the case that the Government provide more money per pupil than ever before in the nation's history, and that the reason why results are not as good as they should be is half-baked 1960s teaching methods, which still find favour with so many left-wing authorities, and waste of taxpayers' money by those very authorities?

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend is completely right about the highest-ever sums being spent on education. On standards, whether we are considering examination results or unauthorised absences from school, time and again Labour-controlled authorities are at the bottom of every table. Far from providing an answer on how to raise standards in our schools, Labour demonstrates by its actions that it has no idea what standards in school really mean.

Part-time Employment

10. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the change in the proportion of (a) men and (b) women at work who were employed on a part–time basis between (i) 1979 and 1990 and (ii) 1990 and 1996. [11735]

Mr. Paice: According to the work force in employment series, since 1979 the proportion of men working part time has increased from 6 to 11 per cent. and of women from 40 to 46 per cent. The labour force survey, which is internationally recognised, shows lower figures, but it did not start until 1984.

Mr. Corbett: Does not the near-doubling of the number of men working part time and often on short-term contracts explain the growing feeling of insecurity among millions of people outside these walls? Will the Minister confirm that 84 out of 100 men returning to work enter part-time rather than full-time jobs, and, while he is at it, will he examine the labour force survey and confirm that it shows—despite the Government's claims to the contrary—that unemployment among women is rising? We are given fiddled figures from a Government whom no one can trust.

Mr. Paice: Survey after survey, including the labour force survey, demonstrates that about 87 per cent. of those in part-time work wish to be in part-time work. A very small percentage of those would rather have—

Mr. Corbett: The Minister is wrong.

Mr. Paice: The hon. Gentleman quoted the labour force survey as a source of fact, but he now questions my reply, which is based on it. It is incorrect to mention the concepts of part-time jobs and job security in the same sentence, as the hon. Gentleman does. There has been a small increase in the number of part-time jobs, and the figures that I quoted show it. However, the increase does not relate to the level of job security.

The recently published British social attitude survey shows very little evidence of increasing job insecurity. More than 50 per cent. of people have been with the same employer for five years, and a third of employees have been with the same employer for more than 10 years. The fact is that the vast majority of people are in normal, stable jobs. Over the past quarter, the entire net increase in jobs created have been full-time jobs.

Sir Alan Haselhurst: Is it not the case that the only thing that creates jobs, be they part-ime or full-time, is the success of British companies and businesses in earning wealth for this country? No amount of fiddling around with increased taxes on industry by one means or another will improve real opportunities for people in future.

Mr. Paice: I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees that increased taxes would have quite the opposite effect. Whatever the good intentions behind policies, they can often have a negative result. If one puts burdens on business, for whatever good reason, one will end up destroying jobs, and it is time that the Labour party recognised that.

Mr. Hain: Why do the Government not come clean about the fact that there has been a huge shift from well-paid, full-time jobs to badly paid, part-time jobs, and that that has hit total earnings? Combining full-time and part-time work, as the Library has done for me for the first time, one sees that, over the past three years, real median earnings have fallen by more than 1 per cent. If that is a Tory recovery, thank goodness we do not have a recession. We have high taxes, low wages and job insecurity. This is a Del Boy Tory recovery.

Mr. Paice: This country has more people at work than any other major European country. Our unemployment has fallen by 900,000 since the peak and is continuing to fall. There have been 600,000 new jobs in the economy since the recovery began. Those are the facts. The Opposition are concerned about earnings. The only way in which people will have their earnings increased is if the businesses they work for improve their productivity and profitability, and are therefore able to employ more people at higher wages.

Mr. Congdon: Does my hon. Friend agree that the significant thing about the UK economy is that we have falling unemployment—it has fallen by 1 million since its peak—whereas our major European partners have increasing unemployment? Is not the reason for that the fact that they have imposed the social costs on their economies that the Labour party wants to impose on this economy, which would destroy jobs in this country?

Mr. Paice: My hon. Friend refers to the burdens that would be put on business by the Labour party's social policies. As I said earlier, such policies may have a good intention; I do not deny that. They have, however, a

deleterious effect on jobs. One has only to look at all the major economies in Europe which have higher unemployment and which also have in place most of the policies that Labour espouses to realise that. That might be a coincidence if it was true of just one country, but the fact is that all the major economies in Europe share the features of high social costs and much higher unemployment than us. That is no coincidence; it is a direct result of the policies that Labour would impose on Britain.

University Research Assessment Exercise

11. **Dr. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the benefits accruing from the research assessment exercise in universities. [11736]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The research assessment exercise supports our policy that research funding should selectively reward excellence, allowing world-class research to flourish and focusing increasing activity on higher-rated departments.

Dr. Wright: Is the Secretary of State aware of the way in which the research assessment exercise has preoccupied the attention of universities and their staff? We hear of staff being transferred between institutions, sometimes with transfer fees, to inflate the research ratings. We have the unreadable in search of the unteachable as research is produced that nobody wants to read or needs to read, while teaching is being devalued. Is it not time to sort this nonsense out?

Mrs. Shephard: It is a peer review system that has been refined over 10 years, and it is as robust and sensitive as the funding bodies can make it. The hon. Gentleman will wish to place alongside it the quality assessment mechanisms developed by the universities. The mobility of academics is not necessarily unhelpful for university institutions and the health of the research base. As I am sure he is aware, research is increasingly globalised, so his criticism does not logically follow.

Mr. Forman: I welcome the good sense of seeking to concentrate our university research in a smaller number of centres of excellence, for the reasons that my right hon. Friend has stated, but I wonder whether the process could be advanced with slightly less paperwork than is currently required. Some of the frequent complaints from universities are along those lines.

Mrs. Shephard: The review was certainly thorough. The operation will have to be looked at again now that the exercise has been completed. The first necessity when allocating £700 million-worth of research is to do the job thoroughly.

University Staff Recruitment

12. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking to retain and recruit high-quality staff in British universities. [11737]

Mrs. Shephard: The staffing of universities is for institutions themselves, which are responsible for setting their own levels of pay and conditions of service.

Mr. Sheerman: Is not the Secretary of State worried that a combination of extremely low pay and a growing number of short-term contracts—many universities have more than half their staff on such contracts—will depress standards even in the medium term? That must concern all hon. Members. Is it not time that the Government realised what an asset we have in our universities? If we run down that asset, our possibilities for wealth creation and the regeneration of local communities will be severely damaged.

Mrs. Shephard: I agree that the higher education sector is a priceless asset for this country because of its research base and the opportunities that it affords us to increase our global competitiveness. I remind the hon. Gentleman that under this Government there has been an expansion in the number of young people going to university from 12 per cent. in 1979 to 30 per cent. now. It is also encouraging that, while this country accounts for about 1 per cent. of the world's population, our universities account for 5 per cent. of the world's research. The sector is in good health and is doing well.

I remind the hon. Gentleman that pay and conditions of service are matters for the universities. Royal Society research shows that the number of British academics returning to employment in Britain exceeds the number going abroad. I do not think that there is cause for concern. Investigating that issue is one of the tasks of the national committee of inquiry into higher education.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will my right hon. Friend congratulate Lancaster university on its ability to attract the highest calibre of staff, enabling it to be placed third in the recent research assessments, after only Oxford and Cambridge, which it hopes to overtake eventually?

Mrs. Shephard: I should be delighted to congratulate the university of Lancaster. In the recent exercise, the best universities have done better than last time and new universities and higher education colleges have significantly increased their number of active researchers and have improved their performance. I am happy to congratulate the university.

Mr. Bryan Davies: We all understand why morale in universities is not high. What about the bombshell that the Secretary of State suddenly exploded this week among further education colleges? Will she confirm that she has refused to fund the demand-led expansion of student numbers, to which colleges are already committed, with students on their courses and private providers already under contract? What is the explanation for that disastrous decision? Why has it been taken now, in the middle of the education year? Has she any idea of the number of colleges that will be plunged into deficit as a result of the decision? How many jobs will be lost in the public and private sectors? Does she accept that the House requires an explanation?

Mrs. Shephard: I cannot confirm the hon. Gentleman's first allegation, because it is not true. The proposals announced in the recent Budget provided a funding increase of £80 million to existing baselines of further education for the next two years. The plans provide for 20 per cent. growth in the number of students in further

education between 1993-94 and 1998-1999. However, I am discussing with the Further Education Funding Council ways of meeting costs arising from the demand-led element of its funding this year. I remind the hon. Gentleman that he should be exceedingly wary before giving any impression that additional funding pledges might be the intention of his party.

Mr. Butler: Will my hon. Friend acknowledge the superb work of the Open university, of which you, Madam Speaker, have the honour to be chancellor and which is in my constituency. It is currently rated 10th out of more than 100 such institutions in terms of its research work, in addition to producing by a multiple factor the largest number of top-quality graduates of any university in the kingdom.

Madam Speaker: It has also just won the Queen's anniversary prize for higher and further education.

Mr. Butler: Indeed, Madam Speaker, it has also just won the Queen's award.

Mrs. Shephard: Perhaps I should congratulate you, Madam Speaker, as chancellor of that excellent institution. The innovative work by the Open university is possibly showing the way for the development of the delivery of learning systems for the next century. One of its most interesting qualities is its work overseas—it has 17 outlets in Russia alone. I am delighted that you are the chancellor of such a first-class establishment.

Teachers (Morale)

13. **Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proposals she has to improve morale among schoolteachers. [11738]

Mrs. Gillan: The Government recognise the skill and dedication of the vast majority of teachers, and say so at every opportunity.

Mr. Dafis: Does the Minister accept that the Government's insistence on placing the principles of competition and market forces at the heart of the education system has contributed to the reduction in teacher morale and that the continuing campaign on grant-maintained schools is an exacerbating factor? How will she ensure that information provided to parents by the Grant Maintained Schools Foundation in England and Wales when ballots are held is accurate and complete? Will she take it from me that at a meeting in my constituency last Monday night, parents, teachers and the public were widely convinced that they had been seriously misled by representatives of that organisation?

Mrs. Gillan: I cannot agree with a single word that the hon. Gentleman says. As far as the Government are concerned, high morale goes with good schools, and our policies for improving standards will also improve morale. I know what would be bad for my morale if I were a teacher: the prospect of a Labour Government, who would destroy grammar schools, grant-maintained schools and the assisted places scheme, attack independent schools, reverse the nursery voucher scheme and turn back all the progress that the Government have made on education. If I were a teacher, the prospect of a Labour Government would certainly destroy my morale.

Mr. Dover: Will the Minister accept that any low morale among schoolteachers in Lancashire is due to the fact that, in the past two years, the Government have provided an extra £45 million in education spending, but precious little of that has been passed down to the schools?

Mrs. Gillan: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The Government have increasingly, year on year, provided more funds for education, and the local education authorities should be answerable for how much of that money reaches the chalkface. The more that reaches our schools, the better it is for teacher morale.

Mr. Eastham: Is the Minister aware that, only a few months ago, I brought a deputation from the city of Manchester to see one of her colleagues? We pointed out that the city had been starved of funds for building maintenance and that a £50 million deficiency had built up. Roofs are letting rain in, the electrics are deficient, new boilers are required and children have been evacuated from schools by bus because of the conditions. Will not that affect the morale of teachers and schoolchildren? It is happening up and down the country.

Mrs. Gillan: I should have thought that teachers' morale would have been enhanced because they were pleased by the local government funding settlement for 1997-98, which allows 3.6 per cent. more for education than in 1996-97. The hon. Gentleman should address his remarks to his local education authority, which is responsible for the fabric of its schools. He should not ask the Government questions: he should ask his local education authority.

Hunger Strikers (Rochester Prison)

3.30 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North) (*by private notice*): To ask what action has been taken by the Home Secretary concerning hunger strikers at HMP Rochester.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Miss Ann Widdecombe): Since 6 January, a number of immigration detainees in the detainee centre at HMP Rochester have been refusing regular prison food. Since that date, the number of those involved in the protest has fluctuated considerably. According to the prison, as of today, the number of those involved is 17, although that figure is subject to constant change.

Since Monday 27 January, a small number of the protesters have claimed to be refusing fluids. The most recent information indicates that there are currently six who are doing so. They are being held in the prison's health care wing.

Various arguments are advanced on behalf of the protesters. It is argued that asylum seekers who have committed no criminal offence should not be held in detention. It is also argued that immigration detainees should not be held in a Prison Service establishment. A third argument is that adequate safeguards do not exist in relation to the use of detention. In particular, it is claimed that detainees do not have adequate access to the legal system. Let me take those arguments in turn.

As the Government have repeatedly made clear, detention is used only sparingly and only for those who it is believed would otherwise abscond. At any one time, only about 1 per cent. of those with asylum applications outstanding will be held in detention. It is inescapable, however, that if we are to enforce the immigration laws effectively, some carefully targeted use of detention must be made. More than 80 per cent. of successfully effected removals have involved detention at some stage. If we are to remove failed asylum seekers, we cannot dispense with the targeted use of detention. Indeed, the experience of other comparable countries is the same. We give detainees full reasons for their detention. Initially, that is done orally, and, at regular intervals subsequently, it is done in writing. Both are done in a language that they understand.

It is a regrettable fact that some failed asylum seekers will not comply with their conditions of temporary admission unless we detain them. There is wide-scale abuse of our procedures, and the potential for absconding is real. It would increase significantly if there were no use of detention.

Secondly, the use of prison establishments to provide some of the detention spaces is also unavoidable, in current circumstances. A small number of detainees simply present control or security problems that are so severe that there can be no question whatever of holding them elsewhere.

Additionally, the Prison Service has for many years provided a significant number of detention spaces for general detainees. It currently provides about half the detention estate for all immigration detainees, but that percentage has fallen in recent years with the opening of the new immigration detention centres at Campsfield house in Oxfordshire and Tinsley house near Gatwick. Furthermore, a policy of greater concentration of immigration detainees in the Prison Service has successfully been implemented, with the bulk of such places now being provided by two establishments, Rochester and Haslar. Such accommodation is, of course, discrete from the rest of the prison.

Those in detention are not all there because they were detained at the port where they innocently asked for asylum. Thirty-four per cent. are illegal entrants, a small percentage are convicted criminals awaiting deportation, and others who absconded following an adverse decision will have had to be detained on detection. For example, among those involved in the fluids protests is one who has served a sentence of imprisonment for two convictions of indecent assault against children, was subsequently removed from the United Kingdom and then re-entered unlawfully. Another was detained by the police when found to be attempting further immigration deception. Nor is it so that many asylum seekers are held for inordinate periods. Of those involved in the fluids protests, half were detained either this month or last month.

Every effort is made to provide good facilities for immigration detainees. At Rochester, there are good physical education and library facilities, access to educational classes and the opportunity to pursue training courses. The greatest possible separation is maintained between immigration detainees and others who are held at Rochester. Detainees are held under remand conditions. They are, for example, allowed a two-hour visit each day from Monday to Saturday and all their varying dietary requirements are catered for. There is a well-equipped health care wing at Rochester, and detainees have access to medical care comparable to that which would be provided by a general practitioner to a member of the public.

On the question of safeguards, detention decisions, which are never taken lightly anyway, are reviewed at very frequent intervals and at senior levels in the immigration service. Moreover, detainees may in most circumstances seek bail or challenge their detention in the courts. Posters are displayed in detention centres giving details of sources of legal advice, and many detainees benefit from legal aid or from the services of statutorily funded organisations such as the Refugee Legal Centre or the Immigration Advisory Service.

The Government entirely understand the sensitivity that surrounds the detention of a small number of asylum seekers and other immigration cases. Detainees are always given priority in the immigration and nationality department, and a range of safeguards, including, of course, appeal to an independent adjudicator, are in place. Our objective is that, where detention is necessary, it should be for as short a period as possible, but arbitrary time limits would be incompatible with the fact that the need for detention to be extended often arises from circumstances beyond our control, such as attempts to stave off removal or, in dealing with a few countries, difficulties in securing documentation for a removable person.

However difficult some cases may be, there is no good reason for detainees to be refusing either food or fluids. It is clearly in their best interests to stop the activity now. I urge them to do so, and every effort is being made to persuade them to do so. I pay tribute to the prison staff, especially the medical staff who are looking after the detainees, and the immigration officers who visit the prison regularly with information and help.

We shall continue to monitor the situation on a very frequent basis, but those concerned must realise that only one course is in their best interests: for them to join the others at Rochester who have already ended their protest.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the Minister explain why, if all immigration detainees are given statements in writing in their mother tongue, I received the following written answer from her colleague the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope), two days ago? It said:

"This is done orally, in a language which the person understands, through an interpreter if necessary. The Government see no justification for providing written reasons."—[*Official Report*, 27 January 1997; Vol. 289, c. *1*.]

What the Minister has said today is the exact opposite of what I was told only two days ago.

Could not the Minister have some sense of humanity and understanding of the outrage and grievance felt by people when they come to this country to seek asylum, within the terms of the 1951 Geneva convention, to find themselves banged up in prisons alongside criminals and treated as criminals? Is she not aware that 891 people are at present in custody in detention centres and prisons at a total annual cost of £20 million? They have an extremely serious grievance. This is not the first protest that has taken place, and I suspect that it will not be the last.

Instead of going on about the prison conditions, of which she paints a rosy picture, why does not the Minister begin to understand the sense of outrage felt by people who have been charged with nothing and have committed no crime, but have been put in prison and given no right of direct access to the courts? That is the flaw in the British legal system.

Is the Minister aware that one of those who is refusing fluids, Ejike Emeneki, is in a critical condition? I understand that he is in the process of being transferred to Medway hospital for treatment that may involve rehydration. Does she not understand that those who undertake a hunger and fluid strike protest do so not as some light lark, but because they are deeply upset and angry and feel that it is the only way to get her and her Government to take their grievances seriously?

Why do not we do as other European countries do, and end the practice of the routine imprisonment of asylum seekers? We would save ourselves a lot of money and give ourselves some credit in the world. At the moment, our reputation on human rights is extremely poor, because people see that we routinely imprison those who have fled from fear and oppression in other countries. Does the Minister accept that her attitude to the issue is a complete disgrace?

Miss Widdecombe: I am obliged to say that I think that the hon. Gentleman's attitude is a complete disgrace. He talks about our routinely imprisoning asylum seekers. How can it be described as a routine action, when out of 44,000 applicants only 750 have been detained? Indeed, we would not wish to detain people: it is very much in their interests and in ours if we do not have to do so. However, there are some cases, such as those that I have described, in which it is necessary.

The hon. Gentleman paints a completely false picture. It is not true that the majority of people whom we detain have come over here innocently declaring their intentions at the port of entry. About one third—34 per cent.—are illegal entrants; others have overstayed; others are awaiting deportation following court convictions; and others have been picked up by the police for minor crime, but will not be prosecuted because we have decided to go for removal instead. All those people are quite rightly detained.

It is also true that there will be a percentage of detainees who have not been convicted of any crime in this country. That is because of the judgments that we make on their application and on the likelihood of their standing by our rules. Many of those detained have endeavoured to abscond, having already had their applications refused.

I repeat that the rules are that initially the people whom we have decided to detain must be given the reasons orally; and that thereafter it should be done monthly, in writing. That is my clear advice, from the most senior levels of the immigration service.

Dame Peggy Fenner (Medway): Has the percentage of people detained among asylum seekers—or alleged asylum seekers—declined since our introduction of the new rules last year? It is my recollection that it was said at that time that it was less than 2 per cent.; can my hon. Friend confirm that it is now about 1 per cent.? Did any of the six who are so tragically refusing liquid refreshment arrive in this country for a reason other than seeking asylum?

Miss Widdecombe: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who represents the constituency in which the events are taking place. The percentage of people detained fluctuates between 1 per cent. and 1.5 per cent. It does not go much higher than that, for the simple reason that, quite apart from the fact that we do not wish to do so, we do not have the facilities to detain on any large scale: we have only about 900 detention places in our system. However, as a result of our putting in 150 extra case workers, we have already significantly reduced the backlog. There has been a reduction of about 10,000 in the past 12 months or so, so there has been a considerable improvement.

My hon. Friend then asked me whether the six people who are refusing fluids, who had claimed asylum, had entered for other reasons. I am sure that she will be aware that, unless people put their details into the public domain, I do not do so. Nevertheless, I have already said that one of them had previously served a prison sentence, had been removed from this country and had then re-entered unlawfully. He then claimed asylum and has appealed against refusal of that. The other to whom I referred was picked up by the police when he was found to be attempting a further immigration deception. His claim for asylum had already been refused, but he had been granted temporary admission pending his appeal. When the further abuse took place, the temporary admission was cancelled and he was instead detained.

Without going into the considerable detail that I have, it would appear that all the remaining three have at some stage claimed asylum, but were not able to give satisfactory documentary evidence. Other reasons that I will not yet put into the public domain, although two cases involved third countries, have made us see fit to detain them.

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): Does the Minister recall that, when the Asylum and

[Mr. Doug Henderson]

Immigration Appeals Act 1993 was going through the House, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), who at that time was responsible for these matters, predicted that the legislation would reduce the waiting time for applications to be heard to three months? Does she acknowledge that the latest figures show that, on average, it is almost 12 months before a decision is reached and that in the past 12 months not only the number of appeals but the time taken to deal with them has increased? Does she further acknowledge that those statistics demonstrate the tension that exists among the many asylum seekers in Britain, and that that is the underlying cause of the critical situation at Rochester?

Does the Minister accept that there is a high risk of events such as we have seen at Rochester recurring, because 60,000 people still await a decision on their application for asylum, and more than 800 of them are languishing in a detention centre or prison? Does she acknowledge the urgent need for new procedures to tackle the underlying cause of delay and to deal with circumstances such as those at Rochester, where people are so desperate that they are prepared to risk their lives, because they cannot get a decision from the Government on when their application will be heard and in what circumstances?

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Gentleman calls on the Government to introduce new procedures. We have spent a considerable part of this Session introducing new procedures, which he and his hon. Friends have voted against. So he is clearly not remotely interested in procedures that will speed up the system. The backlog of enforcement appeals stands at some 13,000, but the hon. Gentleman's deduction that the protest in Rochester is the result of delays is not defensible on the basis of the information that we have before us.

For example, of the 750 people who were in detention last month, which is the latest snapshot figure I have, the overwhelming majority had been there for less than six months and only 30 had been there in excess of 12 months, all of whom had highly complicated cases. The House heard me say that, of the six people who claim to be refusing fluids, half were initially detained either this month or last month. So I do not feel that delays are the actual cause of frustration. Indeed, of those detained, some 75 to 80 per cent. have already had a decision.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: I remind the House that private notice questions deal with a specific issue, and I ask the many hon. Members who are standing to make their questions to the point and to ask them very briskly.

Sir Jim Lester (Broxtowe): Does my hon. Friend acknowledge that there is a difference between the regime in Campsfield house and that in Rochester? What we really need is not prisons, but secure hostels to detain people who need detention. The Prison Service is very uncomfortable with that role and, if we are looking for additional places for people such as those being discussed, we would do better to build secure hostels than to keep them locked up in prison.

Miss Widdecombe: I have a great deal of sympathy with my hon. Friend's remarks about preferring detention in special centres to detention in discrete parts of prison. That is why we have opened Campsfield house and Tinsley house and why the percentage of those detained in our prison system has declined. It is a shared objective. Meanwhile, if we believe that people should be detained and if that view is upheld by independent adjudicators, we believe that it is right that we must supply enough space. As we do not have enough space in our detention centres, we must use prisons.

Mrs. Diana Maddock (Christchurch): Does the Minister recognise that, despite her statement today, many people think it a scandal that so many people have been in prison for so long when no offence has been committed? Does she agree that no one should be allowed admission to this country when they stage a hunger strike, but that delays are unacceptable? In the case of those on hunger strike in Rochester, may we have assurances from the Minister that there will be no further delays, that they will be told when they will get an appeal and that that appeal will be soon? Does the Minister recognise that many hon. Members are somewhat dismayed that such a situation is still occurring, given the reassurances that the House was given in respect of delays during the passage of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993?

Miss Widdecombe: I am amazed at that series of questions. I can only conclude that two things must be true: first, that the hon. Lady had prepared her remarks before she came in; and, secondly, that she did not manage somehow to revise them in the light of what I have already said.

Mr. Peter Brooke (City of London and Westminster, South): Is my hon. Friend aware that two separate and responsible witnesses gave presentations last week to the all-party parliamentary group on refugees and that that caused no little concern to those of us who heard the evidence of those witnesses, one of whom concentrated on the psychological health of detainees? Although I have absolute confidence in her conduct when managing this situation, would she or the Under–Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North–East (Mr. Kirkhope), who is also sitting on the Treasury Bench, be prepared to meet hon. Members to discuss the underlying issues?

Miss Widdecombe: I am always available to my right hon. and hon. Friends and to Opposition Members to discuss these issues.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is the Minister aware that, to independent observers of this exchange, the Government's response will seem bureaucratic, inhumane and harsh? People will remember the totally different and more generous approach taken when people escaped from Tsarist Russia and the pogroms and when people came in the 1930s from Germany. Many hon. Members are descended from those who were given admission. Particularly in view of the Prime Minister's recent boast in India that he was the friend of the ethnic communities, the Minister's answer will sound singularly unconvincing.

Miss Widdecombe: What I find unconvincing is the tendency of Opposition Members to deplore the present situation, without actually saying what the alternative is. Is the alternative seriously not to detain anybody? Is it seriously to release people because they choose distressing methods of attempting to press their case? Should we seriously simply say that anybody who comes to this country, no matter what the circumstances, can wander around free, even if there are very good reasons why we and other responsible persons believe that that should not be allowed? In the absence of any sensible alternative suggestion, I believe that our policy is correct.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): Is my hon. Friend aware that all hunger strikers practise moral blackmail on society? Does she agree that, however compelling certain cases might be—I do not accept that the cases we are debating are compelling—to give way undermines the structures that underpin our society and our approach to sensible living?

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. Friend has summed up the issue very sensibly. However distressing or difficult the circumstances in which people are now putting themselves, we have food, fluids and all the necessary medical care available. All the help and advice in the world is available to those people. If they choose not to avail themselves of it, I deeply regret that, but in the last analysis, that is their decision.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): The Minister constantly wears a cross round her neck. Can she tell us how she equates her Christian conscience with allowing those people to die?

Miss Widdecombe: I have already quoted the circumstances in which some of the detainees find themselves in detention. I quoted one case in which a detainee had served a sentence in this country for indecent assault on children. As the hon. Lady challenges my Christianity, perhaps I may quote to her:

"Whoso shall offend one of these"

my

"little ones . . . it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck".

The hon. Lady knows that very well.

Mrs. Clwyd: "Thou shalt not kill."

Miss Widdecombe: I do not want any of these detainees to die; that is why the medical attention is available. However, it must be their decision whether to take it up.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Although Rochester prison is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Medway (Dame P. Fenner), a number of people are concerned, for humane reasons, about the circumstances in which people are detained in Rochester. Specifically, they are worried about the way in which the decision to detain is taken and the reviews that take place thereafter. They would like to know what those reviews are, how frequently they are carried out and by whom.

Miss Widdecombe: Reviews are carried out at regular intervals and, as I said, written decisions are taken, and written reasons then given, every month. When someone has been in detention for six months or more, the information is regularly brought before a director in the immigration service.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): In view of the Minister's rude and uncalled-for response to the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock)—

Mrs. Maddock *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Dalyell: Should we not remember that we had better be a bit careful about biblical references? Did not the Bible say something about charity? Will the Minister consult some of her distinguished and senior colleagues and find out whether they have a conscience as to what the shade of their grandfathers has to say?

Miss Widdecombe: Does charity involve not detaining people whom we believe it is in the public interest to detain? If that is the definition of charity, it is the oddest definition that I have heard. As for my allegedly rude answer, I was challenged on a most personal basis of religious belief and I believe that I had every right to answer in like terms.

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Is my hon. Friend the Minister aware that every reasonable person, hearing what she has said today about the processes by which we deal with the detained 1 per cent. of asylum seekers, will consider that this action is sadly necessary, decent, humane and totally beyond reproach?

Miss Widdecombe: I am most grateful. I believe that that sums up the situation completely.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): Could the Minister tell us a little more about the way in which the authorities treat hunger strikers? What counselling is available to them to try to get them off hunger strike? What access is made available to their family and friends, so that they may try to dissuade them from the action?

The Minister knows of a case about which I am in correspondence with her Department—that of Mr. Barry Horne, who has been on hunger strike since 6 January. He is protesting about experiments on animals. She is good on animals, but not so good on people. I understand that he was moved, as a category A prisoner—he is on remand—from Bullingdon prison to Bristol prison in handcuffs. The man can hardly walk. Is it necessary to handcuff hunger strikers?

Madam Speaker: Order. We are getting on to the subject of a different prisoner in a different situation. Does the Minister want to respond to that? The question was quite outside the terms of the private notice question.

Miss Widdecombe *indicated dissent.*

Madam Speaker: That is very sensible.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Will my hon. Friend comment on speculation in the press that two temporary prisons on land and a possible floating prison that might end up in my constituency in Portland might be used as detention centres for asylum seekers? Is such speculation correct, and is that the Government's intention?

Miss Widdecombe: We have no such plans. Our current plans are that both facilities, should they become available, will be used for category C prisoners.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): I recognise the sensitivity of the issue. My hon. Friend said that medicine, food and liquids were available to the prisoners. There is a fine line between suicide, euthanasia and taking one's own life by depriving oneself of food. Has my hon. Friend given the matter thought? Is there any point at which the Government would step in to save a life?

Miss Widdecombe: There is no point at which we would force-feed or force on people medical treatment that they had indicated they did not want. We are keeping available medical attention that would immediately assist. We hope that medical intervention would obviate the possibility of a death occurring, but we cannot force that treatment on people. If they decide to refuse it, that must be a matter for them.

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North–East): I welcome my hon. Friend's statement on a serious and difficult matter. Does she agree that, however difficult and awful it may be when people go on hunger strike, it should not deflect us from the point that detention is necessary in a minority of cases? Does she further agree that, in the light of the case histories outlined in the House this afternoon, many people might wonder why some of the asylum seekers are still in this country?

Miss Widdecombe: Those who are seeking asylum are in this country because we have to go through the proper procedures. They are entitled to appeal and, if they choose, to judicial review. Sometimes, even when all avenues have been exhausted and we wish to remove them, documentation and difficulties from the receiving country can make that difficult. For all those reasons, they are in this country. Those who are in the country in the circumstances described by my hon. Friend are precisely the ones who are cases for detention.

Earlier, there was a sedentary intervention—a justified one—from the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock). The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) combined several references in his question, including my response to the hon. Member for Christchurch and my biblical quotation, which was in response to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd). That was why I said that my quotation and my response to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley were fully justified. I also consider my response to the hon. Member for Christchurch to be fully justified: she had not listened to a word that I had said.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): Does my hon. Friend recall that during the private notice question the observation has been made that Britain is almost alone in using detention centres for asylum seekers? That is quite bogus. Many countries use detention centres, but others use reception centres. On the surface, those appear to be voluntary, but it is difficult to avoid them because all welfare support is withdrawn unless the asylum seekers go to the reception centres. Is it not true that we are not alone in seeing that those who need to be detained are detained and dealt with, for the safety of our own citizens?

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. Friend is right. We detain only about 1.5 per cent.—currently about 1 per cent.—of those who are seeking asylum. The rest, to whom we give temporary admission while we sort out their cases, are free to go anywhere they like in this country. In other countries, that is not so: those who are seeking asylum are held in reception centres and their movements are heavily limited. Our approach to those who are seeking asylum is a model of humanity.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): As a final conclusion, does the hon. Lady realise that, second only to the Home Secretary, she is the most nauseous personality in the place?

Madam Speaker: Order. Abusive exchanges about personalities across the Floor of the House must cease. We are concerned with Government policy and not with personalities.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): In relation to the answer that my hon. Friend gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie), would it not be more humane for medical staff to give fluids to hunger strikers—forcibly if necessary—in one or two highly exceptional cases, to ensure that they do not die or damage themselves permanently?

Miss Widdecombe: I honour the reasoning behind that question, and I understand that such a case could be made in the interests of preserving life. However, if people who are in full possession of their faculties decide that they do not want a particular course of medicine, regardless of whether they are in detention or free in society, it cannot be forced upon them.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Would not any decent gentleman want to withdraw the very offensive personal remark that he made to my hon. Friend?

Madam Speaker: I have made my views very clear about personal remarks. Does the hon. Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) wish to make some comment?

Mr. Faulds: I need no prompting from such a gentleman. I have consulted one of my more Christian colleagues, and I was reprimanded by him that it was un-Christian comment. On that ground, as an old-fashioned Presbyterian—and in order to oblige you, Madam Speaker—of course I withdraw that observation.

Madam Speaker: I am much obliged to the hon. Gentleman.

Parliamentary Questions

4.5 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I regret having to detain you and the House on a matter relating to an unanswered parliamentary question. During the Christmas recess—well before 8 January—I tabled a written question to the Chancellor of the Exchequer about the national debt, for answer on Monday 13 January when Parliament resumed. It was duly printed on the Order Paper as Question 595. On Tuesday 21 January, I telephoned the office of the Economic Secretary about the non-appearance of the answer and I was informed by an official:

"The parliamentary question is currently with the Chief Secretary and should be answered within the next couple of days".

It is now Wednesday 29 January—eight days later—and I have not received an answer. In fact, I never received a holding answer to the question. The new guidance on answering parliamentary questions entitled "Basic Dos and Don'ts", which was produced as a result of the Scott report, is clearly not being followed by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury—a man who has paid scant regard to accountability.

Madam Speaker, there is not much more that I can do and I do not know what you can do. However, I have waited two and a half weeks for an answer to a written parliamentary question tabled during the recess and have received no holding answer, even though the new instructions make it clear that Ministers must not circumvent Parliament, must not avoid answering questions and must give truthful answers—even if they are embarrassing. It is beyond belief that we must wait this long for an answer. Is there anything else that I can do, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: I am very grateful to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) for giving me a little notice of his problem. I share his view that it is totally unacceptable that the House and hon. Members should not receive even a holding answer more than two weeks after the event. That is stated not only in guidelines, but in Standing Order No. 18(4), which clearly provides that Ministers shall answer questions tabled for a named day—I believe that the hon. Gentleman gave a named day with his question—

"on the date for which notice has been given."

I seek to ensure that the Standing Orders are observed. I hope that right hon. and hon. Members on the Treasury Bench will report my remarks to the appropriate Department without delay.

Holocaust Denial

4.8 pm

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make it a criminal offence to claim, whether in writing or orally, that the policy of genocide against the Jewish people committed by Nazi Germany did not occur.

Sixty-four years ago tomorrow, Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany. In the following 12 years, Hitler's Nazi regime and his allies and supporters in the countries of Europe that it occupied set about a policy of exterminating the Jewish people, based upon Hitler's writings and ideological racial purity theories that he had outlined more than a decade previously.

After coming to power, Hitler moved quickly to implement his policies. Within a few months, a series of laws had been passed. The laws introduced between 1933 and 1938 led to confiscations and pogroms, and steps were taken to undermine the political, economic and civil rights of Jewish people in Germany. Those measures included action against many Christians of part Jewish origin. By the Nuremberg laws of 1935, Jews lost their citizenship, and they were forbidden to intermarry with other Germans.

During Kristallnacht between 9 and 10 November 1938—the night of broken glass—almost every synagogue in Germany was attacked and destroyed, as well as many other Jewish institutions and businesses. Thousands of Jewish people were imprisoned in concentration camps, their wealth was confiscated and huge punitive fines were imposed on them.

In 1939, by the time of the second world war, Jews were no longer allowed to be citizens, could not attend schools and were not able to practise their businesses or professions. They were not allowed to own land, to associate with a non-Jew, or to go to parks, libraries or museums, and were ordered to live in ghettos. By 1941, boys over 12 were conscripted into munition factories, all use of the telephone and public transportation systems was forbidden, and all Jews over the age of six were required to wear the yellow star of David badge.

Those facts are indisputable. The Nazis, as they occupied neighbouring countries, implemented their policies in those countries. Eventually, they decided to develop the policy of the so-called final solution, which meant the extermination of Jewish people throughout Europe. It has been estimated—it is difficult to give an exact figure—that up to 6 million people of Jewish origin or part Jewish origin were exterminated in that process.

More than 800,000 died in the ghettos: 600,000 in German-occupied eastern Europe; 100,000 in what used to be Czechoslovakia; and 100,000 in Romania and the Soviet Union. About 1,300,000 were killed by being shot in the open air. Up to 3 million people died in the camps—2,700,000 died in the death camps. A million people died at Auschwitz, three quarters of a million at Treblinka, more than half a million at Belzec, up to 200,000 at Sobibór, 150,000 at Kulmhof and 50,000 at Lublin. Others died in concentration camps elsewhere.

Following Hitler's defeat at the end of the war, when those facts, which were already partly known, came to general attention, there began a systematic campaign of disinformation, distortion and lying about the past by Nazi sympathisers and neo-Nazi groups.

[Mr. Mike Gapes]

Many countries have adopted laws against denial of the holocaust. Countries in Europe—including Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France and Lithuania—have such laws, but this country does not. Our current legislation is based on the Public Order Act 1986, under which incitement to racial hatred is an offence. People may refer to the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Home Office and, ultimately, the Attorney-General for legislative consideration literature disseminated in schools which denies the holocaust, or says that Hitler did not know about it, that there were no gas chambers or concentration camps or that people died simply of starvation or as a result of allied bombing. Such a leaflet was distributed in Hemel Hempstead last year, and was referred to the Attorney-General; but we are told that, although material of that kind is offensive and untruthful, it is not insulting, and there are therefore no prosecutions on that basis involving holocaust denial material.

Survivors of the holocaust, relatives of those who died and many other people who believe in democracy and the defence of human rights throughout society find it unbelievable that such a loophole remains in our current legislation. It is time, by one means or another, either to enact a specific law to make it an offence to deny the holocaust, or to amend the existing law in the Public Order Act 1986 to make denial an offence.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition made some welcome remarks this morning when he opened the Anne Frank exhibition in Southwark. He said that it was time for us to give serious consideration to such action. Moreover, since I gave notice of my intention to present my Bill, the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the Holocaust Educational Trust and many others have given their support. That suggests that my proposals have widespread backing. I hope that, before too long, we in this country will join others in Europe to work collectively against the neo-Nazis who operate internationally—who publish material in one country and disseminate it in another, and use loopholes in order to act without any concern for the effect of their actions on the public and the dangers that they pose for the future.

Some people may ask, "What about freedom of speech?" Our freedom of speech is already constrained by the legislation that I have mentioned, and in other ways. There is no such thing as absolute freedom of speech; it is a question of balance, and I believe that the balance must be adjusted so that we can deal with the problems more effectively. Some people will also say that the Bill is not necessary because we shall create martyrs, but what is the point of legislating against incitement to racial hatred unless we are prepared to enforce it rigorously against those who incite such hatred by peddling material of this kind?

Some people will say that we do not need a new law. I hope that hon. Members will demonstrate that we do.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Mike Gapes, Mr. Doug Hoyle, Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, Mr. David Hunt, Rev. Martin Smyth, Mr. Norman Hogg, Mr. Greville Janner, Mrs. Barbara Roche, Mr. John Marshall, Mr. John Hutton, Mr. Michael Fabricant and Mr. Paul Flynn.

HOLOCAUST DENIAL

Mr. Mike Gapes accordingly presented a Bill to make it a criminal offence to claim, whether in writing or orally, that the policy of genocide against the Jewish people committed by Nazi Germany did not occur: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 28 February, and to be printed [Bill 89].

Media Comment (Madam Speaker's Statement)

4.19 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In your considered statement yesterday at column 153-54, you expressed the hope that the investigation would be completed

"at the earliest possible moment."—[*Official Report*, 28 January 1997; Vol. 289, c. 153.]

Is there any indication as to whether we are talking about weeks or months in relation to the earliest possible moment?

Madam Speaker: There is nothing further that I can help the House with following my clear statement yesterday.

Orders of the Day

Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), further considered.

Clause 4

RESTRICTION OF LIBERTY ORDERS

Amendment proposed [20 January]: No. 245, in page 6, line 20, to leave out the words

'of 16 years of age or more'.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

Question again proposed, That the amendment be made.

Madam Speaker: I remind the House that with this we are discussing Government amendments Nos. 246 to 250, 252 and 253.

4.20 pm

Mrs. Irene Adams (Paisley, North): You may recall, Madam Speaker, that I was interrupted in my speech last week when the Government hung on for yet another night and refused to move the 10 o'clock motion because, once more, they were frightened of losing a vote in the House. I was on my feet in support of my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) and of the amendments that he had moved. Our contention was that electronic tagging should be part of the supervision and probation process, and that it should be used only as an alternative to imprisonment.

The Government are still not giving us the guidelines that we think are needed. They are not giving the judiciary the guidelines that they would need. We do not know, for example, what offenders, or offences for that matter, would be targeted and subject to the orders.

In Committee, the Minister guaranteed that this would be a pilot scheme, but the only research that is of any use is from America. It is widely available and shows that the

"equipment alone will not ensure a successful programme".

Electronic tagging will work only if other measures are in place. The research says:

"The involvement of professional social workers is key."

My main concern involves the electronic tagging of people under 16. The American research tells that such tagging worked best with people who already had some internal control and who needed just an extra nudge. I ask again: what offences and offenders does the Minister have in mind, because the under-16s who would be subject to the measure would not need just an extra nudge and would often be from dysfunctional families? They would come not from middle-class homes, with parents who watch their every move and who keep them on track day in, day out, but from homes where family life had often broken down.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): Where does the hon. Lady get that interpretation from? It seems that a young offender from any background could be submitted to this recourse.

Mrs. Adams: If the Minister would give us the guidance on what offenders and offences he was talking about, we might know what offences to address, but, at the moment, we do not, so I must assume that this applies across the board. I have no guidance from the Minister or the Government, and neither do the judiciary. The Government are asking the House to pass the orders on to sheriffs and to judges, who will have to implement them as best they can because we are not getting the guidance that is required.

My experience is that not many children from my street are subject to any court orders. However, I fear that many children in the poorer parts of my constituency would fall into that category. There is nothing to suggest that children with a life style similar to mine would suffer. Many children are in peripheral housing schemes where there are no facilities and bad housing and where schools are not properly equipped by the Government. Their lives are not good and they do not see a bright future. They have nothing to look forward to, and they are the children who would be affected. The last thing that such children need is the pressure on their families that electronic tagging would bring.

In many cases the mother in a house in which the family had broken down would also be the gaoler, and that is a difficult role to give anyone without the backing of social work departments and probation officers. As far as I can see, no such backing is on offer.

In Committee, the Minister said that one of the relevant crimes was football hooliganism. There is no great evidence of football hooliganism in Scotland, because we addressed that a long time ago. I am at a loss to know what sort of crimes he has in mind. Would truancy by those under the age of 16 be relevant? A child playing truant from school could be electronically tagged at home for 12 hours. The removal of the tag would not be an inducement for the child to go to school if the only time that the child was free was during school hours. Tags may also be used on fine defaulters who are over the age of 16.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the best inducements to under-16-year-olds not to play truant would be to offer them the prospect of a real job when they leave school? Perhaps the Government want to experiment with electronic tagging. In view of the closeness of some of the votes in the next few weeks, Tory Whips might try it on Conservative Members.

Mrs. Adams: I am unhappy with that suggestion, because our Whips might try it on us. However, my hon. Friend's first point was excellent. Tagging will not encourage children to look for a better way of life. The only way to do that is to give them hope. Some 20 per cent. of families in Britain do not have an income from a job coming into the household, and that does not encourage a better life. The proposal will not help them.

I am concerned about the way that the matter has been handled, and especially about its effect on those who are under the age of 16. However, people over that age are also affected. Was fine default one of the crimes that the Minister has in mind? In Committee, the Minister failed to answer questions. What would the tag entail? When it is switched off will it still activate other electronic equipment such as that at supermarket doors? We often set equipment off in airports with pagers and mobile telephones. I understand that people will wear the tags even when they are deactivated. *[Interruption.]*

[Mrs. Adams]

Would the Minister like to intervene? Will the tags activate equipment in supermarkets and other stores? Are we putting the mark of Cain on people? Are we saying, "Here is an offender"? Will people who did not buy a television licence be stopped at supermarket doors? Will we point a finger at them in public? None of those questions has been answered.

We are discussing the introduction of an order requiring a piece of equipment, but we do not know to whom the order will apply or what crimes they will have had to commit. We do not know the effect that the order will have on their overall life style or on their families. We are also not guaranteeing the involvement of the professionals who will be necessary to implement an order, such as social workers and probation officers.

We seem to be throwing in a measure that has not been well researched, and not researched at all in Scotland. There have been a few pilot schemes in England, but they have not yet been concluded. The only research we have comes from America, and that has proved that the measure is utterly useless. It has not served its intended purpose, and, as the Minister told us in Committee, its application could cost up to £10,000 per person. Paying that amount would not be very clever if the order was made because of non-payment of the television licence fee or because wee Johnny was kicking a football in the street after his mother could not get him in after 8 o'clock at night.

4.30 pm

Before we accept the measure, the Minister will have to tell us much more about it: the type of crimes to which it will apply, the type of people whom he thinks will be wearing the tags and how we will deal with the equipment problems I have mentioned. He must also tell us the cost of putting the system into every home, as it will have to include a telephone and modem. Presumably the Government will have to install the system and pick up the bills for running it. I should tell the Minister that I have some people in my constituency who could break out of Alcatraz. I do not think that an electronic tag will induce them to stay at home. The Minister has a lot more work to do on the measure, and he will have to answer some of our questions before it progresses any further.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North–East): The hon. Member for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) has made a most compelling case against the proposals. She was particularly right to say that the Bill provides absolutely no guidance to the judiciary generally and to sheriffs particularly on the criteria that should be employed when electronic tagging is applied to those over 16 or to those under 16. One could argue very strongly that the Government's decision to extend the proposal, by tabling Amendment No. 245, places a far more acute obligation on them to prescribe the criteria by which this form of penal disposal should be used.

If one introduces a measure that is essentially a gimmick, surely one has an intellectual if not a political obligation to justify its introduction. If one intends to apply the measure to under-16s—who are, by convention and statute, dealt with differently in virtually every aspect of our civil and criminal law—the obligation is all the more pressing. Thus far, the Government have not discharged that obligation.

As hon. Members have already said, the measure is untargeted and may very possibly have the effect of contradicting the Government's apparent attempt to create more consistency in sentencing. If one introduces a policy that contradicts other policies, surely one has a duty to explain why the contradiction should be allowed.

As the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) said when we last met to discuss the measure, the Government have given absolutely no indication of the resources that will be available to implement it. We are told that public expenditure is under severe and critical review, but this measure will undoubtedly increase the burden upon the taxpayer. We can rest assured that calculations have been done in the Scottish Office, but the House has not been admitted to the privity of that information. No doubt the Government do not want to tell us just how expensive this kind of operation can be.

If the Government have had the opportunity to read the Home Office research study No. 163, which deals with the trials in Greater Manchester, Norfolk and Berkshire in 1995-96, they will know that the average cost per offender in the trial was £18,000. That is approximately 30 times the cost of supervising an offender and greater than the cost of keeping a person in prison for six months. That is my estimate of the costs. Does the Minister have a better estimate for the House?

I now turn to the tagging of children under 16. We know that, in the Scottish system, children under 16 rarely reach the courts because of the children's panel system, which is the envy of many other jurisdictions. What estimate have Ministers made of the precise number of individuals under 16 years of age for whom tagging would be relevant? We look forward to hearing about that from the Minister. In this context, generalisations will not suffice.

What is the position with regard to the pilot study? Is it still under way? The date of 4 January has been mentioned as the date of the conclusion of the pilot study. If that is so, where is the evaluation? Are we to be expected to deal with the matter without the analysis and evaluation of a pilot study being available to the House? I know that the Government are urgent in their desire to put this legislation on the statute book, but is it seriously being suggested that it is sensible to legislate when information directly relevant to the issue we are discussing, which has been gathered as a result of an experiment, is not to be shared with the House? To coin a phrase, that is Mickey Mouse legislating, which does nothing for the credit of the Government.

These matters, and in particular the effort to pass legislation to impose tagging on those under 16, have not gone without comment, particularly from the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland. Letters were reported extensively in *The Herald* of 9 January 1997. We hear that the Secretary of the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland—no bleeding heart liberal he, and he will no doubt regard that as a compliment—wrote:

"The prospect of tagging children under the age of 16 tends to lead away from this general philosophy".

He is referring to the current approach to those who have offended under the age of 16. He continues:

"An electronic tagging device could be a backward step as such tagging would be viewed as a form of additional punishment and stand as a marker on the child, the likely consequence of which would be to expose the child to ridicule. The more hardened offenders would probably regard the tag as a trophy."

Did the Minister get that letter and did he read it? What interpretation did he put on its terms?

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Does the hon. and learned Gentleman realise that the consultation exercise drew 102 responses, four of which were from police forces? One hundred and one out of the 102 responses were against. There was one response for, and I will keep the House in suspense as to who that one was from.

Mr. Campbell: I suppose that one might say that if 101 responses were against, that was probably 101 damnations.

Mr. Cameron continues:

"If a child merits tagging then, generally speaking, he or she is unlikely to view it as an incentive to better behaviour. Indeed, it is more likely to be regarded by some 'harder' children as an achievement . . . The ultimate responsibility for the management and administration of electronic monitoring would or should fall squarely on the shoulders of the local authority and not the police where children are concerned."

There is a demonstration of an eager, anxious and determined body of opinion in Scotland which is desperately awaiting the passing into law of these provisions so that it can be part of it. The association is saying, "Don't let the police have responsibility for this. Pass the responsibility to the local authority." Did the Minister get the letter? Did he read the letter? What weight does he attach to the letter and what weight does he attach to the views of those who are most directly concerned with crime and punishment? Alternatively, has he on this occasion simply swept away the views of the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland because they do not coincide with the prejudices and gimmick-ridden approach to penal affairs which now, unhappily, characterise the Scottish Office?

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Has the hon. and learned Gentleman considered the safety aspect? Tagging equipment might, in some workplaces, be regarded by management and employees as a safety hazard.

Mr. Campbell: That may well be so for those over 16, although we do not normally expect those under 16 to be in factories, where such issues might arise. However, I accept the hon. Gentleman's general point that someone carrying such a tag might be at risk when performing some activities because of the presence of the tag.

Mr. Gallie: The hon. and learned Gentleman criticised the proposals partly because the local authorities, rather than the police, would supervise the young people. Would he like to comment on the fact that the local authority has overall responsibility for those sentenced to community service, which is the present equivalent of probationary service?

Mr. Campbell: The hon. Gentleman states the present position, but I am not sure of the point that he is trying to make. My point was that the police are clear that they do not want anything to do with the administration of these proposals. Coupled with the other aspects of the letter to which I have referred, that is a clear thumbs down from the Association of Chief Police Officers (Scotland).

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Would the hon. and learned Gentleman like to comment on the fact that it is not long since the House debated the Children (Scotland) Bill, when not only did none of the agencies suggest tagging under-16s, but the suggestion did not come from any Minister either?

Mr. Campbell: The hon. Lady has a particular interest in children's issues and makes effective and worthwhile contributions to many of our debates on such subjects. Her intervention underlines the fact that what we are discussing today is a gimmick to be introduced into the penal system not because we know it to be worth while—we have not had the evaluation of the pilot study—or because it has been proved universally effective elsewhere, but because the Government believe that it might attract a headline here or there.

Hon. Members have already referred to pilot studies that have been carried out abroad. Experience abroad suggests that tagging works only if there is close supervision and lasts for a short period. Where in the Bill are those criteria set out? Nowhere. Experience abroad suggests that offenders must have a stable life style. Where in the Bill do we find an obligation on a judge to take account of the family circumstances of a person on whom a tag is to be placed? Nowhere. The report into the United Kingdom study, to which I have already referred, concluded:

"friction between members of the family when one was undergoing electronic monitoring may be a potentially serious consequence of the system."

All the evidence is against the proposals. We have heard nothing approaching a reasoned, rational, intellectual justification for them. One is driven to the conclusion that the issue is not the proper treatment of children, but the capture of what is thought to be the law and order agenda, as evidenced by a tabloid headline here and there. In the run-up to a general election we expect that sort of thing, but it is wrong of the Government to propose measures that are so clearly unjustified either by principle or by experience elsewhere. If the Government had any proper regard for the penal system in Scotland, they would withdraw the proposals immediately.

4.45 pm

Mr. Gallie: I shall be fairly brief. The hon. Member for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) who stated, "We got over the problems of alcohol abuse and hooliganism at football matches." The Government certainly did that by introducing legislation during the 1980s. I was not in the House at the time, but I suspect that Opposition Members opposed those changes. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] That surprises me. It must have been the one and only law and order measure that they did not oppose.

Mrs. Adams: The hon. Gentleman has got it wrong again. In fact our late colleague, the former Member for Glasgow, Gorbals, introduced the legislation.

Mr. Gallie: I certainly welcome that legislation. I am quite sure that the Government pushed it along and that it was a case of Scotland first and others following. It was good legislation.

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell) appeared to suggest that we should impose on sheriffs strict guidelines on sentencing. I agree with him to some extent, but I find it difficult to

[Mr. Gallie]

understand why he finds it appropriate to set out detailed instructions for sheriffs before they can impose the use of monitoring devices.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Perhaps the fault is mine. I suspect that it is a problem of expression rather than comprehension. When we introduce such a radically different measure, and invest sheriffs with a discretion in that respect, we have a duty to lay down the criteria that they are entitled, but not bound, to take into account.

Mr. Gallie: I am quite sure that the Bill does that. From my understanding of it, and perhaps beyond the comprehension of the hon. and learned Gentleman who made such an insulting comment, the Bill contains an element of choice in that individuals will be able to choose whether or not to wear a monitoring device. As far as I am aware, it is an alternative to custody.

Opposition Members have referred to children who will be affected by the measure. Let us get down to the hard facts. In some of the areas to which the hon. Member for Paisley, North referred, children of 14 and 15 are making life an absolute misery for their peers and for society in general. The measure is aimed at children who may have 15, 16, 20 or 30 offences lined up against them. They appear before a children's panel, they are told off and then they are back on the streets. Perhaps the children's panel will be able to utilise the legislation through the courts. I recognise that children's panels can pass on their cases to the courts to be judged by sheriffs.

Mr. McFall: The hon. Gentleman specifically states that the measure will be useful for children's hearings, but amendment No. 245 excludes children's hearings. That completely destroys his case.

Mr. Gallie: It does not, because children's panels have the power to pass on cases involving young offenders to the courts. The provision could well be in their minds when they do so. It is a decision for the panels, but they are not dealing with the problems on our streets as effectively as I would like.

The measure imposes an additional facility to be utilised to control hard-line offenders for the benefit of Scottish society, and I am certainly prepared to give it a chance. If it is good it will be used by the courts, and if it is not it will be abandoned.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow) *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I remind the hon. Member for Linlithgow and any other hon. Member who spoke on the amendment on Monday that they may not speak twice to the same amendment.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): The issue in this debate is whether electronic tagging should be extended to people under 16 years of age. The speech of the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) showed that he does not understand the debate or the nature of the youngsters who are likely to come into contact with the new powers that will be given to the courts. My hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) was right when she said that the power would be almost exclusively applied to youngsters who come from deprived areas.

The hon. Gentleman challenged my hon. Friend and asked what evidence she had for that assertion. I can tell him that my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) and I spent a day sitting in the sheriff court watching case after case—including offences of theft, assault, burglary and housebreaking—and, invariably, the offenders came from similar socio-economic backgrounds and from the same parts of the city of Dundee. They had faced the same economic deprivation. If Tory Members of Parliament spent more time thinking about the causes of crime, instead of ways to chase the criminals, we might live in a safer society.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): I do not know whether my hon. Friend has visited his local constabulary headquarters, as I have, and asked to see the old birching book in which are recorded the names of those who had been birched. The same names appeared again and again. Those people came from a deprived background and could not break out of criminal behaviour. They were frequently flogged, but there was no improvement in their behaviour.

Mr. McAllion: My hon. Friend makes a pertinent point. The hon. Member for Ayr has said in the past that he would like a return to birching or flogging of offenders. Those in favour of birching argue that, once people have been birched, they will not come back for more, but the evidence shows that people were birched more than once. It is not the punishment that deters people from offending, but the circumstances that they live in. Their situations and the people they mix with encourage criminal behaviour. Offenders also tend to believe that they will not get caught, so they do not worry much about the punishment. It is time that Conservative Ministers and Back Benchers began to wake up to that fact.

The issue is why the courts should be given the power to extend electronic tagging to under-16s. The consultation exercise that the Government carried out at the end of last year has been mentioned. Indeed, in our debate on Monday, the Minister accepted that those who were consulted were "overwhelmingly opposed" to giving the new power to children's panels. When he was questioned directly by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), he accepted that the police were opposed to an extension of the power.

If the children's panels will deal with the majority of young offenders, and if everyone who has been consulted—including the police—opposes giving the children's panels powers to impose electronic tagging orders, why are the Government persisting? The Minister tried to base an argument on the number of young offenders who go before the courts rather than the children's panels. He said:

> "In 1994, only 171 young offenders had a charge proved against them in court."—[*Official Report*, 20 January 1997; Vol. 288, c. 715.]

He also accepted that those 171 young offenders were guilty of the more serious offences. We must question whether electronic tagging would be appropriate for such young offenders.

The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has conducted much research into the Government's pilot schemes, and other electronic tagging schemes throughout

the world, and come to the conclusion that electronic tagging is suitable only for a certain type of offender. It said that the monitoring period—the period during which offenders are tagged—should be short. If the Minister is saying that electronic tagging will be used for youngsters who have committed serious offences, why would a short period of electronic tagging be appropriate? I suggest that it is not in any sense appropriate.

COSLA said that electronic tagging should be targeted on offenders who have a stable home base. As my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North said, youngsters who commit such serious offences do not come from stable homes. It is therefore not appropriate for them to be electronically tagged. Indeed, one of the ways in which to deal with such youngsters is to remove them from their home base, since it can often be the reason for their offending in the first place. Why should they be electronically tagged and confined to a place that is unsuitable for them?

COSLA said that another criterion of the scheme is that it should be targeted on offenders with secure employment and economic independence. I wonder how many of the 171 youngsters who ended up in court in 1994 had secure employment or economic independence. I suggest that the answer is nil. Why on earth the Minister is going ahead with the proposal is beyond me.

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that page 24 of "Curfew Orders with Electronic Monitoring" says:

"The majority said they would agree to be tagged again . . . Avoiding custody was an important consideration, as was not jeopardising one's employment, or the chance of it"?

Mr. McAllion: We are talking about young offenders who are guilty of serious offences. It turned out that, of the 171 young offenders who were before the courts in 1994, only 25 were given any kind of detention. Only a fraction of those 25 would qualify for an electronic tagging order. Is the Minister seriously suggesting that youngsters who commit serious crimes—the kind of youngsters who the hon. Member for Ayr says terrorise communities—should be put back into the very same communities and electronically tagged rather than disposed of in detention centres? I do not think that that makes any sense.

The idea of electronic tagging is crazy. No one in the House, including hon. Members behind the Minister, supports it. As the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell) said, it is an election gimmick in an effort to grab the law and order agenda. It will not work, and in a few months' time the Minister will not be in his post. Thank God for that.

Mr. McFall: Many fine points in the debate have shown the hollowness of the Government's proposal for electronic tagging for under-16s.

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell) mentioned the pilot projects and the results of them. There have been no pilot projects in Scotland, either on adults or on under-16s. The financial memorandum to the Bill states that the pilot projects would be cost free, yet in England they cost £1.5 million. The fact that no resources are forthcoming from the Government blows a hole in the idea.

I should like to take the Minister through the history of the matter, because it is important to put it on the record. On 17 June, a White Paper was published, the responses to which were to be in by 31 July. There was no mention of electronic tagging for 16-year-olds. The Bill was published in October, immediately after the Queen's Speech, and there was no mention of electronic tagging in it. The Bill went into Committee in November, yet there was no mention of electronic tagging until near the end of that month, when the Government announced a consultation exercise and asked individuals to submit responses by 4 January—notwithstanding the Christmas and new year holidays.

In the debate last week, the genesis of the idea was mentioned. I have some information to share with the House. I received a "Dear John" letter, dated 21 January, from the chairman of Securicor plc, Sir Neil MacFarlane, the former Minister with special responsibility for sport, drawing to my attention the good work that the company does on the issue of electronic tagging. Mindful that the Government are conducting a consultation exercise in Scotland, and ready to undertake work on their behalf, he says:

"In Scotland, the Government is now consulting on whether electronic monitoring should be made available to children's hearings in considering compulsory measures of supervision for children under 16 referred to them on offence grounds."

Mr. Menzies Campbell: When the hon. Gentleman got that letter, did it occur to him to speculate on how Sir Neil MacFarlane had such information, especially relating to children's hearings, which had not up to that point been in the public domain?

5 pm

Mr. McFall: That is a matter for the Minister. I was being charitable; we need an equal mix of charity and forensic ability. I am providing the charity and the hon. and learned Gentleman has shown the forensic ability. Let us hope that the Minister provides the eloquence; I fear that the third leg may disappoint us.

Sir Neil said that his project officers had undertaken a close study and that he was sharing the results of his research with me. He quoted one extremely profound statement:

"It is established beyond any possible peradventure throughout the world that tagging is of value in the field of criminal justice. Wherever those operating the criminal justice system want it to succeed, it succeeds."

Was that statement from a senior judge in Scotland or from the most senior judge in England and Wales? No. It was from Mr. Tom Stacey of the Offenders Tag Association. It is nonsense and rubbish, and there are nothing but commercial interests at stake.

There were 102 responses to the consultation exercise over the six-week period, of which 101 were against, including four from police authorities. I want to share my secret with the House, and tell right hon. and hon. Members that the one person who was unequivocally in favour was the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie).

The hon. Gentleman does himself and his party no justice. The core question was question 3:

"Would electronic tagging be appropriate to supervision requirements for young people under 16?"

[Mr. McFall]

I have the 102 responses, no thanks to the Government. I had to seek them through the Library; it took us nine days to get them from the Scottish Office. The responses to the question run to six or seven pages, and give detailed observations on why it is not appropriate. I want to share with the House the answer given by the hon. Member for Ayr to that most profound question. His answer, in full, was: "Yes." He added a note at the end, saying:

"I trust my comments, which do require expansion, are helpful."

Let the hon. Gentleman expand on why he is the odd person out in Scotland.

Mr. Gallie: Has the hon. Gentleman lost his sense of hearing? I gave a response here tonight.

Mr. McFall: Is that so? Was that the whole story? Perhaps I blinked and missed it. If that is the whole story, the House and the country will say that electronic tagging, as advocated by the hon. Gentleman, is unacceptable. He goes on about how we should support the police; he will no doubt say that Scotland is voting against tagging for under-16s whereas England and Wales voted for it. The reason, as he well knows, is that we have a unique justice system in Scotland, with children's hearings, and it is the envy of the world, including England and Wales.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) has been up to Scotland to observe the children's hearings system, in which we all take pride, whether we come from the local authority, the police, or the system itself. The system does not apportion blame to under-16-year-olds but tries to find out what the issues and the problems are, so that supervision and assistance can be offered to young people who find themselves in difficulties. Most of all, it offers support to parents and others in the community.

Mr. Gallie: I compliment the hon. Gentleman on his research. How many Scottish Labour Members took the time and trouble even to write a three-letter word on the consultation document?

Mr. McFall: In Committee, we had a constructive debate, as the hon. Gentleman will agree, and there was no hint—nothing on the horizon—about tagging for under-16s. We saw through the exercise at the end of November: it was patent nonsense then, and it remains patent nonsense today. We have the support of 101 individuals and organisations, and the hon. Gentleman is isolated on the issue.

Mr. Gallie: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McFall: No, I am going to educate the hon. Gentleman, even if he does not want me to; he will have to sit there and listen. He said that the police had to be supported. Fife constabulary said:

"The most likely reaction from many children would be to regard the need for tagging in their particular case as a 'badge of honour'. There is a danger that they would be viewed by their peers as role models."

The Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland said:

"The whole ethos of the current system is the fact that it is care based and by its very nature strives to place the child's needs as the first priority. The prospect of tagging children under the age of 16 tends to lead away from this central philosophy. Electronic tagging would simply add another level to the current care arrangements which would probably be of minimal effect and, under the present philosophy, inappropriate. Although tagging could be advantageous as an option for the courts when dealing with *adult* offenders, its use on children would be generally inappropriate and could serve to be counter-productive."

The Association of Scottish Police Superintendents said:

"The overwhelming view was very much against the concept . . . for younger children. Tagging would hugely divert attention from the positive purposes of supervision. Far from being the solution to the problem, supervision becomes the problem itself."

The Scottish Police Federation said:

"At this time, we do not believe that electronic tagging would be appropriate to supervision requirements for young people under 16. We do not believe that electronic tagging would be a positive incentive to a child to demonstrate greater responsibility and self-control."

Dumfries and Galloway, and other non-Labour councils, gave responses. Dumfries and Galloway said:

"To punish children or to even restrict offending without considering the reasons which bring about this behaviour is a backward step and is not a long term solution for the child or the community . . . we do believe this is a suggestion which must have come from someone with little understanding of the Hearing System in Scotland."

Hear, hear to that.

If the Minister takes his figures seriously, he will know that there are very few children for whom it would be appropriate. He must address the central question: for which children aged under 16, and in what circumstances, would tagging be appropriate? Are we to have the perverse situation in which the children available for tagging—the 25 who went to court in 1994—are sent, with electronic tags, back to their communities, which, as the hon. Member for Ayr said, they terrorise? Do we want that solution?

Is the measure in the interests of justice? I fear not, because the responses to the consultation have shown that it is not. Is it in commercial interests? If it is, the Minister and the Government have to be condemned. Following the letter from Securicor, the Opposition are fuelled with the belief that there is a commercial consideration. The Minister and the Government will not be forgiven if they go ahead on that basis.

For goodness sake, let the Minister think. Did he read the 101 responses? If he did, what is his view on them? Why are the Government out of step with social work departments, the children's hearing system and the police? Why are the Government alone on this? Why is the Secretary of State repudiating everything that his predecessors have done? Why does he say one minute that he will consult and in the second minute burn the responses? What use is that to the juvenile system in Scotland? If the Government have any care or concern for law and order in Scotland, they will surely consider again. If they do not reflect, their policy should be damned along with the rest of their policies.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) asked what view we took of the consultation exercise. It is not just who, or how many people, said what that matters, but the merits and strength of the arguments. On the merits of the argument, we took the view that the case against introducing tagging into the

children's hearing system was compelling. In respect of the criminal justice system, we took the view that the main arguments against tagging, pertinent though they were, could be met by appropriate legislation.

Mrs. Fyfe: Will the Minister give way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am answering the points made by the hon. Member for Dumbarton.

On the basis of the arguments, we considered that the balance lay in favour of making tagging available.

The hon. Member for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) asked why there was no provision in the Bill to require the court to take into account the family circumstances, which the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) raised earlier. There is such a provision. Government amendment No. 247 introduces a new subsection in proposed new section 245A to require the court to obtain and consider information about a child offender's family circumstances before making an order.

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) referred to research and a Home Office report, which was published in December and is in the Vote Office. It was generally positive on the pilot schemes. It concluded:

"Electronic monitoring can be a worthwhile addition to the range of community penalties available to sentences."

I make it clear to the hon. and learned Gentleman that there is scope for regulations to target the use of disposal in the future. Government amendment No. 249 enables regulations to confine the application of the disposal to types of offender, so if the experience of the pilot scheme—or experience thereafter—suggests that the disposal is appropriate to some offenders but not others, regulations can be made under the Bill to amend its use.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: The Minister mentioned the pilot scheme. Does he understand why so many Opposition Members find it extraordinary that, having established the pilot scheme, the Government propose to introduce legislation without waiting until they have had the opportunity to evaluate the results? It is like delivering the verdict before the jury has heard the evidence.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. and learned Gentleman is wrong. We are not suggesting the general adoption of these measures throughout Scotland. We believe that it is right to review the effects of the pilot scheme, to have pilot schemes in Scotland first, to make a proper evaluation and then to consider whether it should be taken forward more generally.

The hon. Member for Paisley, North referred to costs. The average cost of the pilot schemes in the first 12 months was £22,140, but that does not accurately predict the cost of an on-going national scheme because it reflects start-up costs, short time scale and the low number of orders initially made. The cost of an average length curfew order with electronic monitoring seems close to that of an average probation order. The monthly cost of tagging is well below half the cost of custody. The proposal is to run two to three pilot schemes in Scotland in the next two to three years. The estimated cost of those schemes is £1.5 million. I have no doubt that they will prove as cost-effective south of the border.

5.15 pm

The hon. Member for Paisley, North raised the evidence given by the police. We received responses from the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland, the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents and the Scottish Police Federation. They expressed reservations. A great concern was that tagging would be inappropriate or ineffective for young offenders. We recognise that there will be many cases in which tagging is inappropriate. That is why our proposals simply enable courts to use tagging in cases in which they consider it more appropriate than a disposal involving custody. Courts would not require tagging in inappropriate circumstances.

Both the chief police officers and the Police Federation suggested that the measure could be given further consideration following the pilot schemes. We recognised the merits of that argument, but also that, because the tagging of young offenders raised distinct issues, pilot schemes involving only adults were unlikely to test conclusively whether tagging could work with particular young offenders. Fife constabulary referred to the need for a

"proper evaluation of its likely efficacy".

We agree. We believe that ultimately such an evaluation can be made only by piloting the tagging of young offenders.

Mr. Dalyell: The Minister was asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North and by me about safety. My hon. Friend referred to safety in supermarkets. I should like to ask about safety in swimming pools. I presume that the equipment is transistorised. It might easily be taken into a swimming pool. If someone drops a transistor into their bath, they are electrocuted. There are practical considerations.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Of course the safety of the individual who has been tagged is a priority. No disposal which risked the safety of the individual would be acceptable. As for the electronic devices, we have moved on a great deal. The results of the pilot scheme showed conclusively that it worked in terms both of accuracy and of reliability. Incidentally, the devices work under water, so there is no concern about that.

We are against the stigmatising of offenders. We equally reject the notion that it will be a badge of honour. We do not believe that it should operate in that way. Tagging may be of value if a court wishes to protect victims and the public from the offender, but wants also to avoid a custodial sentence. It may also have a role to play in helping offenders to break patterns of offending, and act as a deterrent against further offending by restricting the liberty of the offender.

Of course, the person would have to give consent to being tagged. That is an important consideration.

The hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) asked about age. Nothing in our amendments would prevent tagging from being piloted initially only with adults. Government amendment No. 249 would enable regulations to prescribe the class of offender in respect of whom restriction of liberty orders might be made. So it would be possible for such regulations initially to limit the availability of the orders to offenders above a certain

[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton]

age, and extend it later if that seemed appropriate. I shall reflect on the views expressed by the hon. Gentleman and others before I make such regulations. His views may persuade us that the pilot schemes should be limited initially to adults. Even if I am not persuaded to introduce such a limitation, the Opposition will have the opportunity to oppose the regulations.

In a debate on the Crime (Sentences) Bill, the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) said:

"there may be merit in extending the experiment further, so that young offenders who may commit more serious offences as time goes on can be kept away from custodial sentences."

He went on to recognise

"the possibility that some young people will be diverted out of custody but properly supervised via electronic tagging".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 28 November 1996; c. 221.]

The Opposition are taking a different position today from that which he took then.

As I said earlier, we want there to be pilot schemes so that we can make an assessment. We believe that they have a place. What is especially compelling is that the young people who have been involved in pilot schemes south of the border testified to the effect that they would have preferred that option to being sent into custody. That is a consideration that hon. Members should bear in mind when drawing their conclusion tonight.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 301, Noes 291.

Division No. 58] **[5.19 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Roch'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Egger, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hat'fd)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grummer, John
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Michael
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lord, Michael
Loyden, Eddie
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion

Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Scott, Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'd)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John D *(Strangf'd)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bex'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'd)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Anthony Coombs and Mrs. Jacqui Lait.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashton, Joseph
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alex *(Montgomery)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John
Cunningham, Ms R *(Perth Kinross)*
Dalis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stret'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian *(Makerf'd)*
McCartney, Robert *(N Down)*
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Shef'd Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
Oakes, Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom

Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Robert
Shore, Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms R *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Cummings and
Mrs. Bridget Prentice.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendment proposed: No. 136, in page 6, line 23, after 'an', insert

'additional requirement of a probation'.—*[Mr. McFall.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 284, Noes 296.

Division No. 59] **[5.34 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne (C'bridge)
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alex *(Montgomery)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John
Cunningham, Ms R *(Perth Kinross)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Gerald
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stret'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Robert *(N Down)*
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie

Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Robert
Shore, Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Speller, John
Squire, Ms R *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Cummings and Mrs. Bridget Prentice.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Gummer, John
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Michael
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'he)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David

Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Scott, Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Anthony Coombs and
Mrs. Jacqui Lait.

Question accordingly negatived.

5.45 pm

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I beg to move amendment No. 106, in page 6, line 26, leave out '245F' and insert '245G'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 151, in page 7, line 2, after 'shall', insert

'ascertain from the offender

(i) where he lives and if he intends to move during the currency of the order;

(ii) if he works, attends school or other educational establishment;

(iii) if he owns or rents his accommodation; and

(iv) if his religion or beliefs require him to be present at a defined location for a specified period of time and.'.

Government amendments Nos. 107, 5, 108 and 6.

No. 220, in page 7, line 39, after '(9)', insert

'Subject to subsection (9A) below'.

Government amendments Nos. 7 and 251.

No. 221, in page 7, line 47, at end insert—

'(9A) No regulations under subsection (9) above shall be made after the first regulations have been made under that subsection until the Secretary of State shall have laid before both Houses of Parliament a statement assessing the effectiveness of the first regulations made under that subsection.'.

Government amendment No. 8.

No. 222, in page 8, line 4, leave out

'annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either'

and insert

'approved by resolution of each'.

Government amendments Nos. 9 to 12, 112, 13, 113, 14 to 17, 114, 18 to 21 and 116.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: These are technical amendments. I shall be happy to speak to any of them, if the House so wishes.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham (Perth and Kinross): I shall speak to amendments Nos. 220 to 222, which my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) and I tabled.

The amendments, of which amendment No. 221 is the main one, relate to the Government's proposed pilot project for electronic tagging. The purpose of amendment No. 221 is to bring the results of the pilot project back to Parliament for a full debate before we consider whether it should be extended to the whole of Scotland.

Although the explanatory and financial memorandum to the original draft of the Bill noted that the Government intended to set up a pilot project for restriction of liberty orders—or, as we have called it, electronic tagging—there is no mention of the pilot in the Bill. Instead, the legislation overrides the need to evaluate the feasibility of the disposal, and empowers the Government to extend the restriction of liberty orders nationwide and to change the nature of the disposal, without the requirement to seek the approval of Parliament in subsequent legislation. Any subsequent regulations will be made by statutory instrument subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament. That is a negative resolution procedure that does not permit debate on the Floor of the House.

There are several general concerns about electronic monitoring of offenders—a number were raised in a previous debate on the tagging of those under age 16—and those objections strengthen the case for proper parliamentary scrutiny and evaluation of the pilot project before the disposal is extended across Scotland. The case is also strengthened by the Government's concession to the legal profession over the pilot project that will establish a public defender system.

In spite of comparative examples that have led the Government to believe that a public defender system could work in Scotland, they have decided to restrict the legislation's provisions to a limited pilot study which, after three years, will have to come before Parliament to be either withdrawn or renewed or extended by primary legislation. If that is deemed correct for the proposed public defender project—it clearly is—I contend that the electronic tagging provisions, which are untried and untested in a Scottish context, merit similar scrutiny and evaluation by Parliament. I do not see why there should be one rule in respect of the public defender system and another in respect of electronic tagging.

Reference has been made to trials in England, which commenced in June 1995 and will continue until March 1997. They are monitored by Securicor in Manchester and Reading and by Geographix in Norfolk. I listened with interest to the earlier comments of the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) about Securicor and the value that it perceives in the electronic tagging concept. I suspect that the only value Securicor is interested in is the "loads of dosh" value from which it and other private companies will benefit. That is a grave concern for many Opposition Members.

After the first full year of trials, the average cost was estimated at £14,000 per offender. That compares with an average cost of £2,500 per probation order. The trials in England have also demonstrated that the tag can have a stigmatising effect for the wearer. In November 1995, Richard McGuiness was reported to have removed his tag after being assaulted when he was allegedly mistaken for the only other person to be tagged in Reading—a sex offender whose case had been well documented in the local media.

It is interesting to note that there were only two taggings in the whole of Reading. The Government gave the impression that many people would be running around with electronic tags but, in reality, tags are used in only a limited number of cases. Participants also noted that it was difficult to find employment while being monitored, partly because of the longer curfew hours for unemployed accused and partly because of the stigma associated with the anklet.

Tagging is no substitute for projects that concentrate on the offender's behaviour. Concerns were expressed in Committee about the impact of electronic tagging on the offender and on his or her family. It was felt that, in some cases, family members who have to cope with a difficult offender will be punished although they have committed no crime. During the fourth sitting of the Committee, the Minister promised that

"if any difficulties"—

with regard to family members—

"arise, they will be taken fully into account before extending such schemes more widely".

However, it is uncertain how we will develop a clear picture of any difficulties without the involvement of social workers or probation officers. In the clause stand part debate in Committee, the Minister said:

"The Bill's provision will permit restriction of liberty orders to be introduced in Scotland on a pilot basis. Even those . . . who have doubts about the proposal's effectiveness cannot object to it being tried out in practice to establish whether it has a useful role to play."—[*Official Report, First Scottish Standing Committee*, 19 November 1996; c. 152, 172.]

Given the concerns and the uncertainty surrounding the disposal, the Government would surely not object to Parliament's debating fully the results of the pilot study so that Parliament could determine whether it can play a useful role. Why is the Minister's approach to electronic monitoring different from his approach to the public defender project, the results of which must be reported to Parliament? I shall press amendment No. 221 to a vote at a later stage.

Dr. Godman: The remarks of the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham) make a lot of sense. The Minister offered to answer any questions that hon. Members may have concerning the Government amendments, but I have a query about the hon. Lady's amendments. What group of people would carry out the evaluation of the pilot study? Would Scottish Office officials perform that function or would the Scottish Office commission independent analysts to evaluate the trials?

I refer the Minister to Government amendment No. 251—if I can catch his ear, as he is blethering away—which mentions district courts. Would that include the district court in Greenock? I do not want a pilot study or trial to be carried out in my constituency as I genuinely believe that, as my hon. Friends the Members for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) and for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) said, severely deprived youngsters from council schemes would be singled out. Where does Greenock district court stand in relation to amendment No. 251?

Mr. McFall: I commend the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham) for introducing amendment No. 221, which we support. The Minister has been in correspondence with me about amendment No. 151—notably in a letter dated 30 December—because we raised certain matters in Committee. We are concerned about the offender. We would like the Bill to take into consideration where the offender lives and whether he intends to move during the currency of the order; if he works, attends school or another educational establishment; if he owns or rents accommodation; and, lastly, if his religion or beliefs require him to be present at a defined location for a specific period.

Freedom of religion and tolerance are recognised in the terms of the Criminal Justice Act 1991. Section 12(3) states:

"The requirements in a curfew order shall . . . avoid

(a) any conflict with the offender's religious beliefs or with the requirements of any other community order . . . and

(b) any interference with the times . . . he normally works or attends school".

The amendment ensures that a court obtains certain information from an offender before imposing the order. It ensures, therefore, that the court will examine whether it is appropriate to make such an order, taking account of the offender's circumstances. I seek the Minister's views on those points.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I was asked about research. It has not been decided who should conduct the research. In England, it was conducted by Home Office researchers, and I believe that in Scotland Scottish Office researchers will be able to perform that function. However, as I have said, no decision has been taken.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) asked about amendment No. 251. If the availability of restriction of liberty orders is extended, such extension can, if appropriate, be limited to the stipendiary magistrates arm of the district court. It seems sensible to allow such a distinction, because the sentencing powers of stipendiary magistrates correspond to those of a sheriff under summary jurisdiction, rather than to those of other district courts.

We debated amendment No. 151 in Committee, and I wrote to Committee members about an aspect of it on 30 December. As I said on both occasions, I do not dispute that the factors specified may be relevant to the making of a restriction of liberty order, but I am not convinced that the proposed mechanism is necessary or appropriate, so I am unable to accept that amendment.

[Lord James Douglas–Hamilton]

Amendments Nos. 220, 221 and 222, tabled by the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham), would require that when courts are being empowered to make restriction of liberty orders, and when methods of monitoring compliance with such orders are being specified, that should be done by regulation subject to affirmative resolution of both Houses.

Those amendments would also require that such regulations could not be altered before the Secretary of State had laid before both Houses a statement assessing the effectiveness of the regulations. We believe that the amendments are technically flawed, but I do not make too much of that point. The main reason for opposing them is that they would introduce an inappropriately burdensome procedure for prescribing which courts and which methods of monitoring are to be authorised in relation to restriction of liberty orders.

6 pm

Scots law does not require such a procedure to be followed for other community disposals. For example, when a court is being empowered to make community service orders, there is no requirement either for regulations to be subject to affirmative resolution or for a prior statement. Scots law merely requires the Secretary of State to notify a court that the necessary arrangements exist.

We intend to be as open as possible about the operation of restriction of liberty orders. I am happy to give a commitment that, before moving beyond the proposed pilot schemes, we will fully assess those schemes and make the results available. On that basis, I hope that the hon. Lady will not press her amendments.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 246, in page 6, line 43, leave out

'for any period up to 12 months'

and insert—

'(a) in respect of an offender other than a child offender, for any period up to 12 months; and

(b) in respect of a child offender, and subject to subsection (3A) below, for any period up to 6 months.

(3A) A requirement under subsection (2)(a) above made in respect of a child offender may not be made for a period in excess of 3 months.

No. 107, in page 7, line 11, leave out second 'the' and insert 'any'.

No. 5, in page 7, line 11, after 'person' insert 'responsible for'.

No. 108, in page 7, line 16, leave out second 'the' and insert 'any'.

No. 6, in page 7, line 17, leave out 'monitor' and insert 'be responsible for monitoring'.

No. 247, in page 7, line 32, at end insert—

'( ) Without prejudice to subsection (6) above, before making a restriction of liberty order in respect of a child offender the court shall obtain and consider information about that offender's family circumstances and the likely effect on those circumstances of the order which the court is proposing to make.'.

No. 109, in page 7, line 33, leave out

'Subject to subsection (8) below'.

No. 110, in page 7, line 36, leave out from beginning to end of line 38.

No. 248, in page 7, line 41, leave out 'and'.

No. 249, in page 7, line 44, at end insert 'and

(c) the class or classes of offenders in respect of which restriction of liberty orders may be made,'.

No. 250, in page 7, line 46, leave out '(a) and (b)' and insert '(b) and (c)'.

No. 7, in page 7, line 47, at end insert—

'( ) Regulations under subsection (9) above may make such transitional and consequential provisions, including provision in relation to the continuing effect of any restriction of liberty order in force when new regulations are made, as the Secretary of State considers appropriate.

( ) A court shall not make a restriction of liberty order which requires an offender to be in or, as the case may be, not to be in, a particular place or places unless it is satisfied that his compliance with that requirement can be monitored by the means of monitoring which it intends to specify in the order.'.

No. 251, in page 7, line 47, at end insert—

( ) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (9) above, in relation to district courts, regulations under that subsection may make provision as respects such courts by reference to whether the court is constituted by a stipendiary magistrate or by one or more justices'.—*[Lord James Douglas–Hamilton.]*

Amendment proposed: No. 221, in page 7, line 47, at end insert—

'(9A) No regulations under subsection (9) above shall be made after the first regulations have been made under that subsection until the Secretary of State shall have laid before both Houses of Parliament a statement assessing the effectiveness of the first regulations made under that subsection.'.—*[Ms Roseanna Cunningham.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 164, Noes 287.

Division No. 60] **[6.3 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Corston, Ms Jean
Adams, Mrs Irene	Cox, Tom
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*	Cummings, John
Allen, Graham	Cunliffe, Lawrence
Alton, David	Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*	Dafis, Cynog
Armstrong, Ms Hilary	Dalyell, Tam
Ashdown, Paddy	Davidson, Ian
Austin–Walker, John	Davies, Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Barnes, Harry	Dewar, Donald
Barron, Kevin	Dixon, Don
Beith, A J	Donohoe, Brian H
Bell, Stuart	Eagle, Ms Angela
Benn, Tony	Eastham, Ken
Bermingham, Gerald	Ennis, Jeff
Bray, Dr Jeremy	Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*	Fatchett, Derek
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*	Faulds, Andrew
Callaghan, Jim	Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*	Fisher, Mark
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*	Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*	Foulkes, George
Campbell–Savours, D N	Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Canavan, Dennis	Galbraith, Sam
Cann, Jamie	Gapes, Mike
Carlile, Alex *(Montgomery)*	George, Bruce
Chisholm, Malcolm	Godman, Dr Norman A
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*	Godsiff, Roger
Connarty, Michael	Golding, Mrs Llin
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*	Gordon, Ms Mildred

Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Gerald
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Killoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs B *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Sheldon, Robert
Shore, Peter
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steel, Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Watson, Mike
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Andrew Welsh and Ms Roseanna Cunningham.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg Cthorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cartiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Gummer, John
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Michael
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'rne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick

Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Scott, Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'd)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'd)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mrs. Jacqui Lait.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendments made: No. 8, in page 8, line 1, leave out from 'regulations' to end of line 2 and insert

'substitute for the period of—

(a) hours for the time being mentioned in subsection (2); or

(b) months for the time being mentioned in subsection (3) or (3A),

such period of hours or, as the case may be, months as may be prescribed in the regulations'.

No. 252, in page 8, line 5, at end insert—

'(12) For the purposes of this section and sections 245B to 245G of this Act—

"child offender" means an offender under the age of 16 years at the date of his conviction; and

"offender" includes "child offender".'.

No. 9, in page 8, line 10, leave out

'name of the person who is to' and insert

'person or class or description of persons who may'.

No. 10, in page 8, line 14, leave out from 'shall' to 'the' in line 15 and insert

'include provision in the order for making a person notified by the Secretary of State under subsection (1) above, or a class or description of persons so notified, responsible for the monitoring of'.

No. 11, in page 8, line 16, after 'person' insert

' or class or description of persons'.

No. 12, in page 8, line 18, after 'shall' insert ', if necessary,'.

No. 223, in page 8, line 39, at end insert—

'Concurrent probation and restriction of liberty orders

245CC.—(1) Notwithstanding section 228(1) and 245A(1) of this Act, where the court—

(a) intends to make a restriction of liberty order under section 245A(1); and

(b) considers it expedient—

(i) having regard to the circumstances, including the nature of the offence and the character of the offender; and

(ii) having obtained a report as to the circumstances and character of the offender,

that the offender should also to 25 be subject to a probation order made under section 228(1) of this Act,

it may make both such orders in respect of the offender.

(2) Where the court makes both a restriction of liberty order and a probation order by virtue of subsection (1) above, the clerk of the court shall send a copy of each order to both—

(a) any person responsible for monitoring the offender's compliance with the restriction of liberty order; and

(b) the officer of the local authority who is to supervise the probationer.

(3) Where the offender by an act or omission fails to comply with a requirement of an order made by virtue of subsection (1) above—

(a) if the failure relates to a requirement contained in a probation order and is dealt with under section 232(2)(c) of this Act, the court may, in addition, exercise the power conferred by section 245E(2)(b) of this Act in relation to the restriction of liberty order; and

(b) if the failure relates to a requirement contained in a restriction of liberty order and is dealt with under section 245E(2)(b) of this Act, the court may, in addition, exercise the power conferred by section 232(2)(c) in relation to the probation order.

(4) Where the offender by an act or omission fails to comply with both a requirement contained in a probation order and a requirement contained in a restriction of liberty order to which he is subject by virtue of subsection (1) above, he may, without prejudice to subsection (3) above, be dealt with as respects that act or omission either under section 232(2) of this Act or under section 245E(2) of this Act but he shall not be liable to be otherwise dealt with in respect of that act or omission.'.

No. 112, in page 8, line 41, leave out second 'the' and insert 'any'.

No. 13, in page 8, line 41, after 'person' insert 'responsible for'.

No. 113, in page 8, line 45, leave out second 'the' and insert 'any'.

No. 14, in page 8, line 45, after 'person' insert 'responsible for'.

No. 15, in page 8, line 46, after 'may' insert 'by order'.

No. 16, in page 9, line 1, leave out 'or'.

No. 253, in page 9, line 2, after '245A(3)' insert

'or, as the case may be, (3A)'.

No. 17, in page 9, line 3, at end insert '; or

(d) revoking the order.

(3) Where the court, on the application of a person other than the offender, proposes to—

(a) exercise the power conferred by paragraph (a), (b) or (c) of subsection (2) above to vary (otherwise than by deleting a requirement) a restriction of liberty order, it shall cite the offender to appear before the court and section 245A(4) shall apply to the variation of such an order as it applies to the making of an order; and

(b) exercise the power conferred by subsection (2)(d) above to revoke such an order and deal with the offender under section 245EE of this Act, it shall issue a citation requiring him to appear before the court.

(4) If an offender fails to appear before the court after having been cited in accordance with subsection (3) above, the court may issue a warrant for his arrest.'.

No. 114, in page 9, line 13, after 'failed' insert 'without reasonable excuse'.—

No. 18, in page 9, line 14, leave out

'vary the order or revoke it' and insert

'by order—

(a) without prejudice to the continuance in force of the order, impose a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale;

(b) vary the restriction of liberty order; or

(c) revoke that order.

( ) A fine imposed under this section in respect of a failure to comply with the requirements of a restriction of liberty order shall be deemed for the purposes of any enactment to be a sum adjudged to be paid by or in respect of a conviction or a penalty imposed on a person summarily convicted.'.

No. 19, in page 9, line 17, after 'in' insert

'paragraphs (a) to (c) of'.

No. 20, in page 9, line 18, leave out from beginning to 'it' in line 19 and insert—

'Disposal on revocation of restriction of liberty order

245EE.—(1) Where the court revokes a restriction of liberty order under section 245D(2)(d) or 245E(2) of this Act,'.

No. 115, in page 9, line 22, at end insert—

'(2) Where the court revokes a restriction of liberty order as mentioned in subsection (1) above, and the offender is, by virtue of section 245CC(1) of this Act, subject to a probation order, it shall, before disposing of the offender under subsection (1) above, discharge the probation order.'.

No. 21, in page 9, line 31, leave out

'the person responsible for monitoring the order'

and insert

'a person nominated for the purpose of this paragraph by the Secretary of State'.

No. 116, in page 9, line 45, after 'circumstances.' insert—

'Procedure on variation or revocation of restriction of liberty order

245G. Where a court exercises any power conferred by sections 232(3A), 245D(2) or 245E(2)(b) or (c) of this Act, the clerk of the court shall forthwith give copies of the order varying or revoking the restriction of liberty order to any person responsible for monitoring the offender's compliance with that order and that person shall give a copy of the order to the offender.'.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

Clause 5

DISPOSAL IN CASES OF MENTALLY DISORDERED OFFENDERS

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I beg to move amendment No. 22, in page 10, line 28, leave out '28' and insert '7'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: Government amendments Nos. 23, 24, 254 and 25.

No. 142, in clause 6, page 12, line 32, at end insert—

'(aa) A patient shall not be remitted to prison in accordance with sub-paragraph (a) above until and unless—

(i) the case has been referred back to the court that imposed the hospital direction; and

(ii) the court is satisfied that the remittance to prison would not be injurious to the patient's mental health.

(ab) In order to determine the impact of the remittance to prison on the patient's mental health, the court shall consider the written or oral evidence of two medical practitioners (complying with section 61 of this Act).

(ac) Where a court is satisfied under (aa)(ii) above that the remittance to prison would be injurious to the patient's mental health, the court may revoke the hospital direction and—

(i) impose a hospital order (with or without a restriction order); or

(ii) impose no further penalty.'.

Government amendments Nos. 26, 117 and 118.

No. 143, in clause 20, page 23, line 39, after '60A', insert '(1)'.

No. 144, in page 23, line 48, at end insert—

'(2) Where a court determines under section 62A(4)(ac) of the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984 above not to remit a patient to prison, the Prosecutor may appeal against this determination—

(a) if it appears to him that the determination was inappropriate, or

(b) on a point of law,

and an appeal under this section shall be treated in the same manner as an appeal against sentence under section 108 of this Act.'.

Government amendments Nos. 79, 277, 126, 278, 279 and 80 to 82.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I can speak briefly, as the amendments arise from amendments—and arguments—presented by Opposition Members in Committee, which I accepted in principle. However, I should mention one point specifically. Amendments Nos. 22 to 25 would, following the making of a hospital direction, reduce the maximum time for which a person may be in transit between the court and the hospital from 28 to seven days, and add to the list of those who may so convey the person an officer on the staff of that hospital. The other amendments are procedural.

Dr. Godman: Amendment No. 23 says that, in addition to a constable and a mental health officer, an officer on the staff of the hospital can perform escort duties. Will the Minister confirm that most mental health officers are social workers who have undergone specific training in the mental health sector? Surely he would not expect someone to be escorted by a mental health officer—a social worker. Surely such escort duties would be undertaken by a police officer or, as the amendment says, "an officer on the staff of the hospital specified".

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am certain that sensible arrangements will be made, which will not burden those concerned, but the amendment arose out of an Opposition request in Standing Committee. I think that the hon. Gentleman was not on the Standing Committee. The amendment reflects the Committee's wishes, and is a step forward.

Mr. McAllion: This group of amendments deals with a new court order, which is called a hospital direction; it is sometimes referred to as a hybrid order. It gives the court new powers where offenders are found guilty of an offence that is punishable by imprisonment, but where the court judges that a prison term would not be insufficient to deal with such offenders. In addition to any prison sentence, the court is empowered to direct that the prisoners should be detained in hospital.

If the patient, or the prisoner, recovers from the mental disorder in hospital, the idea behind the hospital direction is that he would be returned to serve the rest of his sentence in prison. Amendment No. 143 seeks to deal with the damaging consequences that may arise out of that situation.

I am particularly concerned about the type of offenders who will come under the provisions of the clause. The notes on clauses make it clear the people who are affected by it—obviously, not all prisoners but only certain groups of prisoners. The notes say that the clause affects prisoners who are well enough to have stood trial, but who also suffer from a mental disorder to the extent that would warrant hospitalisation. It is the use of the term "mental disorder" that I want to bring to the House's attention. I want to plead with the Minister to think again before he commits this provision to the statute book, because it would affect people in the real world.

The idea of hybrid orders came out of a working party that was set up in 1994 by the Home Office and the Department of Health in England and Wales. It was chaired by a Dr. John Reed—not, I think, the Dr. John Reid who is Labour spokesman on defence. The working party recommended that hybrid orders should be introduced, but it made it clear that the recommendations related only to prisoners/patients who were suffering from what it termed a "psychopathic disorder".

Psychopathic disorder is one form of mental disorder that is defined in the English Mental Health Act 1983. It has a specific meaning, but it is not defined in Scottish legislation. The working party made it clear that it was concerned about whether people with a psychopathic disorder were in any sense treatable in hospital in any case. That was why it introduced the hybrid order. When the Minister transferred that concept from the working party in England and Wales to Scottish legislation, he completely misunderstood the purpose that lies behind the hybrid order.

Dr. Helen Kirk, one of the most distinguished consultant forensic psychiatrists in Scotland, who works at Murray Royal hospital in Perth, wrote to me this month because she was concerned about the detail in the Bill. She said:

"It is my understanding that originally this order was to apply only to psychopathic personalities."

Obviously, she was referring to the working party's report. She said that, if that were so, there was no problem with hybrid orders being applied to such cases, because

"in Scotland, most such people"—

those with psychopathic personalities—

"would not be admitted to hospital."

She wrote:

"By definition psychopaths are said to be unable to learn by experience. Such a definition raises questions as to whether change can be effected by hospital treatment. Furthermore such individuals are extremely disruptive and destructive in a ward to the disadvantage of other patients."

Dr. Kirk made it clear therefore that, if the hybrid order referred only to people suffering from a psychopathic personality, no one in Scotland would be concerned about the application of the clause. However, there is no such thing as a definition of a psychopathic personality in mental health legislation. The nearest we have is one of the definitions that is applied to mental illness. It states that it is

"A persistent disorder manifested only by abnormally seriously aggressive or irresponsible conduct",

which

"makes it appropriate for him"—

or her—

"to receive medical treatment in a hospital",

which

"is likely to alleviate or prevent a deterioration in the patient's condition."

Dr. Kirk is concerned that the clauses refer not to people who have a psychopathic personality or a psychopathic disorder but to people who have a mental disorder, and mental disorder has a different meaning in law in Scotland. It refers, first, to people with mental illness and, secondly, to people who have mental handicaps—mental impairment or severe mental impairment. As Dr. Kirk said, for such people prison is no kind of answer. She wrote:

"The mentally handicapped . . . have no place in a prison nor do those with mental illnesses such as schizophrenia or manic depressive illness."

Those are comments by someone who is an expert in dealing with offenders who are sent to Murray Royal hospital for forensic psychiatry, often by the courts. She should know better than any hon. Member that, if we include mental disorder in the terms of this law, we will begin to create much damage for vulnerable people in society. She said that all psychiatrists throughout Scotland would resist such people being sent to prison once they are better. For a start, she pointed out that, if anyone came out of serious mental illness and had recovered, only to be told that he was to be sent back to prison to serve the rest of his sentence, the most likely effect would be a relapse into illness, and all the good work in the hospital would be undone as a result.

Dr. Kirk also pointed out that, if the proposed law included all types of mental disorder,

"the likely outcome would be hospital beds (which are relentlessly diminishing in numbers) would be blocked by patients ready for discharge but who have to mark time while the tariff"—

the prison sentence—was served out.

If the threat of being sent back to prison is there when the patient is sent to hospital, the consultants in the hospital will allow that patient to block the bed in the

hospital, rather than release him, because going back to prison is likely to lead to a relapse. By including the clause, the Minister has made a gross mistake in transferring an English concept to Scottish law, misunderstanding what the English concept was about and applying it wrongly to Scotland.

Amendment No. 142 tries to salvage something by saying that, before someone is returned to prison, the matter must go back to court, which must be satisfied that there will not be a relapse of the condition if the patient is sent back to prison. The Minister is creating a bureaucratic maze and a nightmare for many people who suffer from genuine illness and who come before the courts. I plead with him to ensure that, before the Bill goes to the House of Lords, he will get in touch personally with people such as Dr. Kirk at the Murray Royal, and speak to them about their concerns, because we are making a terrible mistake.

This is not a party political point. If my Front-Bench team had introduced this measure, I would have made the same speech. We will be making a terrible mistake if we allow the hospital directions to go through in these terms, because they will encompass people who should never be sent to prison, and who will not be sent to prison anyway. The clause will be a nightmare for consultants, the mentally ill and the prisons.

6.30 pm

Dr. Godman: I share some of the serious reservations of my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion). A court has to be satisfied by way of the written or oral evidence of two medical practitioners, by which is meant consultant psychiatrists. In the context of amendment No. 242, before a person can be transferred to the prison system would consultant psychiatrists be involved in an examination in the hospital?

The Minister reminded the House that I was not a member of the Standing Committee that scrutinised the Bill. Which hospitals are we discussing? We are speaking not just about Carstairs prison but about several hospitals in Scotland. What role does the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland play in the scheme? I have the greatest respect for the members of that commission and I should like to know whether they would be concerned with the development of a patient's treatment in hospital. Would the commission be informed if it were decided that a person was to be placed in prison and that his condition had changed dramatically during his hospital stay?

If medical practitioners are involved in the determination of a hospital direction, then, in the context of amendment No. 142, they should also be involved in deciding whether a patient should be sent to Barlinnie or Greenock or to some other penal establishment. Despite agreements in Committee, the clause has woeful deficiencies. Perhaps the Minister would reply to my question about the role of the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland and say whether consultant psychiatrists outwith a hospital would be involved in the decision to remit a person to prison.

Mr. McFall: We debated amendment No. 142 in Committee and the Minister said that he would consider it. However, there are still glaring deficiencies in the measure. We have been contacted by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, Edinburgh Healthcare NHS trust, the consultant forensic psychiatrist, Derrick Chiswick, and by the Royal College of Psychiatrists. The comments by those people have to be taken seriously by the Minister.

The danger in the legislation is that the combination of prison and the hospital direction will be used not instead of a prison sentence but instead of a hospital order. People should not be punished for having mental disorder. Amendment No. 142 seeks to guard against the risk of transferring people to prison who would more appropriately continue to receive hospital treatment. The decision to transfer a person subject to a hospital direction from hospital to prison should rest with the court, which would be duly advised by consultant psychiatrists. The decision should not be the sole responsibility of doctors.

Dr. Chiswick was a member of the Reed committee in 1994 and says that the committee made proposals which in England and Wales distinguish between the different categories of mental disorder. However, for Scotland there is a hybrid proposal which will not serve our interests. In his letter, Dr. Chiswick states:

"hospital direction would not apply to people with a mental illness or a mental handicap. It would only apply to those where the mental disorder is a persistent one manifested by abnormally aggressive or serious irresponsible conduct which is a near equivalent of the English Mental Health Act category of psychopathic disorder."

In summing up, he states:

"I am aware that the working of the law in relation to mentally disordered offenders is something of an arcane affair but I do urge you most strongly to try and prevent the passage of Clause 5 in its current form. It will do no good but may do much harm."

The Royal College of Psychiatrists has also written to us. I have a letter from Dr. McCreadie, who is the chairman of the Scottish division, saying that the mental health provisions have been adopted in clause 36 of the Crime (Sentences) Bill and that the Scottish Bill proposes the use of hospital direction for all categories of mentally disordered offenders. We take exception to that.

The royal college says that among the implications would be the need for more secure beds. The letter states:

"While the Scottish Office expects that only a dozen or so such Hospital Directions would be made in the course of any one year, it is clear that there will be cumulative effects which will have major implications for the number of beds required in conditions of security for mentally disordered offenders. In particular, there will be a need for many more beds in the State Hospital, where such patients are likely to be treated, and if it is considered that return to prison would lead to a relapse in their mental condition. Length of stay in hospital will be directed by the length of sentence rather than by clinical need or public safety issues."

The Minister must treat those concerns seriously.

Dr. McCreadie also mentions an increase in the number of mentally disordered people in prison. His letter goes on:

"To avoid the risk of a Hospital Direction being imposed, psychiatrists may be reluctant to recommend a conventional Hospital Order resulting in more mentally ill people in the prison system."

[Mr. McFall]

The Opposition do not want that, and nor do the professionals, and I hope that the Government do not want it either.

In the part of his letter dealing with the possibility of risk, Dr. McCreadie states:

"There may well be an increased risk to the public. Patients under Hospital Directions will not benefit from the indefinite follow-up which is provided by the current legislation relating to Restriction Orders."

The letter suggests a solution. It states:

"If the new Hospital Direction is to be introduced in Scotland then the Ministers should be urged to restrict it to those patients who would fall within the definition of Psychopathic Disorder in the English Mental Health Act."

That is the Act that flowed from the Reed committee. The letter goes on:

"While there is no exact category of Psychopathic Disorder in Scotland, it exists in terms of Section 17(1)(a)(i) in those cases where the 'mental disorder from which he suffers is a persistent one manifested only by abnormally aggressive or seriously irresponsible conduct, such treatment is likely to alleviate or prevent a deterioration of his condition'."

Eminent psychiatrists and the Royal College of Psychiatrists have said that we are doing the wrong thing. I ask the Minister to take the issue seriously so that we may have appropriate legislation and not a defective measure which could increase the risk to the public.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Courts will act only on the basis of recommendations from psychiatrists and will take into account whether the accused's condition is treatable and therefore whether a hospital direction would be appropriate. I was asked whether the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland would have a role. At the moment, it has no role when a court is deciding on a disposal that involves sending somebody to hospital. Statute spells out what evidence shall be given to the court and by whom and the same will apply under hospital directions.

The hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) asked why an order was to be made available for all forms of mental disorder. I am aware that the equivalent English conditions enable hospital orders to be made where the mental disorder is psychopathic, but it has been decided that for the time being it should be so limited in England and Wales. Scottish courts can make such an order in any case in which that is thought appropriate and the Home Secretary has power to extend hospital directions to other categories of mental disorder by order.

I listened carefully to hon. Members who spoke to amendment No. 142 and the related amendments, but I am not attracted to proposals that seem to be based on the assumption that hospital doctors will recommend to a sheriff or the Secretary of State for Scotland a course of action that would run counter to a patient's best interests—a course that would be injurious to the patient's mental health.

Let us first be clear that the situation with which the amendments deal is not new, merely arising out of the introduction of a hospital direction. The situation arises already with prisoners who become ill in prison and are transferred to hospital under a transfer direction. While their sentence of imprisonment is running, the only exit from hospital for such patients leads back to prison. However, that will happen only when the Secretary of State is satisfied that the criteria have been fully met.

The Secretary of State must be satisfied either that the person is not suffering from mental disorder of a nature or degree that makes it appropriate for that person to be liable to be detained in hospital for medical treatment, or that it is not necessary for the health or safety of the person or for the protection of other persons that that person should receive such treatment. In either case, the Secretary of State must be satisfied that it is not appropriate for the person to remain liable to be recalled to hospital for further treatment.

The House will be interested to know that, each year, there are about 60 transfers of prisoners to hospital, but that fewer than 20 prisoners move in the opposite direction; thus, there are many more transfers from prison to hospital than prisoners returning to prison. Most prisoners remain detained in hospital and—when appropriate, on expiry of their sentence—are released directly into the community.

I am convinced and confident that the same rigorous attention to health will apply to persons who are in hospital under the authority of a hospital direction, and that is what the Bill so provides. What prompts and will prompt consideration of whether a patient should be transferred to prison will be either an appeal by the patient to the sheriff or the hospital doctors' view that it is appropriate to recommend a return to prison to the Secretary of State. Therefore, given those safeguards, there should be no question that doctors would argue for such a transfer or that the sheriff or Secretary of State would agree to one if the considered medical view was that the patient required continued hospital treatment for his or her mental illness.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 6

EFFECT OF HOSPITAL DIRECTION

Amendments made: No. 23, in page 11, line 43, after 'officer' insert

', an officer on the staff of the hospital specified in the direction'.

No. 24, in page 12, line 2, leave out '28' and insert '7'.

No. 254, in page 12, line 6, at end insert—

'(1A) Where the managers of a hospital specified in a hospital direction propose to admit the patient to a hospital unit in that hospital, they shall, if that unit was not so specified, notify the Secretary of State and the Mental Welfare Commission of the patient's proposed admission to and detention in that unit; and the patient shall not be so admitted unless the Secretary of State has consented to the proposed admission.'.

No. 25, in page 12, line 7, leave out '28' and insert '7'.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

Amendment proposed: No. 142, in page 12, line 32, at end insert—

'(aa) A patient shall not be remitted to prison in accordance with sub-paragraph (a) above until and unless—

(i) the case has been referred back to the court that imposed the hospital direction; and

(ii) the court is satisfied that the remittance to prison would not be injurious to the patient's mental health.

(ab) In order to determine the impact of the remittance to prison on the patient's mental health, the court shall consider the written or oral evidence of two medical practitioners (complying with section 61 of this Act).

(ac) Where a court is satisfied under (aa)(ii) above that the remittance to prison would be injurious to the patient's mental health, the court may revoke the hospital direction and—

(i) impose a hospital order (with or without a restriction order); or

(ii) impose no further penalty.'.—*[Mr. McFall.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 134, Noes 289.

Division No. 61] **[6.42 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Austin–Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Beith, A J
Benn, Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alex *(Montgomery)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Corston, Ms Jean
Cox, Tom
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Donohoe, Brian H
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Ennis, Jeff
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faulds, Andrew
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Gerald
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Milburn, Alan
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs B *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Robert
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms R (Dunfermline W)
Steel, Sir David
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Greg Pope and
Mr. John Cummings.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cartiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas–Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hat'fd)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel–Jones, Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson–Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Gummer, John
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Sir Edward
Heathcoat–Amory, David

Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Michael
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Scott, Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfld)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Anthony Coombs and Mrs. Jacqui Lait.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment made: No. 26, in page 14, line 12, leave out 'order' and insert 'direction'.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

Clause 9

MEDICAL EVIDENCE IN RELATION TO MENTALLY DISORDERED OFFENDERS

Amendments made: No. 117, in page 15, line 30, leave out from 'words' to end of line 31 and insert

'from "under" to "this Act" there shall be substituted the words "in making a finding under section 54(1)(a) of this Act or under any of the relevant provisions";'.

No. 118, in page 15, line 38, at end insert—

'(c) in subsection (2), for the words "the said section 58(1)(a)" there shall be substituted the words "any of the relevant provisions";

(d) in subsection (3), for the words "the said sections 54(1) and 58(1)(a)" there shall be substituted the words "making a finding under section 54(1)(a) of this Act or of any of the relevant provisions"; and

(e) after subsection (5) there shall be added the following subsection—

"(6) In this section the "relevant provisions" means section 53(1), 54(1)(c), 58(1)(a) and 59A(3)(a) and (b) of this Act.".'.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

Clause 13

INCREASE IN MAXIMUM PENALTY FOR CERTAIN SEXUAL OFFENCES

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I beg to move amendment No. 224, in page 17, line 8, leave out 'five' and insert 'ten'.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 225 and 226.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The amendments relate to increased sentencing powers for certain sexual offences. They are a response to calls made by members of the Committee.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 225, in page 17, line 10, leave out 'five' and insert 'ten'.

No. 226, in page 17, line 13, leave out 'five' and insert 'ten'.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

Clause 14

DRIVING DISQUALIFICATIONS

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I beg to move amendment No. 29, in page 18, line 18, at end insert

'and, without prejudice to that generality, in relation to district courts an order under this subsection may make provision as respects such courts by reference to whether the court is constituted by a stipendiary magistrate or by one or more justices'.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendment No. 30.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The amendments relate to the extension of the powers of the courts to disqualify from driving for offences not directly related to road traffic offences.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 30, in page 18, line 34, at end insert—

'( ) In section 14(2) of the Proceeds of Crime (Scotland) Act 1995 (application of fines provisions to confiscation orders), after paragraph (k) there shall be added the following paragraph—

"(l) section 248B.".'.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

Clause 15

DESIGNATED LIFE PRISONERS

Amendments made: No. 31, in page 18, line 37, after 'prisoners)' insert

'—

(a)'.

No. 255, in page 18, line 42, leave out

'the sentence for which is not'

and insert

'for which, subject to paragraph (b) below, such a sentence is not the sentence'.

No. 32, in page 19, line 4, at end insert '; and

(b) in subsection (2)—

(i) the word "and" shall cease to have effect; and

(ii) after paragraph (b), there shall be inserted the words—

"; and

(c) where appropriate, the matters mentioned in paragraphs (a) and (b) of section 196(1) of the 1995 Act.".'.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

Clause 21

APPEAL BY PROSECUTOR AGAINST FAILURE TO IMPOSE SUPERVISED RELEASE ORDER

Amendment made: No. 33, in page 24, leave out lines 1 to 17.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

Clause 22

APPEALS AGAINST ORDERS UNDER SECTION 49 OF THE 1995 ACT

Amendments made: No. 34, in page 24, line 29, at end insert 'and'.

No. 35, in page 24, line 30, leave out from beginning to end of line 37.

No. 36, in page 24, line 42, leave out from 'Act;"' to end of page 25, line 3.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

Clause 25

EXTENSION OF POWER TO TAKE EVIDENCE OF CHILDREN BY COMMISSIONER

Amendment made: No. 227, in page 26, leave out lines 27 and 28.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

Clause 29

APPLICATION OF PROVISIONS WITH RESPECT TO EARLY RELEASE

Mr. McFall: I beg to move amendment No. 132, in page 28, leave out lines 6 and 7 and insert

'"prescribed minimum standard" means an absence of proved misconduct reports'.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 145, in page 28, line 7, after '(rules);', insert

'"prescribed minimum standard" means an absence of proved misconduct reports'.

Mr. McFall: The Scottish Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders, among other bodies, was very concerned about the Government's approach, and believed that good behaviour should be the minimum standard required of all prisoners. The absence of misconduct reports considered and proved at a disciplinary hearing should be all that can be reasonably expected from most prisoners.

Given the patchy availability of programmes, education and work in the prison estate, it is suggested—I seek the Minister's comments on this—that it would be unfair to require prisoners to demonstrate

"positive good behaviour and that they are making constructive use of their time in prison to address their offending behaviour. As appropriate, that might mean participating in a programme on drug addiction or anger management, as well as working productively in the prison workshops."—[*Official Report, First Scottish Standing Committee*, 28 November 1996; c. 294.]

Those are the Minister's comments in Committee.

Will the Prison Service have the capacity to make available to all the estimated 40,000 prisoners eligible for assessment of early release the opportunity to participate in programmes designed to address offending behaviour? Any extension of current programmes would require significant additional resources. The Government have not faced up to the issue.

One of the Opposition's serious concerns, which is shared by Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons, is the state of our Prison Service at the moment. We all recognise that if the Bill is enacted, within one year, the prison establishment will increase by 2,200 prisoners. I recommend the comments on Edinburgh prison in the chief inspector's report, which was released on 16 January. He said that if it was not overcrowded, it could be doing an awful lot better in guarding the public by reducing crime.

Let us consider just what is involved in the Government's approach to the extra prisoners. Under the Bill, every prisoner will expect the prisons to run

[Mr. McFall]

programmes to address offending behaviour. This year, the Government will require all prisons to commence a programme of mandatory drug testing for prisoners. All that will have to be done without additional resources.

At present, the Prison Service is required randomly to test a minimum of 10 per cent. of the prison population. With follow-up tests and tests for other reasons, that figure could be almost 15,000—or more than 1,000 drug tests per month. That will have to be done within a budget that is constrained at the moment. If prisoners are to be offered an educational programme, it is important that the Government address that issue. How can the Government offer programmes to 6,000 of the anticipated 8,400 prisoners who might be serving appropriately long sentences? If we do not have the resources for that, the Government will be letting the Prison Service in for a deluge of prisoner appeals, lawyers' letters and judicial reviews when prisoners are denied the opportunity to earn the early release provided for in the Bill.

Let us examine how such a system would operate. Each of the 6,000 prisoners from the predicted larger population would be entitled to a review every two months, or six times a year. That is a total of 36,000 reviews a year. In Committee, the Minister told us how early release would be calculated. He said:

"assessments will not be made on the whim of one individual officer. We envisage that the governor or another senior manager will convene an assessment board to consider carefully reports from relevant staff on each prisoner, according to a range of criteria which would be set out in prison rules."—[*Official Report, First Scottish Standing Committee*, 28 November 1996; c. 275-76.]

7 pm

Each prisoner will receive a report every two months from his hall or gallery officer, his work or party officer and a programmes officer. Those reports will have to be requested, collated and processed. In addition, the assessment board will have to consider behaviour and misconduct reports. The board will have to be staffed, taking up valuable senior management time, to assess 36,000 reviews with perhaps more than 100,000 bits of paper. Each decision will have to be communicated to the prisoner and his new release date entered on to computer records and warrants. A prisoner may have his release date changed every two months.

In addition, staff will be required to make retrospective reports on untried prisoners, who are presumably considered innocent until found guilty by a court, when sentences are backdated to cover the period on remand. Decisions will have to be taken on them. Presumably they will not be expected to address their offending behaviour while maintaining a not guilty plea at court.

The Government are setting up a bureaucratic nightmare. They do not realise the practical effects on prisons. Do we want to end up with prisoners who are denied an early release programme to address their offending behaviour having judicial reviews and making the system even more chaotic than it currently is? The Minister should take note of the reports of Her Majesty's chief inspector on the state of prisons. He should be ashamed about what is happening in our prisons and should remember the need to keep public order in prisons. The people who offend and are a danger to society should be in prison, but we do not want to return to the mid-1980s and the Peterhead prison riots. The amendment was designed to help avoid that.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I shall speak to amendment No. 145, which is phrased in almost identical terms to that moved by the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall). I do not wish to detain the House long, because the hon. Member for Dumbarton made the pertinent points about the Government's proposed scheme for early release.

The Government will require prisoners to show positive behaviour rather than an absence of bad behaviour. The hon. Gentleman has underlined the scale of that undertaking and the number of reviews that will be needed. The system will also lead to pressure in prison. The fact that officers will be responsible for filing reports could put them in the way of intimidation and pressure from prisoners or could open the way to favouritism. I do not believe that to be satisfactory. It may not happen, but the concern has been raised before and has never been properly allayed by Ministers.

The other important point relates to the recent report by the chief inspector of prisons in Scotland, referred to by the hon. Member for Dumbarton. If prisoners are to be obliged to show positive behaviour to achieve early release, the resources ought to be available for them to follow various courses that might lead to early release. Under the present regime, many courses that would lead to rehabilitation are not possible because of a lack of resources. That problem will become more acute under the Government's proposed new early release regime.

I do not believe that the Government have thought through the practical implications of their proposals. That is why the system proposed by the two amendments, under which the prescribed minimum standard would be the absence of proved misconduct reports, is more practical and would, in the long term, lead to less tension in Scotland's prisons.

Mr. Gallie: I should like to make a quick contribution, picking up on some of the points made by the hon. Members for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) and for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace). I accept some of their points, but do they honestly believe it right that someone who is sentenced to four years should be released automatically halfway through that sentence? The Bill addresses that and I believe that people in Scotland will warmly welcome it.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The prescribed minimum standard defined in amendments Nos. 132 and 145 is:

"an absence of proved misconduct reports."

We discussed a similar proposal in Committee on 28 November, when I explained that we thought the proposal unhelpful.

The earning of early release should require more than simply not breaching prison discipline. Prisoners should have to demonstrate positive good behaviour and that they are making constructive use of their time in prison to address their offending behaviour. For the first 12 months of a sentence, the prescribed minimum standard of behaviour will be set out in the prison rules.

Examples of behaviour that might attain the minimum standard are: conforming with the prison rules; avoiding violent or threatening behaviour, intimidation and aggressive language; co-operation with staff; respecting others' property; and abstaining from drugs and alcohol. That is no less than should be expected of prisoners. I invite the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment negatived.

Amendments made: No. 228, in page 28, line 11, at end insert 'the 1989 Act and'.

No. 229, in page 28, line 13, leave out 'the 1993 Act' and insert 'either of those Acts'.

No. 230, in page 28, line 16, after 'amendments' insert—

'(a) to the 1989 Act made by sections 38, 39 and 40 of, paragraph 8(2) and (4) of Schedule 1 to, and the repeal of the words from "including" to the end of section 3(1) of that Act made by Schedule 3 to, this Act; and

(b)'.

No. 231, in page 28, line 17, after '(10)(b)' insert ', (11)(a)'.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

Clause 30

Early release

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I beg to move amendment No. 37, in page 28, line 27, leave out 'three months or more' and insert 'more than two months'.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 38, 39, 241, 233, 40, and 102, Government new schedule 2, and Government amendments Nos. 121 and 103.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Amendments Nos. 37, 38 and 39 have been tabled to address a point raised in Committee by the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall). He was concerned that if the new early release scheme applied only to those serving three months or more, someone serving a slightly shorter sentence would have to serve longer than someone sentenced to exactly three months who earned full early release.

We have dealt with that point by providing in amendment No. 37 that all those serving more than two months will be eligible to earn early release. At the same time, we have made it clear in amendments Nos. 38 and 39 that no prisoner can be released earlier than the day after his assessment.

Amendment No. 233 was drawn up following discussions in Committee on the procedure under which a prisoner may make appeals in relation to awards of early release days. Since consideration in Committee, we have given full consideration to that procedure. The details will be spelled out in the prison rules.

We now envisage a three-stage process. The amendment makes it clear that there will be more than one level of appeal. The process will be based on the existing complaints procedure. A governor or other senior manager will convene an internal assessment board to make initial decisions on the award of early release. If the prisoner is dissatisfied with the decision, his first avenue of appeal will be to the prison internal complaints committee. Each prison has such a committee, chaired by a senior prison manager, with a minimum of three members. Membership is flexible, so that staff who were previously involved in the case will not become reinvolved at this stage.

If, following consideration of the case by the complaints committee, the prisoner remains dissatisfied, he will have a further appeal to the governor in charge, who will reconsider the case. It should be noted that half of all general complaints under the existing complaints procedure put to internal complaints committees are resolved at that stage and do not need to go to the governor, reducing the burden on him.

If the prisoner is still unhappy about the decision following reconsideration by the governor, there will be an appeal to the Secretary of State. Amendment No. 233 makes it clear that the rules may prescribe the Secretary of State for that purpose. The Secretary of State's functions in relation to the appeal will be exercised by the chief executive of the Scottish Prison Service, acting in the name of the Secretary of State. The Scottish prison complaints commissioner will become involved at that stage. Under the terms of the amendment, the rules will empower the Secretary of State to appoint a person to consider the appeal and report to him. He will, in all normal circumstances, ask the commissioner for a report on the case.

The prison rules would, therefore, formally specify the internal complaints committee, the governor in charge and the Secretary of State as the persons prescribed to consider appeals. The commissioner would provide the independent element in the process. He would not have the power to overturn the governor's decision at his own hand—which is what we had envisaged in Committee. However, we would expect the chief executive to take serious account of any factors that the commissioner may identify in his report in making his final decision on the case. I invite the House to accept the amendment.

Mr. McFall: I thank the Minister for saying that the amendment was tabled to address my proposals in Committee. Under the current arrangements, a prisoner sentenced to 12 weeks could be released before a prisoner who had been sentenced to 10 weeks. Therefore, a judge could sentence someone to 10 weeks in prison and the prisoner could say, "Give me 12 weeks as I will be out sooner." That was absurd. However, I have news for the Minister: the amendment fails to rectify the position completely.

I shall be brief, but constructive. In his letter to me dated 12 December, the Minister wrote:

"I agree we should avoid any possibility of a situation where an offender sentenced to a period above the threshold can, by earning early release, reduce his sentence below that of a person who falls just below the threshold and who is therefore not eligible for early release. I aim to table amendments to achieve this on report."

However, lowering the threshold has not achieved the desired result. For example, a prisoner sentenced to 70 days could be released after 56 days, whereas a prisoner sentenced to 59 days could be released only after 59 days.

The amendment brings those serving between 60 and 89 days into the same position as those serving 90 days or more. In 1994, 1,366 prisoners came into that category, which represents about 58 per cent. of those serving fewer than 90 days. So the amendment would give large numbers of prisoners some prospect of early release that would not

[Mr. McFall]

have been available to them in the original Bill. What about those serving up to 59 days? Are they still to be denied any early release? That anomaly persists. In 1994, 901 or 91 per cent. of the 990 prisoners in that category were serving 30 days or fewer.

The Government have some thinking to do, perhaps in another place. They could table amendments to rectify the anomaly or they could revert to their previous approach, with automatic release at two thirds of the sentence for those serving up to 59 days. Alternatively, they could introduce a different basis, such as a banding system, for calculating early release for those serving fewer than 60 days but more than seven days.

Any such solution would allow consistency with the concept of earned as opposed to automatic release. It would give short-term prisoners the opportunity of early release analogous to long termers; it would give short-term prisoners an incentive to good behaviour; and it would allow relatively easy calculation of release dates, because there would be no need for assessment. In that constructive vein, I ask the Minister to re-examine the issue to provide some consistency.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall certainly look closely at the details of the hon. Gentleman's speech. I should explain to him that the purpose of the amendment in meeting the point that he raised in Committee is that a prisoner serving two months and three days, for example, would be able to earn two days early release. Similarly, a prisoner serving two months and four days would be able to earn three days, and so on. So there would be a tapering effect around the threshold, which would ensure that no one would serve less time in prison than someone sentenced to a shorter period who is ineligible for early release.

My understanding of the present position is that no assessment will be carried out until after two months have elapsed. As a prisoner serving two months or more cannot be released until after the date of his assessment, he cannot in practice be released earlier than a prisoner serving less than two months. That tapers the effect. I shall examine the details of what the hon. Gentleman said and come back to him in due course.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 38, in page 28, line 43, at end insert—

'( ) No award of early release days under this section shall entitle a prisoner to be released earlier than the day after the day on which the award is made.'.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

Clause 31

PRISONERS HELD ON REMAND

Amendment made: No. 39, in page 29, leave out lines 37 to 39 and insert—

'(4) No award of early release days under this section shall entitle a prisoner to be released earlier than the day after the day on which the award is made.'.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

Clause 32

AMENDMENTS TO 1989 ACT

Amendments made: No. 241, in page 30, line 8, leave out from beginning to end of line 9 and insert—

'(1) Section 39 of the 1989 Act (rules for the management of prisons) shall be amended in accordance with this section.

(2) Subsection (7) shall cease to have effect.

(3) After subsection (12), there shall be added the following subsections–'.

No. 233, in page 30, line 25, leave out from 'prisoner' to the end of line 26 and insert—

'(i) to make such appeals against any such determination as may be prescribed to such person or persons as may be prescribed; and

(ii) following such appeals, to make an appeal to the Secretary of State, who may appoint a person—

(A) to consider any such appeal in such manner as that person thinks fit; and

(B) to recommend to the Secretary of State how it should be disposed of.'.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

Clause 35

FINE DEFAULTERS AND PERSONS CONVICTED OF CONTEMPT OF COURT

Amendments made: No. 40, in page 33, line 24, at beginning insert '(1)'.

No. 102, in page 33, line 31, at end insert—

'(2) Section 30 of this Act shall apply to children in respect of whom detention has been imposed for fine default or contempt of court as it applies, by virtue of subsections (5), (6) and (7) of section 31 of this Act, to persons sentenced to be detained under 44 (detention of children in summary proceedings) or detained for determinate periods under section 208 (detention of children convicted on indictment) of the 1995 Act.'.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

Clause 38

TESTING OF PRISONERS FOR ALCOHOL

Amendment made: No. 256, in page 34, line 28, leave out

'the sample contains any alcohol'

and insert

'he has any alcohol in his body'.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

Clause 41

POLICE GRANT

Amendments made: No. 42, in page 38, line 30, after 'grant' insert 'made'.

No. 43, in page 38, line 31, leave out first 'under' and insert 'by virtue of'.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

Clause 43

RECORD OF EVIDENCE TAKEN FROM EXTERNAL PARTS OF BODY

Amendments made: No. 235, in page 40, line 47, leave out '19, 19A and 20' and insert '19 to 20'.

No. 257, in page 41, line 45, leave out '"print"' and insert

'"prints", in the place where it first occurs,'.

No. 258, in page 42, line 1, after '"prints"' insert

'in the place where it second occurs'.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

Clause 44

SAMPLES ETC. FROM CONVICTED SEX OFFENDERS

7.15 pm

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I beg to move amendment No. 259, in page 42, line 38, leave out 'sexual'.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 260, 261, 44, 262 to 264, 93, 265 to 268, 94, 269, 270, 95, 271, 96 and 272 to 276.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I should like to refer first to amendment No. 274, upon which amendment No. 259 and others in the group are consequential. As hon. Members are aware, clause 44 extends police powers to take DNA samples from all persons who have been convicted of a serious sexual offence and who are still in custody.

We have considered the proposal further and we believe that it is equally important for the police to have that facility available to them in respect of persons who have been convicted of violent offences. People who commit crimes of violence are completely abhorrent to society. In some cases, those offenders are an even greater threat to the community than people who have been convicted of a sexual offence.

It is our duty to try to ensure that all reasonable steps are taken to protect members of the public from that type of menace. We must ensure, therefore, that the police have as much assistance as possible to help them prevent and detect such crimes. We see the proposal as a step nearer to helping them do just that.

Violent offenders frequently leave traces of human matter at the scenes of their crimes and the analysis of that matter can lead to the detection of those crimes. It would therefore be helpful to the police to be able to take samples from violent offenders, and we propose to allow them to do so.

Incidentally, I had a sample taken from me by the police as an example of how it was done. It is a perfectly acceptable procedure, although I got the impression that not everyone would have volunteered for it because of the strong hand of the police officer concerned.

Other amendments in the group extend the list of qualifying offences and in so doing address some proposals made in Committee that I was able to accept in principle.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 260, in page 42, line 40, leave out 'sexual'.

No. 261, in page 42, line 41, after 'imprisonment' insert 'in respect of that offence'.

No. 44, in page 43, line 11, after 'so' insert 'taken or'.

No. 262, in page 43, line 19, leave out 'sexual'.

No. 263, in page 43, line 22, leave out from beginning to end of line 26 and insert—

' "relevant offence" means any relevant sexual offence or any relevant violent offence;

"relevant sexual offence" means any of the following offences–'.

No. 264, in page 43, line 27, leave out '(i)' and insert '(a)'.

No. 93, in page 43, line 27, at end insert—

'(b) clandestine injury to women;'.

No. 265, in page 43, line 28, leave out (ii)' and insert '(c)'

No. 266, in page 43, line 29, leave out '(iii)' and insert '(d)'.

No. 267, in page 43, line 30, leave out '(iv)' and insert '(e)'.

No. 268, in page 43, line 31, leave out '(v)' and insert '(f)'.

No. 94, in page 43, line 32, leave out 'towards a child'.

No. 269, in page 43, line 33, leave out '(vi)' and insert '(g)'.

No. 270, in page 43, line 34, leave out '(vii)' and insert '(h)'.

No. 95, in page 43, line 35, leave out from beginning to end of line 37.

No. 271, in page 43, line 38, leave out from beginning to 'offence' and insert—

';and

(i) any'.

No. 96, in page 43, line 45, at end insert—

'(iia) section 106 of the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984 (protection of mentally handicapped females);

(iib) section 107 of that Act (protection of patients);'.

No. 272, in page 44, line 11, leave out from beginning to end of line 16 and insert—

'( ) section 7 of that Act (procuring);

( ) section 8 of that Act (abduction and unlawful detention of women and girls);

( ) section 9 of that Act (permitting use of premises for unlawful sexual intercourse);

( ) section 10 of that Act (liability of parents etc in respect of offences against girls under 16 years);

( ) section 11(1)(b) of that Act (soliciting for immoral purpose);'.

No. 273, in page 44, line 17, leave out '13(5)' and insert '13(5)(b) and (c)'.

No. 274, in page 44, line 18, after 'offences);' insert—

' "relevant violent offence" means any of the following offences—

(a) murder or culpable homicide;

(b) uttering a threat to the life of another person;

(c) perverting the course of justice in connection with an offence of murder;

(d) fire raising;

(e) assault;

(f) reckless conduct causing actual injury;

(g) abduction; and

(h) any offence which consists of a contravention of any of the following statutory provisions—

(i) sections 2 (causing explosion likely to endanger life) or 3 (attempting to cause such an explosion) of the Explosive Substances Act 1883;

(ii) section 12 of the Children and Young Persons (Scotland) Act 1937 (cruelty to children);

(iii) sections 16 (possession of firearm with intent to endanger life or cause serious injury), 17 (use of firearm to resist arrest) or 18 (possession of firearm for purpose of committing an offence listed in Schedule 2) of the Firearms Act 1968;

(iv) section 6 of the Child Abduction Act 1984 (taking or sending child out of the United Kingdom);'.

No. 275, in page 44, line 20, leave out 'sexual'.

No. 276, in page 44, line 28, at end insert—

'(5) In this section—

(a) any reference to a relevant offence includes a reference to any attempt, conspiracy or incitement to commit such an offence; and

(b) any reference to—

(i) a relevant sexual offence mentioned in paragraph (i); or

(ii) a relevant violent offence mentioned in paragraph (h),

of the definition of those expressions in subsection (4) above includes a reference to aiding and abetting, counselling or procuring the commission of such an offence.'.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

Clause 45

CRIMINAL LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I beg to move amendment No. 45, in page 45, line 1, after '(b)' insert

'subject to subsection (3A) below,'.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following amendments: Government amendments Nos. 46 to 52.

No. 160, in page 46, leave out lines 36 to 47.

Government amendments Nos. 53 to 59.

No. 161, in page 48, line 37, after 'shall', insert

'refer the matter to the Law Society of Scotland and upon receiving the Law Society's ruling that the solicitor's name should be removed from the Register, it shall.'.

Government amendments Nos. 60 to 69.

No. 152, in clause 46, page 50, line 44, leave out 'require' and insert 'offer the opportunity to'.

Government amendment No. 70.

No. 153, in page 51, line 1, leave out 'requiring' and insert 'offering to'.

No. 154, in page 51, line 2, leave out 'to use' and insert 'the opportunity to instruct'.

Government amendments Nos. 242, 71 to 74 and 243.

No. 158, in clause 49, page 52, line 41, leave out 'The Board may', and insert

'Where a sheriff is satisfied, by evidence on oath given on behalf of the Board by a person authorised by the Board for that purpose, that there are reasonable grounds for believing that, circumstances specified in section 35B(1)(a), (b) or (c) arise he may authorise the Board to.'.

Government amendment No. 75.

No. 155, in page 52, line 42, leave out 'wholly or partly' and insert 'only'.

No. 157, in page 53, line 13, after 'documents', insert

'relating only to the provision of criminal legal assistance'.

Government amendments Nos. 76 and 77.

No. 159, in page 55, line 25, at end add—

'(3A) Where the Board has referred a matter to the Law Society or any of the bodies mentioned in subsection (2) above it may withhold payment of any fees due to him in respect of such work, pending the outcome of the investigation by the body or bodies to which the matter has been referred.'.

No. 156, in page 55 leave out lines 26 to 33.

Government amendment No. 78.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government amendments in this group affect the part of the Bill relating to criminal legal aid and implementing improvements suggested in Committee by my hon. Friends the Members for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) and for Ayr (Mr. Gallie). They cover the registration of solicitors, a pilot scheme for public defenders, the code of practice, the involvement of the Law Society and other matters.

Mr. Wallace: I should like to speak to the amendments standing in my name and those of my hon. Friends. This part of the Bill opens up some important issues concerning the relationship between the Scottish Legal Aid Board and the Law Society of Scotland, and the circumstances in which additional powers are being given to the Scottish Legal Aid Board without sufficient case having been made to justify the need for those powers.

Amendment No. 160 would delete the provision that relates to the Scottish Legal Aid Board's code of practice, which governs those who provide criminal legal aid assistance in Scotland. The code of practice should not include provisions concerning the conduct of defence work. It is inimical to our system of justice for a state body to be able to dictate to defence lawyers, who should be independent, how they should conduct relations with the prosecution.

The Law Society of Scotland is the statutory regulator of solicitors and, since its inception, it has set standards of conduct in its rules and regulations for those who enrol as solicitors to follow. If the rules are broken or complaints are made, the Law Society of Scotland investigates and, if the complaints are substantiated, prosecutions may be brought before the Scottish Solicitors Discipline Tribunal.

The Scottish Legal Aid Board is not a professional regulator: it is a non-departmental Government body. It is mixing two concepts that do not mix well to give a Government-appointed body the power to lay down codes of practice that could affect the way in which solicitors

are able to defend their clients. Clause 45 provides that the board could regulate

"the manner in which a solicitor should conduct a case and represent his client, including . . . the passage of timeous and accurate information to the client . . . the frequency of meetings . . . the giving of advice to the client as to the consequences of any decision made . . . the taking of such precognitions as may be necessary . . . the conduct of relations with the prosecution."

That goes to the heart of the relationship between a client and his professional adviser. I do not doubt that the parameters were set with good intentions, perhaps to prevent slipshod service, but the Law Society of Scotland can already do that.

Dingwall sheriff court is currently being clogged up with the cases of people protesting against the payment of tolls on the Skye bridge. Many fine legal points have been raised, appeals have been made to the Court of Session, and Government policy has been challenged effectively. It would not be in the interests of justice that a code of conduct for solicitors defending people charged with the non-payment of tolls should be determined by a Government-appointed body. That is a potential conflict of interest.

Clause 45 also provides that the Scottish Legal Aid Board could remove the name of a solicitor who did not comply with the code. Amendment No. 161 would ensure that the matter was referred to the Law Society of Scotland, which is the appropriate body to rule on the removal of names from the register. After referral, and if the Law Society agreed, the board could then remove the name. The amendment would clarify that what is effectively a disciplinary action should be taken by the Law Society and not left solely to the board.

Clause 49 would give further powers to the Scottish Legal Aid Board. Amendment No. 158 would require judicial authority for certain actions and activities of members of the board. I declare an interest as parliamentary adviser to the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland. The institute is concerned that the provisions are too wide. In particular, it is concerned that information might be sought by officials of the board without proper judicial authority.

It is necessary in some cases for the police to be given powers to obtain information, but almost exclusively those powers are sought under judicial authority. The Bill would give powers to the Scottish Legal Aid Board, which—as far as I am aware—has no proper training in how police powers might be used, to seek information without judicial authority. Such powers are not even given to the police.

I draw a parallel with the Finance Act 1994. The Treasury sought to give similar powers to the officers of the Inland Revenue. The attempt was strongly opposed on several grounds, including the unacceptably wide powers, the possibility that they could be misused by an over-zealous officer and the need to strike a balance between exposing bad practitioners and protecting the innocent.

The powers in the Bill go too far, without sufficient judicial discretion, and could allow an over-zealous official of the Scottish Legal Aid Board to go on a fishing expedition on an unfounded allegation or on a hunch. That is not acceptable and does not strike the proper balance. In any case, the House has been given no evidence that a serious problem exists that has to be addressed by such sweeping powers.

Amendments Nos. 155 and 157 are important and technical amendments which relate to the requirement to produce documents under the powers. Amendment No. 155 would ensure that only documents relating to criminal legal aid cases could be recovered. Clause 49 would allow SLAB officials to seek documents that did not relate to the application for criminal legal aid and in which the board had no interest.

As the clause stands, the powers would allow the officials to obtain documents that related to other, civil matters which had no connection with the criminal case, but which were part of one file in a solicitor's office. Again, that power goes to the heart of the relationship between client and solicitor, and should be outwith the scope of the Bill. I ask the Minister to address the point that the powers would allow a wider discretion to request documents than even he might think necessary.

Clause 49 states:

"The power under this section to require production of information and documents includes power . . . to require any person, who is a present or past partner or employee of any such solicitor or firm and who appears to the Board or one of its officers to have any information or documents, to produce them".

No qualification whatever is included. At least proposed section 35A(1) includes the qualification that the information and documents should relate

"wholly or partly to the provision of criminal legal assistance."

I sincerely hope that the lack of a qualification is a drafting error and, if so, I offer the Minister the opportunity to accept amendment No. 157 to limit the power to obtain documents.

Amendments Nos. 159 and 156 would delete the current provision that would allow the suspension of all payments to a solicitor who might be guilty of a criminal offence. Amendment No. 159 would allow the suspension of payments to the solicitor only in respect of work related to the offence.

The reason behind that is that the power of the board should not be to suspend solicitors from legal aid entirely pending the outcome of a complaint because such a suspension can proceed only on suspicion and without the benefit of any judicial hearing. I believe that that is contrary to natural justice. Suspending a solicitor from earning a large part of his or her livelihood without any judicial process cannot in any way be seen as fair; it flies in the face of the presumption of innocence.

The Bill makes inadequate provisions to ensure that the client is protected in such circumstances. What would happen not only to the client concerned but to other clients of a solicitor if he or she were suspended? We believe that a right of retention of payment of fees claimed from the fund is reasonable. Amendments Nos. 159 and 156 would allow that objective to be achieved without going into much more principled and procedural objections.

I know that the amendments are wide-ranging, but they all seek to ensure that any power given to the Scottish Legal Aid Board is properly accountable and defined, and does not overstep the mark or duplicate work that ought in the first place to be done by the Law Society of Scotland. I await the Minister's reply with interest.

7.30 pm

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Opposition's amendments on legal aid go too far in seeking to curtail the powers to be conferred on the board by part V.

[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton]

Many of the issues raised by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) were explored in great detail in Committee, so I shall give an overall summary of the view that the Government have taken.

The code of practice must deal with the manner in which a solicitor should conduct a case and represent his client. We consider that an essential area. It is for the Scottish Legal Aid Board to monitor compliance with the code and decide who is to be included on the register. There are provisions for appeal on the merits of the decision to safeguard those affected by such decisions. I must therefore resist amendments Nos. 160 and 161.

We have made substantial changes to clause 46, but cannot concede amendments Nos. 152 to 154. They would prevent the board from ensuring that directly employed solicitors have an adequate throughput of cases. If we are to report to the House within three years on the pilot scheme, it is essential to ensure an adequate work load for the solicitors from the outset.

Amendments Nos. 155 to 159 seek to restrict the powers of the board to obtain information and documents to support a full investigation where there are grounds for suspicion, and in the last resort to suspend a solicitor from providing criminal legal assistance. Those powers are, however, an important safeguard for the public from potential fraud and the use of legal aid. I therefore urge the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland to withdraw the amendments.

The hon. Member referred to the proposed section 35A(4), and asked whether there was a drafting error. The powers to acquire information from past partners are conditioned by the purposes for which information may be required under the proposed section, which are made clear by amendment No. 157. The overall view of members of the Committee was that the powers were necessary. I therefore commend them to the House.

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): Unusually for me, I must say that my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister did not give a wholly adequate reply to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) on the powers of entry. Such powers have been described as iniquitous by bodies such as the Glasgow Bar Association. One can of course argue that it comes at the question from a particular angle, but I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend has an opportunity to reconsider what he has said.

From listening to the hon. Gentleman, I certainly felt that, at the very least, he deserved a detailed reply to his important points. *[Interruption.]* I can tell the Whips that I shall not detain the House for very long. I think that I am entitled to a couple of minutes of the House's time, having served on the Committee.

I should like to put two questions to my right hon. and learned Friend. I accept that, under the circumstances, he may want to write to me rather than detain the House.

First, how will the pilot scheme to which he has referred work? My understanding is that a proportion of accused persons within the jurisdiction of the court covered by the public defender will be directed to the public defender. Although that could work in various ways, I do not think that the public have been informed of the details. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend can assure the House that, if he is not going to inform people of the details in this debate—that may not be the will of the House—he will find a method of doing so.

Secondly, how will the fixed payment system work in practice? There are two or three possible ways in which it could work, but—again—I understand that they have not been made public. I would wholly accept my right hon. and learned Friend's assurance that he will make the matter public as soon as possible to those who are especially interested in the details if he does not want to detain the House tonight.

Mr. McFall: I shall be brief, because clauses 45 to 49 were well covered in Committee.

The Minister knows that the official Opposition are very much behind his public defenders system pilot scheme. I remind him that he must make adequate resources available for the scheme to ensure that it works properly. The best information must be available, especially in the light of the rising legal aid budget. We are interested not only in value for money but in access to justice for many people. We consider that the pilot scheme is extremely important, and we want the Government to support it as much as possible.

I draw the Minister's attention to amendment No. 152, which concerns a matter that we debated in Committee. As he knows, the Law Society of Scotland, which has very successfully lobbied the Government, was concerned about freedom of choice. Amendment No. 152 would ensure that clients have freedom of choice in whether they instruct solicitors employed by the Scottish Legal Aid Board or private practitioners. The Law Society of Scotland believes that such a choice is worth preserving and protecting. It reminds the Government of their obligations, especially in relation to article 63 of the European convention on human rights, which states:

"Everyone charged with a criminal offence has the following minimum rights . . .

(c) to defend himself in person or through legal assistance of his own choosing or, if he has not sufficient means to pay for legal assistance to be given it free when the interest of justices could be in breach of the European Convention."

I remind the Minister of comments made by the Law Society and others, and seek his response.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I should confirm, to correct the point that I made in haste a moment ago, that the drafting error relates to amendment No. 75, not amendment No. 157.

I welcome the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart). I say to him, and to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) that it would not be possible for the board's officials to go on a fishing expedition. Before obtaining a warrant, they must convince a sheriff of the grounds specified in the proposed section 35B(1).

Mr. Wallace: The Minister is, of course, right to say that a shrieval warrant will be necessary to obtain powers of entry to premises to investigate. The point that I was making concerned the fact that no prior

judicial authority will be needed to make a requirement of solicitors. He will note that a failure to respond to such a requirement can lead to conviction. The question that the Minister must address is why judicial authority is required for the board to enter premises to investigate, but a similar judicial authority is not required where the board issues a requirement for information.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall examine that point and write to the hon. Gentleman. I shall also thoroughly examine the way in which the pilot schemes will operate and write to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood on that point.

The method of directing counsel to the public defender is under consideration. The arrangements will be announced when the Scottish Legal Aid Board and the Scottish Office have resolved the details, but I shall write to my hon. Friend and to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland in due course.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 46, in page 45, line 6, leave out from beginning to 'only' in line 8.

No. 47, in page 45, line 10, leave out '(b)' and insert

', subject to subsection (3A) below,'.

No. 48, in page 45, line 12, at end insert—

'(3A) A solicitor employed by the Board under section 28A of this Act shall require to be registered, and the entry relating to his name on the Register shall include a note that he is so employed; but the Board shall not be regarded as a firm for the purposes of this section, and shall not itself require to be registered.'.

No. 49, in page 45, line 17, at end insert—

'( ) Before making any decisions as to the matters mentioned in subsection (4) above the Board shall—

(a) send to the Law Society and to such other persons and bodies as it considers appropriate a draft of its proposals in that regard, inviting their comments on those proposals within such period, being not less than 8 weeks from the date on which the draft is sent, as it may specify; and

(b) consider any such comments timeously received by it,

but, where it amends those proposals in the light of any such comments, it shall not be required to re-intimate the amended proposals to any of those who were invited to comment.'.

No. 50, in page 45, leave out from line 41 to line 10 on page 46 and insert—

'(10) Where the Board decides to refuse an application it shall forthwith intimate that decision to the applicant, and shall as soon as practicable thereafter send him or them, by recorded delivery, a written note of its reasons.

(11) An applicant aggrieved by a decision of the Board to refuse registration may, within 21 days of the receipt of the notification of the Board's reasons under subsection (10) above, appeal to the Court of Session against that decision.

(12) An appeal under subsection (11) above may be on questions of both fact and law and the court, after hearing such evidence and representations as it considers appropriate, may make such order as it thinks fit.'.

No. 51, in page 46, line 18, leave out

', other than solicitors employed by the Board by virtue of section 28A of this Act,'.

No. 52, in page 46, line 30, at end insert 'and professional ethics'.

No. 53, in page 47, line 9, leave out from '(ii)' to 'the' in line 11.

No. 54, in page 47, line 14, at end insert 'and professional ethics'.

No. 55, in page 47, leave out lines 25 and 26 and insert—

'(1A) The code may make different provision in relation to firms and solicitors including, in relation to solicitors employed by the Board by virtue of section 28A of this Act, different provision to reflect the fact that they are so employed.'.

No. 56, in page 47, leave out lines 27 to 30 and insert—

'(2) The Board shall—

(a) send a copy of the draft code prepared by it under subsection (1) above to the Law Society and to such other persons and bodies as it considers appropriate, inviting their comments on the draft within such period, being not less than 8 weeks from the date on which the draft is sent, as it may specify; and

(b) consider any such comments timeously received by it,

but, where it amends the draft code in the light of any such comments, it shall not be required to re-intimate the amended code to any of those who were invited to comment.

( ) After carrying out the consultation mentioned in subsection (2) above the Board shall submit the draft code to the Secretary of State for his approval.'.

No. 57, in page 48, line 17, leave out 'is not' and insert 'may not be'.

No. 58, in page 48, line 32, leave out 'is no longer' and insert 'are not'.

No. 59, in page 48, line 36, leave out 'no longer' and insert 'not'.

No. 60, in page 49, line 8, leave out

', or a solicitor employed by the Board by virtue of section 28A of this Act'.

No. 61, in page 49, line 13, leave out from 'Register' to 'but' in line 17 and insert

'it shall forthwith intimate that removal to the firm or solicitor concerned, and shall as soon as practicable thereafter send them or him, by recorded delivery, a written note of its reasons for its decision.

(8) A firm or solicitor aggrieved by a decision of the Board under subsection (4) above may, within 21 days of the receipt of the notification under subsection (7) above, appeal to the Court of Session against that decision.

(9) An appeal under subsection (8) above may be on questions of both fact and law and the court, after hearing such evidence and representations as it considers appropriate, may make such order as it thinks fit;'.

No. 62, in page 49, leave out lines 20 to 25.

No. 63, in page 49, line 30, leave out 'is not, or'.

No. 64, in page 49, leave out from line 33 to line 4 on page 50 and insert—

'(2) Subsections (6) to (9) of section 25D of this Act apply in relation to a solicitor whose name is removed from the Register under subsection (1) above as they apply in relation to a solicitor whose name is removed from the Register under subsection (4) of that section.'.

No. 65, in page 50, line 12, leave out 'but' and insert 'and'.

No. 66, in page 50, line 13, leave out 'need not' and insert 'shall'.

No. 67, in page 50, line 16, leave out 'April' and insert 'December'.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

Clause 46

EMPLOYMENT OF SOLICITORS IN RELATION TO CRIMINAL LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Amendments made: No. 68, in page 50, line 25, after 'State' insert

'may, in accordance with the provisions of this section, provide for the carrying out of a study into the feasibility of providing criminal legal assistance by means of solicitors employed directly by the Board, and, accordingly,'.

No. 69, in page 50, line 28, at end insert—

'( ) The Board shall not, by virtue of this section, employ more solicitors than are necessary to enable it to maintain at all times a working staff of such number of full-time or part-time solicitors as will equal six full-time solicitors; and any solicitor employed by the Board on a casual or temporary basis to fill a vacancy left by the absence on leave or because of illness of a permanent appointee shall require to be a registered solicitor.

( ) The Secretary of State may authorise the Board to make such preparations for the feasibility study as will enable it to begin the study as soon as regulations under subsection (1) above come into force; and such preparations may relate to the purchase and equipping of heritable and moveable property and the employment of staff including, but only for the purposes of training, solicitors.'.

No. 70, in page 50, line 46, leave out 'use' and insert 'instruct'.

No. 242, in page 51, line 2, leave out 'use' and insert 'instruct'.

No. 71, in page 51, line 10, leave out '28(2)' and insert '28'.

No. 72, in page 51, line 10, leave out

', and section 28(1) of this Act shall,'.

No. 73, in page 51, line 12, at end insert—

'(8) Within three years of the date on which regulations made under subsection (1) above first come into effect, the Secretary of State shall lay before each House of Parliament a report on the results of the feasibility study.

(9) This section, and the provisions of this Act mentioned in subsection (10) below, shall cease to have effect five years after the date on which regulations made under subsection (1) above first come into effect.

(10) The provisions referred to in subsection (9) above are—

(a) in section 4, subsection (2)(aa) and (3)(ab);

(b) in section 11—

(i) in subsection (1) the words "or (3)"; and

(ii) subsections (3) and (4);

(c) in section 12(2), the words "; but does not apply to the salary payable to a solicitor employed by the Board by virtue of section 28A of this Act.";

(d) section 25A(3A);

(e) in section 25B(1A), the words from "including" to the end; and

(f) in section 31(1A), paragraph (c).

(11) Prior to the date on which this section ceases to have effect the Board shall make arrangements for the transfer to solicitors or, where registration is in force, registered solicitors not employed by it of any work currently being undertaken by way of criminal legal assistance by solicitors employed by it by virtue of this section.

(12) On the date when this section ceases to have effect the Board shall remove from the Register the name of any solicitor employed by it by virtue of this section who is not otherwise entitled to be registered.'.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

Clause 48

CONTRACTS FOR THE PROVISION OF CRIMINAL LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Amendments made: No. 74, in page 52, line 11, leave out

', or a solicitor employed by the Board by virtue of section 28A of this Act'.

No. 243, in page 52, line 18, leave out 'use' and insert 'instruct'.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

Clause 49

POWER OF INVESTIGATION OF SCOTTISH LEGAL AID BOARD

Amendments made: No. 75, in page 52, line 41, after 'may' insert

', for the purpose of determining whether—

(a) a solicitor or any employee of him or of his firm may be committing a criminal offence in connection with criminal legal assistance; or

(b) a solicitor may be seeking, in relation to criminal legal assistance, to recover from the Fund money to which he is not entitled, as, for example, by performing unnecessary work; or

(c) a registered firm or solicitor is or may not be complying with the code,'.

No. 76, in page 53, line 44, at end insert—

'(8) No information or documents obtained by the Board by virtue of this section or section 35B of this Act shall be used by it or by any of its employees for any purpose other than the purposes mentioned in subsection (1) above.

(9) Section 34 of this Act applies in relation to a contravention of subsection (8) above as it applies in relation to a contravention of subsection (1) of that section.'.

No. 77, in page 54, line 1, leave out

'or a Justice of the Peace'.

No. 78, in page 55, line 44, leave out

'or a solicitor employed by the Board by virtue of section 28A of this Act'.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

Clause 54

CONFISCATION OF ALCOHOL FROM PERSONS UNDER 18

Mr. McFall: I beg to move amendment No. 140, in page 57, line 42, after 'shall', insert

'where there is no byelaw in force prohibiting the public consumption of alcohol'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also No. 141, in page 57, line 45, at end add

'and where there is a byelaw in force prohibiting the public consumption of alcohol it shall be an offence punishable on summary conviction by a fine not exceeding level 4 on the standard scale for a person not so to comply with a requirement made under subsection (1) or (2) above'.

Mr. McFall: A similar amendment was debated in Committee. The clause allows a police officer to take liquor from an under-18-year-old and to take that individual's name and address; and to take liquor from over-18s if the officer believes that they are supplying under-18s with liquor. A new crime is created, of failing to comply with a police officer's request to surrender the

liquor or of not providing a name and address. That would incur a fine of not more than level 2 on the standard scale, which is £500.

The amendment is designed to increase the penalty for failing to meet police requirements when a local authority byelaw exists prohibiting consumption. We are concerned here not with the drinking but with the possession of the liquor and the failure to comply with the police request. We want to send out a message to those involved that what they are doing is unacceptable, and that we take the matter seriously.

The official Opposition are extremely concerned about the issue. We have co-operated with the Government in the matter of byelaws. The amendment would ensure that there was a penalty regardless of whether a byelaw was in place. We urge the Government to take the matter seriously.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The amendments replicate amendments that we considered in Committee. I said at that time that I would consider further the level of the penalty. I recall that the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) said that it would be absurd if someone were fined £2,500 for not giving his name and address. I agree in this context, and I believe that we should not go down the road of increasing penalties merely for the sake of presentation. Penalties should be proportionate to the gravity of the offence.

Having reconsidered the matter, we are still of the view that anything above a level 2 or £500 maximum fine for the offence would be disproportionate.

Mr. Gallie: Has my right hon. and learned Friend any guidance on why Opposition Members are taking this line? I hear repeatedly of their dismay that people are sent to prison for not paying fines. A fine of £2,500 would be well beyond the means of the majority of people who would be affected by the clause, and it would be nonsense unless they were sent to prison for non-payment.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It would not be appropriate to get into the business of sentence-gazumping proposals. For a variety of reasons, we think that the amendments are unnecessary.

Amendment negatived.

Clause 57

INTERPRETATION

Amendment made: No. 98, in page 59, leave out line 1.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

Clause 58

SHORT TITLE, COMMENCEMENT AND EXTENT

Amendment made: No. 104, in page 59, line 25, leave out from '(5)' to end of line 26 and insert

'of this Act shall extend to England and Wales, and section 33(4) of this Act shall extend to England and Wales and Northern Ireland.'.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

New schedule 2

TRANSITIONAL PROVISIONS WITH RESPECT TO EARLY RELEASE

1.—(1) In this Schedule—

"existing provisions" means the provisions relating to the detention or release of persons which are in force immediately prior to the date upon which Chapter 1 of Part III of this Act (hereinafter referred to as "the Chapter") comes into force, and where those provisions are amended or repealed by this Act or any other enactment, that amendment or repeal shall apply for the purposes of those provisions and this Schedule only if expressly stated to do so;

"new provisions" means the Chapter;

"new offence" means an offence (including default in paying a fine and contempt of court) committed after the new provisions come into force;

"old offence" means an offence (including default in paying a fine and contempt of court) committed before the new provisions come into force;

"new sentence" means a sentence passed in respect of a new offence;

"old sentence" means a sentence passed in respect of an old offence; and

"sentence" includes a period of imprisonment imposed for default in paying a fine or for contempt of court.

(2) In subparagraph (1) above, the definitions of new offence, new sentence, old offence and old sentence shall have effect notwithstanding that conviction and sentence may occur after the Chapter comes into force.

(3) In relation to default in paying a fine, the date on which sentence is passed shall be taken to be, in relation to imprisonment imposed—

(a) under section 214(2) or 216 of the 1995 Act, the date on which the court imposes imprisonment; and

(b) under section 214(4) of the 1995 Act, the date on which the defaulter is committed to prison.

2. Where, by virtue of the provisions of this Schedule, a prisoner is treated as serving—

(a) a new sentence, the new provisions will apply in respect of him;

(b) an old sentence, the existing provisions will apply in respect of him,

in both cases subject to any specific provision made in this Schedule.

3. For the purposes of this Schedule, where additional days have been awarded to, or days of remission have been forfeited by, a prisoner serving an old sentence, the period which he is required to serve in respect of that sentence shall be computed without regard to those days, and he shall serve those days—

(a) after that period has come to an end; and

(b) before starting to serve any new sentence of imprisonment which is to run consecutively to that old sentence.

4. Where any combination of old and new sentences is to run, either consecutively or concurrently, in relation to a prisoner, any supervised release order imposed under any of those sentences shall begin on the date when he is released; and where there is more than one such order he shall be subject to whichever of them is the longer or, as the case may be, the longest.

5. Where a single sentence is passed in respect of a number of offences committed on different days, for the purposes of this Schedule the sentence shall be deemed to have been passed in respect of the offence or offences committed on the latest of those days.

6. Subject to paragraph 8 below, where a new sentence is to run consecutively to an old sentence, the new sentence shall begin—

(a) where the old sentence was or is for less than four years, at the expiry of one half of that sentence; and

(b) subject to paragraph 7 below, where the old sentence was or is for four years or more, at the expiry of two thirds of that sentence

7. Where, in a case to which paragraph 6(b) above applies, the Parole Board have, prior to the passing of the new sentence, recommended that the prisoner be released on licence on a date—

(a) earlier than the expiry of two thirds of that sentence; and

(b) later than the date on which the new sentence is passed,

the new sentence shall begin on such date as the Secretary of State may, after considering any further recommendation of the Parole Board, determine, being a date not later than the expiry of two thirds of the sentence.

8. Where a new sentence is to run consecutively to an old sentence and the prisoner concerned is in prison—

(a) because he has been recalled to prison by the Secretary of State, the new sentence shall begin, where he is recalled—

(i) after the expiry of one half and before the expiry of two thirds of the old sentence, at the expiry of two thirds of that sentence;

(ii) after the expiry of two thirds of the old sentence, at the expiry of the old sentence;

(iii) in either of the cases mentioned in sub-paragraphs (i) and (ii) above, and the Parole Board has directed his release under section 17(4) of the 1993 Act or has recommended his release under section 28(5) of the 1989 Act, on the date on which he would, by virtue of that direction or recommendation and but for the new sentence, have been released;

(b) as a result of an order made under section 16 of the 1993 Act (commission of offence by released prisoner), the new sentence shall begin on the date on which the return period determined by that order expires;

(c) both because he has been recalled by the Secretary of State and returned as a result of an order made under section 16 of the 1993 Act, the new sentence shall begin on the expiry of whichever of the recall period and the order period ends later.

9. Where any combination of old and new sentences is to run consecutively in relation to a prisoner and—

(a) after the expiry of any supervised release order such as is mentioned in paragraph 4 above; or

(b) where he is not subject to any such supervised release order, on his release,

there remains outstanding part of any licence period in respect of an old sentence, he shall, in accordance with the existing provisions, be subject to that licence for that part of that period.

10. Where any combination of old and new sentences is to run consecutively in relation to a prisoner and—

(a) the last of those sentences is a new sentence, he shall, in addition to any supervised release order or licence period, be subject to the new provisions in relation to that new sentence; and

(b) the last of those sentences is an old sentence, he shall, in addition to any supervised release order or licence period, be subject to the existing provisions in relation to that old sentence.

11. In calculating a licence period for the purposes of paragraphs 9 and 10 above any period less than three months shall be disregarded.

12. Where a prisoner serving an old sentence of four years or more—

(a) has been released on licence; and

(b) receives a new sentence,

before the expiry of that old sentence, he shall begin to serve the new sentence immediately on its being passed or on such other date as the court may specify.

13. Where an old sentence is to run consecutively to a new sentence, the prisoner concerned shall begin to serve the old sentence on the date when he would otherwise have been released from the new sentence.

14. Where any combination of old and new sentences is to run concurrently, in relation to a prisoner, he shall be treated as if he is serving whichever of them will, as at the date on which the latest of them is passed, give rise to the later or, as the case may be, latest release date and, for the purposes of this paragraph, "release date" means—

(a) in the case of an old sentence—

(i) one half of a sentence of less than four years; and

(ii) two thirds of a sentence of four years or more; and

(b) in the case of a new sentence, the whole term.

15. If, by virtue of paragraph 14 above, the prisoner is to be treated as serving an old sentence, and—

(a) that sentence is either quashed or reduced to a period shorter than the concurrent new sentence on appeal; or

(b) a new sentence to which he is subject is increased on appeal to a period longer than the concurrent old sentence,

the prisoner concerned shall, as at the date when he begins to be treated as serving the new sentence, be deemed to have been awarded as many early release days as possible in relation to the period during which he was treated as serving the old sentence, (under deduction of any additional days which may have been awarded to him, or days of remission which may have been forfeited by him, during that period).

16.—(1) This paragraph applies where a prisoner who is being held on remand in respect of both an old offence and a new offence is, in consequence of the same act or omission—

(a) awarded additional days in respect of any prospective old sentence which may be imposed upon him; and

(b) is made subject to an order by which he forfeits early release days, in respect of any prospective new sentence which may be imposed upon him.

(2) Where the prisoner receives—

(a) only an old sentence, he is liable to the additional days mentioned in subparagraph (1)(a) above;

(b) only a new sentence, he is liable only to forfeit the early release days mentioned in subparagraph (1)(b) above.

(3) Where the prisoner receives both an old and a new sentence which are to run—

(a) consecutively, he is liable to the additional days, if the longer or, as the case may be, longest sentence is an old sentence, or to the forfeiture of the early release days, if the longer or, as the case may be longest, sentence is a new sentence;

(b) concurrently, he is liable either to the additional days or, as the case may be, to the forfeiture of the early release days, depending on whether the sentence is, in accordance with paragraph 14 above, to be treated as an old or, as the case may be, a new sentence.'.—[*Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.*]

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

Schedule 1

MINOR AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendments made: No. 79, in page 60, line 40, at end insert—

'( ) In section 60 (effect of hospital orders)—

(a) in subsection (1)(a)—

(i) after the word "officer" there shall be inserted the words ", an officer on the staff of the hospital specified in the order"; and

(ii) for the words "28" there shall be substituted the word "7";

(b) in subsection (4), for the words "28" there shall be substituted the word "7".'.

No. 277, in page 61, line 1, leave out from beginning to 'notify' and insert

'they shall, if that unit was not so specified,'.

No. 126, in page 61, line 46, at end insert—

'( ) In section 77 (transfers to England and Wales), after subsection (5) there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(5A) Where a patient removed under this section was immediately before his removal liable to be detained under this Act by virtue of a hospital direction made by a court in Scotland, he shall be treated as if any sentence of imprisonment passed at the time at which the hospital direction was made had been imposed by a court in England and Wales.".

( ) In section 80 (transfers to Northern Ireland), after subsection (6), there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(6A) Where a patient removed under this section was immediately before his removal liable to be detained under this Act by virtue of a hospital direction made by a court in Scotland, he shall be treated as if any sentence of imprisonment passed at the time at which the hospital direction was made had been imposed by a court in Northern Ireland.".

No. 278, in page 62, line 33, after 'order' insert 'or a hospital direction'.

No. 279, in page 62, line 34, after '62(1A)' insert 'or 62A(1A)'.

No. 121, in page 66, leave out lines 26 and 27.

No. 236, in page 67, line 30, leave out 'the order' and insert 'an order or direction'.

No. 237, in page 67, line 50, leave out 'under' and insert 'by virtue of'.

No. 238, in page 68, leave out line 14 and insert—

'(a) in subsection (2)—

(i) the words from the beginning to "209(1) of the 1995 Act" shall cease to have effect; and

(ii) after the words "prison in Scotland" there shall be inserted the words "under Schedule 1 to the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997 in an unrestricted transfer within the meaning of that Schedule"; and'.

No. 99, in page 70, leave out line 13 and insert—

'(2) In section 44 (detention of children in summary proceedings)—

(a) in subsection (4), the words ", subject to subsection (6) below,";

(b) subsections (6) to (9); and

(c) in subsection (10), the words "or (8)",

shall cease to have effect.'.

No. 80, in page 70, line 17, at end insert—

'( ) in subsection (3), for the words "28" there shall be substituted the word "7";'.

No. 81, in page 70, line 19, after 'time";' insert—

'( ) in subsection (5), for the words "28" there shall be substituted the word "7";

( ) after subsection (5), there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(5A) Subsections (1) and (4) of section 60 of the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984 shall apply to an interim hospital order as they apply to a hospital order.";'.

No. 82, in page 70, line 22, at end insert—

'( ) In section 58 (hospital orders)—

(a) in subsection (4), for the words "28" there shall be substituted the word "7"; and

(b) in subsection (9), for the words "28" there shall be substituted the word "7".'.

No. 83, in page 70, line 28, at end insert—

'( ) In section 65 (prevention of delay), after subsection (3) there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(3A) An application under subsection (3) shall not be made at any time when an appeal made with leave under section 74(1) of this Act has not been disposed of by the High Court.".

( ) In section 74(4) (disposal of appeals in connection with preliminary diets)—

(a) the word "and" after paragraph (a) shall cease to have effect; and

(b) after paragraph (b) there shall be inserted the following words "and;

(c) may on cause shown extend the period mentioned in section 65(1) of this Act.".

( ) In section 81(6) (list of jurors where trial does not take place)—

(a) the word ", signed" shall cease to have effect; and

(b) for the words "85(1) and (2)" there shall be substituted the words "85(2)".

( ) In section 83 (transfer of sheriff court solemn proceedings)—

(a) in subsection (1), for the words "transfer the case to a sheriff court" there shall be substituted the words "adjourn the trial and transfer it to a sitting of a sheriff court, appointed as mentioned in section 66(1) of this Act,";

(b) in subsection (2)—

(i) before the word "make" there shall be inserted the words "adjourn the trial and"; and

(ii) for the word "case" there shall be substituted the word "trial as mentioned in subsection (1) above"; and

(c) after subsection (2), there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(3) Where a warrant to cite any person to attend a sitting of the sheriff court has been issued by the sheriff clerk under section 66(1) of this Act and the trial has been adjourned and transferred by an order under subsection (2) above, the warrant shall have effect as if the trial diet had originally been fixed for the court, and the date of the sitting of that court, to which the trial is so transferred.".'.

No. 84, in page 70, line 45, after 'citation)' insert

'—

(a) in subsection (3)—

(i) the words "signed by the prosecutor and" shall cease to have effect;

(ii) in paragraph (a), after the word "accused," there shall be inserted the words "signed by the prosecutor and"; and

(iii) in paragraph (b), after the word "sent" there shall be inserted the words "by or on behalf of the prosecutor"; and

(b)'.

No. 85, in page 70, line 48, leave out

'signed by the accused's solicitor and sent'

and insert

'sent by the accused's solicitor'.

No. 119, in page 71, line 32, at end insert—

'( ) In section 228(1) (probation orders), after the word "below" there shall be inserted the words "and without prejudice to section 245CC of this Act".

( ) In section 232 (failure to comply with requirements of probation order), after subsection (3) there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(3A) Where the court intends to sentence an offender under subsection (2)(b) above, and the offender is by virtue of section 245CC of this Act subject to a restriction of liberty order, it shall, before sentencing the offender under that paragraph, revoke the restriction of liberty order.".

No. 86, in page 71, line 37, at end insert—

'( ) In section 234A (non–harassment orders), subsection (5) shall cease to have effect.'.—*[Lord James Douglas–Hamilton.]*

Schedule 2

TRANSITIONAL PROVISIONS WITH RESPECT TO EARLY RELEASE

Amendment made: No. 103, in page 72, leave out from line 9 to end of line 27 on page 73.—*[Lord James Douglas–Hamilton.]*

Schedule 3

REPEALS

Amendments made: No. 87, in page 74, line 3, column 3, at end insert—

'In section 2(2), the word "and".'.

No. 240, in page 74, line 14, column 3, leave out 'subsections (2) and (3)' and insert

'in subsection (2), the words from the beginning to "209(1) of the 1995 Act"'.

No. 100, in page 74, line 54, column 3 after "44," insert

'in subsection (4), the words ", subject to subsection (6) below,".'.

No. 101, in page 74, line 55, column 3 at end insert

'and in subsection (10), the words "or (8)".'.

No. 88, in page 75, line 5, column 3, at end insert—

'In section 74(4), the word "and" after paragraph (a).
In section 81(6), the word ", signed".
In section 85(1), the words from "but" to the end.'.

No. 89, in page 75, line 10, column 3, at end insert—

'Section 140(3).
In section 141(3), the words "signed by the prosecutor and".'.

No. 90, in page 75, line 17, column 3, at end insert—

'In section 234A, subsection (5).'.

—*[Lord James Douglas–Hamilton.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

7.45 pm

Mr. Connarty: I did not make a speech earlier, but only an intervention, because I had been on the Committee and I knew that my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) could handle any points well.

What is left to us to debate now is what would in Burns's time have been called a reggle o' banes—a raggle of bones—loosely strung together to appeal to certain prejudices in the dark side of human nature and to try to appease them by getting tough. My concern is that the Bill will create more problems in society than it solves.

I intend not to rehearse matters that have gone before, but to deal with new ones. First, I should like to thank the Minister for his kind remarks when he said that he had considered my plea against the electronic tagging of children. He did not accept the amendment to that effect, but said that he would consider the possibility that the pilot scheme would be only for adults. I hope that that proves to be the case should this science fiction nightmare ever be put into operation in Scotland.

The main thrust of the Bill is to increase sentences. People will spend more time in prison. The Government's well-argued point, made in 1993, that to serve half a sentence in prison and to carry the rest of it into the public domain as a suspended sentence, to prove that one could be a good citizen, has been cast aside.

The main result, as we know, will be increased overcrowding. The main unplanned consequence of that, which has been predicted by everyone who has considered the criminal justice system over the past 100 years, will be to increase tension in prisons and stress for prison staff. I predict that prison unrest and violence will increase.

The effects will not be confined to prisons, because the public are well aware—*[Interruption.]* I have a speech to make, and I intend to make it. I have sat here all day waiting to make this speech, and I intend to make it fully. I have considered my position today, and I want to express it on Third Reading, because it relates to important matters that concern the whole Bill rather than any particular part of it. If I need to detain hon. Members until 10 o'clock to make my point, I will. No one of any party can tell me to curtail my speeches merely to play some game.

I believe that the public will feel the impact of such unrest. That is why I speak against Third Reading. The public in my constituency feel the impact of every single shiver of unrest in the Polmont young offenders institution. When there is unrest in a prison, as there has been at Full Sutton, at Glenochil and other prisons, and when there are suicides in places such as Cornton Vale, as we discussed at some length on Report, there is an impact on everyone in society. People are worried that the society in which they live is breaking down and that one of the major institutions designed to keep the checks and balances—the Prison Service—is failing to perform its duty properly.

There will also be a long-term impact on the behaviour of ex-prisoners who have served five sixths of their sentence. They will not turn out better citizens: they will turn out better institutionalised criminals, and they will probably learn much greater criminal habits. As we have seen from reports on prisons, prisoners are increasingly learning drug habits. That comes from the feeling in

prison that the sentence will never come to an end, and that one might as well conform to the institution, with all its aberrations and anomic behaviour.

We know that five new prisons are planned by the Government at a cost of £102 million as a consequence of the Bill, using the private finance initiative. I am sure that society has a feeling of betrayal when that £102 million could be doing something useful in hospitals, the national health service, education or elsewhere in Scotland.

One of the early consequences of the Bill will be overcrowding. I have had a long discussion, at its instigation, with members of the Scottish Prison Officers Association. They have given me some interesting facts about the institution in my constituency as an example. I will use it as an example to suggest to the Minister that, as a consequence of his Bill, the problems there will be repeated throughout the prison system in Scotland.

The Minister will be aware that the situation at Cornton has been artificially produced by the Government's closure of Castle Huntly young offenders institution and moved the prisoners from there mainly to Polmont, with a proposed onward move to a wing of Cornton Vale prison. We have debated Cornton Vale at great length. The Minister said in reply to one of my points that it was on hold at the moment. There are now more than 500 prisoners in Polmont. I am told that that is 25 per cent. overcrowding. The Bill will have the same consequence for prisons throughout Scotland.

What are the consequences of 25 per cent. overcrowding for Polmont and other prisons? I am told that in, that young offenders institution, the slightly insecure wing, where trusted prisoners were kept, has had to be emptied and the D category prisoners all moved into secure wings. The reason for that was that the behaviour of other prisoners and the unrest in the rest of the prison impacted on the trusted prisoners, and a large cache of knives and ski masks was found in the insecure section. They had been brought in by trusted prisoners and by other means to feed the unrest in the main prison, where faction fighting is growing.

I am told that Saughton prison wants to get rid of its untried prisoners and dump them in Polmont young offenders institution, thereby exacerbating the problem. I hope that the Minister will give me an assurance that that will not happen. That is the problem that will be caused by the Bill. Prisoners will stack up and prisoners will end up in very overcrowded prisons. That must be considered.

I am also told that the Bill which is about to be passed will impact on an environment in which there are serious concerns about staffing. I have some examples of the results of that in Scottish prisons. In one wing, one supervisor and six members of staff have to look after 105 prisoners on leisure regime, when they are outside. That is frightening. I asked why. I am told that there are now serious problems of non-cover for staff absence.

I was given a table showing an analysis of staffing levels. The excess hours worked in 1994-95 were the equivalent of 16 extra members of staff. That was forced down to 12 in 1995-96 and is now down to only five and a half, because people are not covered. Rotas are not covered when people go off ill. That is what happens when there is an attempt to reduce the staffing level and the bill for prison staffing at the same time as forcing more prisoners into the institution, which is what the Bill will do.

There is also concern about the inability to prevent drugs and weapons coming into the prison system. That is due to a lack of investment at the interface between visitors and prisoners. The SPOA members told me that there were not enough sniffer dogs, metal detectors or other equipment to scrutinise the throughput of the vast numbers of visitors to an overcrowded prison. I am sure that that will be reflected in prisons throughout Scotland, as well as Polmont, and even more so as a consequence of the Bill.

What is the result of overcrowding? We have the problem of a growing challenge to the regime of the prisons. The examples given to me from Polmont were frightening. I said earlier that ski masks and weapons had been smuggled in by supposedly trusted prisoners. Internecine warfare is running throughout the halls in the prison. We had a major riot about a year and a half ago in Polmont. We had a mini riot in November 1996. It was about prisoners trying to become a regime within a regime. I am told that people from one city or section of the Scottish population try to rule all those from other counties. The prison officers said that they were worried that they could not control any major outbreak of prison violence.

There have been five assaults on officers in Polmont in 1996-97. An officer has been hit over the head with a chair. One has been attacked in a cell. One has had serious damage to his groin after being kicked. Another has had broken ribs in four separate incidents.

A prisoner was up in court on an assault charge today, and will probably have been disposed of. He is a fairly well known character in prison legend. When he was sentenced, he jumped over the barrier in the sheriff court and pulled the sheriff's wig off. The Minister may recall him. The prisoner is up for assaulting a member of staff. The custodial regime is beginning to break down because of overcrowding. That will be the consequence throughout Scotland of the Bill, and it seriously worries me.

I am told that, on escort duty, staff can have up to six prisoners, with only one driver and one member of staff to supervise them. There was a recent assault on a woman officer. The prisoner assaulted the officer in the back of the van, then jumped through and attacked the driver. The driver was forced to draw to the side of the road. Luckily, an off-duty policeman and some others came to the rescue, or we could have had a very serious incident on our hands.

It is all down to trying to save money and force more people into prisons and to the philosophy that people who break the law should be slammed up without considering the logic of why we are doing it or making any attempt to change the behaviour of people when they are in prison. That is plainly the philosophy behind the Bill.

I am told by the SPOA that too many minor offenders are in prison. We discussed the detail of cases of people in Cornton who were in prison for fine default. Polmont is said to be 25 per cent. overcrowded. I am told that, if the fine defaulters were taken out, the prison population would be reduced by 25 per cent. immediately. That is something that we must consider. If the fine was the proper disposal at the beginning, people should not end

[Mr. Connarty]

up taking up room in prison, if prisons are to do anything about changing the behaviour of inmates and provide proper custodial care.

The main point for me is that preventing the prison system from breaking down does not rely on the business approach that has come in to the prison service since it became an agency, but in adopting a more caring, educational and reconstructive approach than is evident in the Bill. This is a silly Bill to introduce at this time. It is a piece of egocentric chest puffing to show that people can be tough on the criminal. Society wants a reduction in crime. If the Government merely slam people up and do not consider the need to reduce criminal behaviour, society will be in a worse position than when we began.

I am seriously concerned by what I have heard from the SPOA about what is happening in the prisons closest to my home and in my constituency. The SPOA tells me that it is a malaise that is spreading throughout the Scottish prisons. In a recent report, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) referred, the chief inspector of prisons said that there were major problems in Saughton prison. I do not understand why the Government have not taken time to think this out, hold the Bill back if they believe it is important, and put it in their manifesto. Then people would see whether we want better prisons that do more about not sending people back to criminal behaviour and less about tough-man approaches and longer sentences. I hope the Government will suffer in respect of the Bill in the Lords.

7.59 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): I shall be brief. I am amazed that, on this important Bill, the Minister can speak at length on amendments on Report, but cannot manage to rise to his feet to speak at the start of the Third Reading debate.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Where is the Secretary of State?

Mr. Robertson: I shall get to the question of the boss in a moment. He is the senior counsel and we have been left with the junior counsel.

I wish to start by thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) for his work on the Front Bench in Committee. The Bill is now remarkably different from the one that received a Second Reading, and much of that is down to my hon. Friend and his work with colleagues on the Committee. I also thank my hon. Friends the Members for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke), for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion), for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe), for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Davidson), for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster) and for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty). They have done a good job on the Bill.

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) asked a relevant and pertinent question—where is the Secretary of State for Scotland? The right hon. Gentleman was here last Tuesday night, when we had the first part of the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill saga. He trailed what he was going to say when he opened the Third Reading debate—the taunts, gibes and gimmicks that he was going to unveil in that speech—but he was denied the opportunity to deliver the speech because the Whips were incapable of keeping hon. Members in the House beyond 10 o'clock, so here we are tonight.

The problem is that we know the answer to the question: this evening, the Secretary of State for Scotland is at a drinks party at Dover house, up on Whitehall. That might explain his earlier agitation when the debate did not come to an end as he had expected. People in Scotland will note carefully the right hon. Gentleman's priorities—a drinks party with the press, rather than conducting this major piece of legislation through the House this evening. The Bill is the flagship of his parliamentary year—his last parliamentary year—yet he is not on the battlefield.

The right hon. Gentleman leaves behind the Minister of State, whose brother hit the headlines this week. I want to put on record my gratitude for the good sense of at least one member of the Hamilton family. As the Member of Parliament for Hamilton, let me publicly congratulate the Duke of Hamilton on his remarks and his criticism of Her Majesty's Government.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman seems to be unaware that one has to do a little bit more than rely on those who do not have a vote.

Mr. Robertson: I am perfectly capable of relying on those who do have the vote. Underlining the fact that his brother is an hereditary peer will not get the Minister off the hook of the duke's criticisms and his relevant and pertinent attacks on the Conservative Government. The duke told me that he is not a professional duke, but a professional engineer. Why cannot the Minister answer his arguments instead of slagging him off for being a member of the upper House?

Two weeks ago, I met residents in the Fairhill area of my constituency. I brought them together with representatives of the local police force, the social work department, Scottish Homes and South Lanarkshire council's housing department. They are afraid to go out at night; they are imprisoned in their houses during the day; and they are afflicted by anti-social neighbours. As a Member of Parliament, I ask myself how I can explain to them how the Bill will help them—but of course it will not.

Will the Bill allow action to be taken against the anti-social neighbours who make residents' lives hell by throwing stones, making threats and harassing them? No, of course it will not. Is there anything in the Bill that will prevent the use of scanners by local hooligans, who spot the police even as they leave the local police station and so avoid them? There is no such action in the Bill.

It is important to note that the absent Secretary of State himself described Conservative Scotland in the magazine *Flourish*, which is published by the Roman Catholic archdiocese of Glasgow. Just after he was appointed, 18 months ago, in September 1995, he described that part of the world as it was after 17 years of Conservative government. He said:

"When parents dare not let their children go out to play; when senior citizens who have given a lifetime of service to the community are forced to spend their sunset years—which should be among the most rewarding in their lives—as prisoners in their own home; then we have reached a point where action must be taken."

That is a description by a Conservative Cabinet Minister of this country—of my country, of Scotland—after 17 years of Conservative government. It is a vivid, bleak and depressing description, and it is exactly right. If the Conservatives cannot get it right in 18 years of government, how can anybody expect them to get it right now? *[Interruption.]*

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Here he is.

Mr. Robertson: The Minister is pointing to the fact that his boss has now arrived back from the party. We are all privileged to see the Secretary of State here this evening, although he will sit silent for the rest of the debate.

There is nothing in the Bill to help my constituents. All we have had are two White Papers, a Bill, hours of debate in Committee and enough leaked headlines and public relations stunts to launch a Duchess of York television commercial. That is hardly any consolation to those who live in the conditions described by the Secretary of State. There are no proposals to deal with the anti-social neighbours who imprison those golden-age pensioners in their own homes. Within a few months there will be a general election, and when we win that election—with or without the support of the Duke of Hamilton—we will take action against anti-social neighbours; we will make it easier for the agencies to share information about the behaviour of some tenants; and we will look at tenancy agreements to ensure that proper and decent behaviour towards others is a clear obligation of tenants and residents.

Since the Secretary of State has taken over in St. Andrew's house, he has branded the policies of his predecessor as irrelevant, dishonest and a failure. Only a few years after being introduced by the right hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Lang), those policies have been swept away by the Bill in a lurch from ineffective action to inane action. The Bill was a rush job, cobbled together in St. Andrew's house without any regard to the opinion of anyone who works in the criminal justice system.

The criminal justice system of Scotland, which is distinct and differs in many ways from the system prevailing south of the border, is too important to be treated in such a cavalier manner. That treatment has to be examined, as does the panoply of penalties available to the courts, to see whether it is sufficient or whether it should be augmented or changed. Most important, if we are to change our criminal justice system and make fundamental alterations to the system to which we in Scotland have grown accustomed and which we believe to be better than systems in other parts of the world, let the changes be based on consensus and agreement, not on the ideological fixation and publicity seeking of a transient politician.

We shall not block the Bill's Third Reading, because, first, although concern about several aspects remains, many elements of the Bill are vital for tackling crime; and, secondly, because the Government have either accepted Labour amendments and new clauses or given assurances as to the meaning of specific clauses. *[Interruption.]*

The Secretary of State may have enjoyed the party from which he has just returned, but a bit of decent silence would be in order. As he has not graced us with his presence or his arguments, perhaps he should sit back—maybe for the first time in his political career—and listen to some of the things that are said about him and to him.

For example, we have supported additional targeting of supervision on those deemed to be of greatest risk to society, new measures on the registration of convicted sex offenders, and new powers for the police to take DNA samples from a person in legal custody who has been convicted of "relevant sexual offences". In the latter case, the Government accepted a Labour proposal to extend the list of "relevant sexual offences" to include rape, clandestine injury to women and any lewd, indecent or libidinous behaviour towards adults or children.

Similarly, we support proposals in the Bill to create a new offence of seeking employment with children for those convicted of a sexual offence against children, as well as increases in the maximum penalty for sex with under-age girls. On the latter point, Ministers have accepted a Labour amendment to increase the maximum penalty, not only to five years but to 10 years. We believe that the law must be tough on those involved in certain offences.

We have supported the Government's proposals to reform the legal aid system by using pilot schemes to benchmark costs. We support tougher powers to tackle under-age drinking. We sought to toughen the penalties for under-age drinking in alcohol-free zones, but were defeated in Committee by the Government majority.

We remain concerned about the potential impact of the Government's sentencing policy and, in effect, their removal of judicial discretion, but—this is where there is a major difference between the Bill on Second Reading and the Bill in its present form—we welcome Government assurances, secured in Committee, that the courts will have wide discretion to define the exceptional circumstances in which the court will be allowed to award less than a mandatory life or minimum sentence, including both the circumstance of the offence and the circumstances of the accused.

Ministers have given assurances—which we have welcomed—that they will introduce new clauses in the House of Lords to protect mentally disordered witnesses in court. The Bill is not finished. It is still to be considered by the House of Lords, and we shall watch carefully what happens there.

The Bill was designed purely to gain votes in an election which itself, by its timing, may finish it off. That would be the final irony—and a fitting epitaph for this gimmicky, limited and crude electioneering piece of legislation.

8.12 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell: I detect impatience in the House about the progress of this Bill. Those who find the fact that we are detaining them irksome should reflect on the following: many of us need not be here discussing the domestic affairs of Scotland, and if they would only grant us devolved powers to a Parliament in Edinburgh, they could dine much earlier and we might fashion a better piece of legislation.

When the White Paper was debated in the Scottish Grand Committee, the Government took offence at the robustness of my criticism, especially regarding the imposition of automatic sentences, but also regarding the

[Mr. Menzies Campbell]

rejection of the Sutherland committee recommendation that there should be instituted in Scotland a body with responsibility for dealing with miscarriages of justice, independent of the existing judicial system. The latter defect in the Bill remains. No such body has been set up, and it is notable that Lord Ross—the recently retired Lord Justice-Clerk—made that absence one of his principal criticisms of the Government in the interviews that he gave following his retirement. In the absence of that provision, I believe the Bill to be substantially flawed.

Another element—perhaps of commission, not omission—which surrounds these proceedings, equally directs us to the judgment that the Bill is flawed. I refer to the imposition in certain circumstances of automatic sentences. These constitute a substantial and unprecedented innovation in the law of Scotland. Although the statutory provision which the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) just mentioned—the use of the expression "exceptional circumstances"—may go some way to palliate the consequences of the imposition of provisions to provide for automatic sentences, it does not deal with a fundamental question of principle which lies at the centre of the Bill.

For those reasons, I and my colleagues are not prepared to accept the Bill. We will divide the House on Third Reading when the appropriate moment comes, because we believe that the Bill is so flawed in principle that it does not deserve the approval of the House.

The innovation which I mentioned—automatic sentences—dilutes judicial discretion in Scotland in a way that has never before been seen. It is noteworthy that, of several Scottish High Court judges who have commented on the Bill, none has been found to support the principle on which the Government have advanced this part of the legislation. That is inevitable, because what is now proposed is wrong in principle and will result in injustice in practice.

What is proposed will certainly result in a far higher number of contested cases in the High Court of Justiciary in Scotland. There will be absolutely no incentive for any accused person to plead guilty if the consequence of doing so is that he or she will attract an automatic sentence. That means that many complainers—many victims—who might otherwise have been spared the ordeal of giving evidence in serious cases, especially where sexual misconduct is alleged, will have to go into the witness box to give evidence.

Faced with the draconian consequences of the Bill, juries, who will be aware of the likely consequences because they will almost certainly be told of them by those conducting the defence of an accused person, will seek to find any excuse for acquitting or for returning a verdict of guilty on a lesser charge, to avoid triggering the automatic provisions. Juries will find ways to acquit. In addition, prosecutors in sympathetic cases will charge the accused person with a crime of less seriousness than is appropriate in the circumstances so as to avoid the risk that the automatic provisions will be triggered.

Earlier this week, I had the privilege of listening to the speech of Lord Bingham in another place. If hon. Members want a point of reference for what is intellectually sustainable, what is founded in justice and what reflects the reality of the disposal of serious criminal cases, they can do no better than have regard to the terms of that speech.

The Bill is fundamentally flawed: it is wrong in principle. For that reason, it should not command the support of the House, and we will invite the House to pass its verdict on it.

8.19 pm

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) raised some serious points in relation to Polmont. I shall examine them and write to him in due course.

The speech of the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) was one of the most desperately weak speeches that I have ever heard. He sought to justify abstention and, no doubt on the orders of Islington, will sit on his hands because he knows that the Bill protects the people of Scotland and will be an extremely popular law and order measure.

Only the Liberal Democrats have the courage to oppose the Bill, which they know will do a great deal for law and order and will be tough on crime. I challenge the hon. Member for Falkirk, East to vote with them, if his speech reflects his sincere belief.

Conservative Members have no dilemma about giving much stronger protections to the people of our country. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 287, Noes 20.

Division No. 62] **[8.20 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dewa, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen

Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hat'fd)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Gummer, John
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Michael
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrea, Rev William
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Sir James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hersf'd)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'd)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bex'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'd)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Matthew Carrington and Mr. Sebastian Coe.

NOES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Paddy
Beith, A J
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Montgomery)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Harvey, Nick
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Maclennan, Robert
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
Rendel, David
Skinner, Dennis
Steel, Sir David
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thurnham, Peter
Wallace, James

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and Mr. Paul Tyler.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Mr. Gallie: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. In the previous debate, I referred to the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 1980, which banned alcohol at sports grounds and on coaches in Scotland. At the time, I was howled down and told that the measure was introduced by a Labour Member before the Conservatives took office. That is not true: the measure was introduced by this Government and Opposition Members voted against it.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order, but the hon. Gentleman has made his point.

Police Grant (England and Wales)

8.33 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Miss Ann Widdecombe): I beg to move,

That the Police Grant Report (England and Wales) 1997–98 (HC 208), which was laid before this House on 27th January, be approved.

I am pleased to open the debate on the funding of the police service. The settlement demonstrates the Government's commitment to providing the police with the resources to carry on the magnificent job that they do every day of the year, 24 hours a day. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has said, we have the best police service in the world. The police deserve our support and we shall back them every inch of the way.

Our determination to back the police is evidenced by the extra money that we have made available to them over the years. Expenditure on the police has increased from just over £1 billion to more than £7 billion since 1979. I am proud to say that spending has therefore more than doubled in real terms. Our support for the police is made through the police grant and the local authority finance system. Tonight, we are debating the police grant report and we shall debate the English and Welsh local government finance reports in the next few days.

The increases in resources have been reflected in increased police numbers. Since 1978-79, overall police numbers have increased by about 16,000. More officers are being put back on the beat to address the public's demand for high-visibility policing. The number of constables has increased by 2,360 since the last general election, making a total of more than 98,000. Between 1983 and 1996, more than 9,100 officers were released for other work by bringing in civilians.

Our support is paying off. Recorded crime in the 12 months to June 1996 was down by 10 per cent. on the rate three years ago. That is a fall of more than half a million offences—the biggest continuous fall over three years since records were first kept in 1857. I am sure that the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) is smiling because she welcomes that significant decrease. Those successes have not happened by accident: they are a tribute to the hard work and dedication of police men and women up and down the country. They demonstrate that our strategy of supporting the police by giving them the resources they need is the correct one.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): Does my hon. Friend recall that, when Labour was last in power, the police were undermanned and underpaid, and so demoralised that officers were leaving in droves?

Miss Widdecombe: I do recall that. Our policies have had a significant impact.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): Will the hon. Lady have the grace to acknowledge that average police numbers rose faster, year by year, during the life of the last Labour Government than under this Government? That hardly bears out her claim, which is not justified.

Miss Widdecombe: My claim is justified because police numbers have risen by more than 16,000 since the Conservatives came to power. I am sure that we will have the opportunity to debate that point in later exchanges.

In total, £7.3 billion will be available for policing next year, including £205 million for capital expenditure. This is a good settlement for the police: it shows our commitment to fighting crime and maintaining law and order, and the priority that we give to those aims when we are keeping careful control of public spending to ensure the wise use of taxpayers' resources.

Capping limits for police authorities will be confirmed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment next week, but they are set to be fixed at 3.2 per cent. That measure, coupled with the additional funding that is being provided outside the cap, will deliver an increase in police authority spending power of £247 million. In setting the allocations for individual police authorities in the report, we have listened to the views of those on the ground—the chief constables, police authority representatives and people who make day-to-day decisions about how valuable resources are spent. They have told us that stability in allocations is their overriding concern. They do not want to see their funding see-sawing from year to year: they want to be able to plan ahead.

Therefore, we have applied two additional rules to the funding formula—rules 1 and 3 in the report. They will ensure that every force receives a 2 per cent. increase in the total police grant, standard spending assessment and SSA reduction grant if they receive it, in addition to a 3 per cent. minimum increase for provincial forces this year and an average increase of 4.2 per cent. the year before. That is evidence of our firm and consistent support for the police. Those increases do not include money for the extra constables promised by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. I shall return to that issue later.

We have also proposed measures that would enable police authorities outside London to increase their spending by 3.2 per cent. if they wished to do so. When we add to that the money for new officers that was promised by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, the potential increase becomes 3.7 per cent.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Will the Minister explain to the House why the Merseyside police service has suffered a reduction of more than 400 in the number of officers on the beat in the past few years?

Miss Widdecombe: The way in which individual police forces decide to allocate their resources and the priorities that they attach to their spending patterns are matters for the chief constables.

Mr. Walter Sweeney (Vale of Glamorgan): My hon. Friend may be pleased to learn that I recently had a meeting with the chief constable of the South Wales police, who reassured me that all the extra money made available by the Government will be spent on extra policing.

Miss Widdecombe: I am delighted to hear that, and I welcome the chief constable's statement. I thank my hon. Friend for bringing that to the House's attention.

Some people have pointed out that if police authorities budget up to their capping limit, higher council tax bills will result. We should keep that claim in perspective. If authorities spend right up to their limit, the average band D council tax payer will pay just £7 a year more. Overall, central Government currently funds between 80 per cent. and 85 per cent. of police expenditure. It must be right that council tax payers should bear a slightly higher proportion of the burden of funding the police.

If police authorities were to budget up to the proposed cap, that would still mean a change of under 1 per cent. in the balance of funding. We do not intend to tell police authorities how to set their precept for the police: that is not our role. It is for each authority to decide at what level the precept should be set and it will naturally want to balance its force's need to maintain current levels of service with the position of council tax payers.

I have already reminded hon. Members of the commitment made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to provide funding for an additional 5,000 police officers over three years. Forces will receive the first slice of that funding, some £20 million, this year. Next year, forces will receive a share of funding for those officers taken on this year. They will also receive a further £40 million in additional money. Additional rule 2 in the police grant report is applied to distribute that funding between the forces.

That extra £40 million is sufficient to pay for 2,000 officers, but again we are not telling chief officers how to spend their money. It is for them to decide how the funding should be allocated. I hope that, when considering how to spend it, they will listen to the public, who always make it clear—

Mr. Michael: Does the hon. Lady recall that the promise made by the Prime Minister before the last general election to increase police numbers by 1,000 was not surrounded by caveats? It was a direct promise, and it was not delivered. Why has the Prime Minister's promise—which also was not surrounded by caveats—of 5,000 extra police not been delivered?

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Gentleman overlooks the fact that we now have a record number of constables. That is clear proof of our commitment.

I was saying before I was not very intelligently interrupted that, when the police consider how to spend the money, we hope that they will listen to the public, who always make it clear that they want more officers on the beat, which demonstrates—

Mr. Michael: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Miss Widdecombe: I would like to finish my sentence this time, having given way in the middle of it last time. That demonstrates the high regard in which the police are held.

Mr. Michael *rose—*

Miss Widdecombe: Does the hon. Gentleman still want to interrupt?

Mr. Michael: I am grateful to the hon. Lady. These issues will come up in debate, but I think that she should acknowledge that there are 500 fewer police officers now than there were in March 1992, when the Prime Minister made the pledge, which, as I said, was not fulfilled.

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Gentleman will be well aware that that very slight fall, against the overall rise, is accounted for by the rise in the number of constables and the flatter management structure, which has resulted in a slight shift in the figures.

We will support total capital expenditure of £205 million in 1997-98, and we will honour our existing commitments. All funding for specific police building projects is being maintained, which is what the Association of Chief Police Officers wanted. Some projects will be deferred, but it is open to individual forces to explore private finance initiative opportunities if they do not want to defer.

There has been a reduction in capital provision. That reflects the scope for greater efficiency and value for money. In particular, it recognises the opportunities open to police authorities to benefit from the private finance initiative in running their capital programmes.

Increasingly, the police service is taking advantage of PFI. The fundamental objective of PFI is to secure the best possible use of capital resources at best value for the public sector. The private sector is using its skills and expertise to help deliver better deals for the police.

We now have 14 pilot PFI projects with an estimated capital value of £130 million in all. For example, Derbyshire police are in the final stages of agreeing a contract with the private sector to design, build, finance and operate a replacement police station at Ilkeston. Derbyshire and others are forging ahead with their pathfinder projects. Those projects are yet another example of police forces' enthusiasm for looking at new and more effective ways to provide services to the public. They will also be a valuable source of advice on best practice for future schemes.

I am convinced that the private finance initiative has a future in the police service as in other parts of the public sector. The private finance initiative means that risks best borne by the private sector do not fall on the client, and it brings new and innovative solutions. Above all, PFI means value for money.

The Metropolitan police's spending power will increase to more than £1.7 billion in 1997-98. That is an increase of 3.4 per cent. over 1996-97, including the funding for extra officers. We recognise that they have a unique role because of their national and capital city functions, so they will receive a special payment amounting to £130 million to cover that work.

The bulk of police funding is allocated according to the needs-based formula that was introduced in 1995-96. We made a number of refinements last year, in response to concerns expressed by the police and others. This year we have again listened to the police in refining the formula for 1997-98.

In 1996-97, 40 per cent. of funding was allocated on the basis of establishment or police staffing figures from 1994. For 1997-98, that proportion will reduce to 30 per cent. The establishment figure is increasingly out of date. The need for such a component continues to recede, but it provides useful continuity with previous funding regimes, so it stays for next year at least, albeit at a reduced level.

[Miss Widdecombe]

We have looked long and hard at the pensions element. We recognise that pension costs have risen, so we have increased the proportion of funding distributed under that component from 12.3 per cent. to 12.9 per cent. The model used by the Government Actuary's Department to project forces' relative pensions expenditure has been overhauled.

I know that police forces went to a lot of trouble to provide information on pensioners and serving officers, and I am grateful to them for that. The result is more accurate information and a fairer distribution of resources.

Ms Eagle: The hon. Lady will know that the pension component of the formula presents particular difficulties in Merseyside. Is she absolutely certain that her Department has taken account of all the extra retirements and the efficiency savings that the police force has made by removing part of the management structure, to which she referred earlier? That has put even more pressure on this area of expenditure.

Miss Widdecombe: We believe that we have taken into account all relevant factors in reaching our conclusions. I accept the hon. Lady's point. The pensions problem is a difficult and major one, and although it has an impact on all forces, it affects certain forces in particular.

Other parts of the formula have also benefited from improved data. The way in which the money is divided is based on what we know about how the police spend their time. The latest information on police activity and incidents has been reflected in the formula.

Finally, we have acknowledged that patrol is a crucial element of police work. The patrol component of the formula is now shown separately. It is now clear for all to see that a significant proportion of police funding is allocated on the basis of this important area of work.

Mr. Stephen: Does my hon. Friend accept that her statement shows the Government's firm commitment to the policing of this country? Does she share my perhaps unrealistic hope that the broadcast media will report her statement fairly, and will not do what they did last time, which was to seek out the police authority with the smallest increase and mislead the public into thinking that that was the general situation?

Miss Widdecombe: Not having the powers of a clairvoyant, I do not know what the media will do. I have learnt not to hope for entirely fair treatment, and again on this occasion I will not risk putting money on receiving fair treatment from them. However, I join my hon. Friend in hoping that the media will indeed reflect accurately the considerable support that is clearly demonstrated by what I have been saying.

I was talking about the work on the formula. That work is not yet finished; we will continue to look at the funding formula this year to see whether further refinements are required. Representatives of the police service and police authorities will be fully involved, and will therefore be able to make points such as the one made by the hon. Member for Wallasey in relation to Merseyside.

I have set out a very satisfactory settlement for the police service, and a fair and equitable distribution of the available funds between the 43 forces in England and Wales. We have ensured stability in allocation. All forces outside London can receive at least 3.2 per cent. more money. On top of that, we have delivered the next chunk of money to meet my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's promise of funds to provide 5,000 extra constables. We have refined the formula, which now uses more accurate information than ever before. The establishment factor continues to shrink, and rising pension costs have been recognised.

The report gives us, and the people, a properly and fairly funded police service. It enables the police to go into battle with the terrorist, the burglar and the mugger armed with the resources that are needed to carry out that work. I commend the report to the House.

8.50 pm

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): I pay tribute to the ingenuity of Ministers. Every effort was made to ensure that the House was not misled—that must have been very difficult, because the facts relating to police finance are now becoming clear. Far from giving the police an extra 3.7 per cent. this year, total Government support will rise by less than 2 per cent.—1.98 per cent., to be precise.

The Minister said that the settlement demonstrated the Government's commitment to the police. She was misinformed. That is as absurd as her claim about police numbers. She suggested that the cut in capital funds gave scope for efficiency; I suggest that the motivation was not to increase efficiency, but to save money. It certainly lessens the scope for efficiency if the police cannot spend money on expensive new technology that may help them to tackle crime by reducing the burden of bureaucratic work and getting more policemen out on the streets.

The Government will not spend money on increasing police numbers; they will make local people pay through the council tax. I am not sure whether to call that institutional theft or another Tory tax rise, but I ask the House to take careful note of the exact words that have been used. In a Home Office press release issued in November 1996, to which the Home Secretary gave the heading "More resources for the fight against crime", the right hon. and learned Gentleman stated:

"My top priority is maintaining law and order and tackling crime."

He says that fairly frequently, but no one believes him. He continued:

"Planned spending fully reflects that commitment."

The words were carefully chosen. He added:

"More funding for police authorities will allow the police service to continue the fight against criminals and to recruit another 2,000 constables."

Reading those words, one might think that the Home Secretary intended to provide money from the Home Office budget rather than going on a pocket-picking spree.

Another Home Office press release was issued today, in the name of the Minister of State, who is not taking part in tonight's debate. I understand that the Home Secretary has gone abroad to avoid being present for it. The Minister of State said:

"In a year when we have more bobbies on the beat than ever before, I am delighted that we will be able to give police authorities increased spending power to continue the fight against crime."

Hon. Members should note the words "we" and "give"—words used by a Minister who described the settlement as generous. I am not surprised that the Minister who is present has been given the "hospital pass" of being allowed to deal with tonight's debate; I am sure that the other Ministers know that the money is being provided not by the Home Office but by local people.

Having checked all the figures that have been laid before the House, I can assure hon. Members that they do not actually mislead the House. Today's Home Office press release, however, represents an extraordinary attempt to fool the public into believing that the Government are providing extra money for the police, and that the Home Secretary is fulfilling the promise made by the Prime Minister in October 1995 to provide additional money to finance an extra 5,000 police officers. Neither is true, as I shall spell out.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): This is a short debate. I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman is about to come to the kernel of his speech—I am sure that he is—and tell us how much more a Labour Government would give the police. Surely, any other words condemning the Government are sheer hypocrisy.

Mr. Michael: No. I am going straight to the target of the debate, which is the Government's hypocrisy in making a statement that makes it appear that they are giving money to the police, when they are in fact picking the pockets of local people to obtain the sums that are at the bottom of the finance sheet. That is what our debate should be about: that needs to be exposed.

Let me remind the House what the Conservative party promised the British people before the last general election. Page 22 of its manifesto stated:

"We are continuing to increase police numbers. There will be 1,000 extra officers this year."

That intention was confirmed by the Home Office annual report, published in March in the run-up to that general election. It stated:

"The Government plans to increase police establishments further in 1992-93 by nearly 1,000 police officers."

Once the general election was over, the Conservative party reneged on that promise. I suspect that it was partly because of the constant scrutiny from Opposition Members that Ministers decided, in 1994, to absolve themselves of responsibility for setting the police establishment by devolving decisions to chief constables through the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994. When we were debating that legislation, we said we thought that that curious conversion to the devolving of responsibilities might have something to do with an intention to cut police numbers, and we were right.

Miss Widdecombe: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that we did, in fact, approve sufficient funds for 1,000 additional officers in 1992-93, that some police authorities decided that they would not deliver their share of those approved funds and that, none the less, we gave it to them? Will he confirm that, in the event, police strength increased by 845 in that year?

Mr. Michael: I shall come to the numbers in a moment, but it is a fact that, in 1992-93, responsibility for deciding police establishment and police numbers had not been taken away from the Home Office. That happened in the 1994 Act. The Minister cannot evade responsibility on behalf of her colleagues. In fact, police numbers went down during that year.

It is, of course, right for police authorities to be able to consider what is best for their areas, and to agree with the chief constable the balance between spending on equipment and personnel, between police officers and civilians and at each rank. It is pretty obvious that the only reason Ministers were willing to allow subsidiarity is that they believed that it would let them off the hook in reducing police budgets in real terms.

As we predicted, police numbers went down. Before the last election, the annual report projected a total of 129,425 police officers by March 1966. The Home Office has confirmed that on 31 March 1996 the total number of officers was 126,878—more than 2,500 below the number promised. As the Prime Minister promised to fund an extra 5,000 police officers over three financial years, commencing in April 1996, it is pertinent to ask the Minister what the base line is. Is it the number of officers in March 1996 or the number of officers that, in 1992, Ministers promised there would be in 1996? Is it perhaps the number of officers before the last election, plus the 1,000 officers promised then?

That question has not been answered by the Prime Minister or the Home Secretary, although it has been asked many times. It would provide an honest starting point if Ministers answered that question: sadly, it would be an academic answer, because the latest Home Office figures show that the total number of police officers in England and Wales in September 1996 was 500 lower than the number in March 1992, immediately before the general election.

Mr. Stephen: On the subject of questions that have not been answered, surely the point put to the hon. Gentleman by my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) is right: the hon. Gentleman cannot stand at the Dispatch Box and say that more central Government money must be devoted to the police, but refuse to commit his party to putting any more central Government money in.

Mr. Michael: The hon. Gentleman seems not to have understood the importance of what I am saying. His party went to the 1992 general election promising 1,000 additional police officers and has not delivered that. It is now promising an additional 5,000 police officers, and it is not providing the resources or putting in the money to meet the Prime Minister's promise.

I understand that Conservative Members are practising for opposition. They want to question Ministers and we are prepared to practise answering questions, but, at the moment, it is the Conservative Government's pledges that are under scrutiny. I pledge that we will at least deliver what we promise. The basic point is that, when he spoke

[Mr. Michael]

during the general election, the Prime Minister promised an extra 1,000 police officers, and he did not deliver. He is now promising 5,000 additional police officers over a finite period, and he is not delivering the money to meet that requirement.

Miss Widdecombe: As the hon. Gentleman deludes himself utterly that he is practising for government—I assure him that he is not—perhaps he could give us a foretaste of exactly what his Government will do and answer the question that was aptly put to him. How much more would a Labour Government spend on the police, and has the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) agreed to that spending?

Mr. Michael: I look forward to the first Home Office questions after the general election, when I hope that it will be appropriate for the hon. Lady to ask the questions. She should be more interested in providing a cogent explanation of why she serves in a Government whose Prime Minister promised 1,000 extra police officers and failed to deliver that, and why her settlement today fails to deliver the promise. That is the sort of Prime Minister and Government that we have. That is why it is about time they were swept away.

The practical effect, for instance, in London is that, since the last general election, the number of police officers has fallen by 1,000. In an intervention, my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) referred to Merseyside. Between March 1992 and September 1996, the number of police officers in Merseyside went down by 351. It will lose another 215 by 2001. The people of Wirral, with whom I discussed police issues last week and again a few weeks ago, will not be impressed by that failure to support the police in Merseyside, which is implicit in the Minister's statement today.

Miss Widdecombe: Does not Merseyside still have more police officers per 1,000 head of population than any other force outside London? As money is allocated on the basis of population, is it not also true that the Merseyside population is decreasing and that the number of officers in that force, as in others, is a matter for the chief constable?

Mr. Michael: That is a little essay for the defence, I suppose. Merseyside has considerable crime problems. The police in Merseyside whom I visited a few weeks ago face chronic problems. The people of Wirral to whom I was listening only days ago said that they were unhappy with the lack of resources for the Merseyside police. The settlement makes matters worse for the people of Merseyside.

Ms Eagle: Does my hon. Friend agree that the people of Wirral are extremely unhappy with being forced to pay a 50 per cent. increase in their council tax precept for the police service in the past three years, yet they have many fewer officers than before the increases?

Mr. Michael: My hon. Friend is right. It is interesting that local people—this was clear in Wirral—see through what the Government have been up to. Those people recognise that promises are made and not kept, and that they have to pay more for less because of the way in which the Government have dealt with their finances. My hon. Friend makes a telling point, which must greatly embarrass the Minister.

The Government's record on police numbers is not good. The police have to deal with worse problems because of the huge increase in crime over which the Tories have presided. Violent crime is up by 163 per cent. compared with 1979, crime has doubled and criminals are three times more likely to get away with violent crimes than in 1979 when Labour was in office. The facts about police numbers are clear. Under the Labour Government, the average increase in the number of police officers was more than 700 a year, much greater than under the Conservatives. Since 1989, the increase has been only 127 a year. Under the Labour Government, there was less crime and a greater commitment to policing and the future bodes better for the police and the public than for the past few years.

Let us put all that history behind us and look at what has happened since the Prime Minister made his new promise to fund extra officers. Last year's police grant report included an extra £20 million for the first tranche of additional officers. However, as I said in last year's debate and as is made plain on page 154 of the Home Office annual report, the capital grants allocated to police authorities were reduced by £23 million from the previous year, and that in itself was a reduction of £19 million compared with what was promised on page 126 of the 1995 Home Office annual report. I do not think that Ministers want us to look closely at the figures, but those figures are in documents that were published by the Home Office, and they cannot escape them.

It is fine for Ministers to say that they will provide extra money for police officers, but, if they keep cutting the capital budget every year, how on earth is the force expected to keep up with increased expenditure on more police, uniforms and police cars, not to mention side-handled batons and pepper sprays and all the other innovations that the Home Secretary has announced in press releases in the past couple of years? That is the context in which we look at this year's settlement.

The Home Office issued two press releases giving the joyous news that police grant was up 3.7 per cent. and that total police spending power was up 3.7 per cent. Perhaps the general public and even informed journalists were fooled by that information into thinking that the Government were giving the police an increase of 3.7 per cent. this year. I hope that the representatives of the press who are covering the debate will be fair on the Minister; I am not sure that that will have the desired effect suggested by the hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen), because, if the Government are dealt with fairly, the coverage will be extremely critical.

I am sure that the Home Secretary cannot have harboured such dishonourable intent, but I thought it sensible to seek further clarification in case anyone felt the slightest bit misled. Just before Christmas, I tabled parliamentary questions so that the Home Secretary could clarify the position to the House. His answer appeared in columns *269-70* of the *Official Report* of Wednesday 15 January 1997: the increase in total Government grants to police authorities was just 2.2 per cent. but there was a flaw in the answer because it did not include the capital grants.

I have today received a list of the capital grants that have been allocated to each police authority and they show why the Home Secretary chose not to include them in his totals. The grants are down again this year to below last year's figure, which in itself was £20 million short.

By my calculations, the real increase in Government support to the police is just £117 million, a rise of less than 2 per cent. Where is the rest of the money that enabled the Home Secretary to claim a 3.7 per cent. increase without in any way misleading the House? The answer in the *Official Report* of Wednesday 15 January makes it clear that the Government intend to ask local government taxpayers to stump up the cash. The Minister's figures are based on the Government's contribution going up by a miserable 1.8 per cent. and the cash demanded from local authorities going up by an average of 14 per cent.

It is interesting to look at the figures for Kent, where the Government contribution will go up by 2.39 per cent. I am not sure what the citizens of Kent will say when they discover that the Home Secretary is to send them a bill that will increase the burden on council tax by 13.4 per cent. The bill will not come directly from Kent's Members of Parliament, the Home Secretary and the Minister of State, Home Office, the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe); it will come by the scenic route of the local council tax, but it will have been written by the Conservative Members who represent that area.

The increase in the council tax precept in Merseyside will be 16.9 per cent. At the top end of the scale, and based on the Government's own figures, Cleveland will suffer an 18.5 per cent. increase.

Mr. Stephen: Surely the hon. Gentleman accepts that the distinction he is attempting to draw between council tax payers and income tax payers is artificial. Council tax payers and income tax payers are substantially the very same people.

Mr. Michael: The hon. Gentleman should know full well—although I appreciate that he, like the Home Secretary, avoided accountancy and went into law, which is probably just as well—that the Government are saying that they are giving extra money to the police, but that they are not giving Government money to the police. They are not providing the money they take from taxpayers to provide the rises. They are saying, "It's not coming out of our sums. We'll take it out of council money instead, and let council tax payers pay for it." They hope that local authorities will be blamed, although the burden will have been placed on local taxpayers because of the Government's decisions.

The hon. Member for Shoreham really must appreciate Ministers' sleight of hand, because there is no doubt that they think the public will believe that local councils are taking the money or that they hope councils will get the blame. The increased financial burden on local authorities, however, has an impact on crime and on the work of the police.

Labour-controlled local authorities want to do more, not less, on crime prevention and public protection. They want to do more, not less, on work with young people to cut youth crime. They want to do more, not less, in working with the police and the local community to cut local crime. However, those authorities are being provided not with more help but with an additional burden by the Government. I am sure that next week's announcement on local authority settlements in England and in Wales will show just how difficult the situation has become.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I hope that the hon. Gentleman will remind those Labour-controlled local authorities that the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) has made it clear that those spending plans cannot be changed.

Mr. Michael: Yes, indeed. The problems that the Government have given to local authorities are very considerable and clear. As we all realise, an incoming Government will inherit the problems created by the current Government.

Next week, we will hear more about the problems that the Government are offloading on to local government. As I said, the way in which the Government have dealt with police finances will make the situation worse, and they have still not managed to meet the challenge of creating a fair and transparent police funding formula that is dependable over the long term. Ministers recognise the problems posed by increasing pension burdens, but they have not solved them.

This year, the police will not experience a real, bottom-line increase in resources, and far less will they be able to provide for additional police officers. Even without that swingeing 14 per cent. increase in council tax precepts—which is an average, as I have made clear; the burden will be even higher in some places—the total increase is only £247 million, compared with local authorities' estimated cost of £371 million for pay increments, rising pension costs, pay and price increases and allowing for efficiency savings to fulfil the Prime Minister's promise.

As with the rest of the Government's approach to law and order, today's settlement fails to deliver what it promises. It fails the police; it shrugs financial responsibility from the Home Office to local authorities; and, above all, it continues with the Government's tradition of failing the public across England and Wales.

9.13 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I shall keep my speech brief, and plead the case of North Wales police. I should say that, against the background of a tight public spending round, the police settlement has been marginally higher than the settlements for some other services. There are problems, however, particularly in north Wales. Some of the points that I shall make are specific to that area, although some apply to all police forces.

The 3.2 per cent. overall budget increase—before funding for additional officers is provided—is sufficient to fund only the full-year effects of 1996-97 pay rises, in 1997-98, and forecast and pension rises, in 1997-98. That assumes that the police authority will agree to set the maximum precept.

There is insufficient to meet likely price increases in services, energy, fuel and consumables. To maintain current levels of operation, the North Wales police will be forced to fund significant savings from maintenance and support areas. Operational support demands are increasingly sophisticated and expensive. Several

[Mr. Elfyn Llwyd]

initiatives must be taken to improve the operational safety of officers and the effectiveness of procedures, and each requires a significant investment. They include provision of body armour, measures to improve the armed response to meet growing needs and provision for crime recording and management systems and for the continuing expense of communications. Those developments will have to stand still for the coming couple of years in the North Wales police area.

The reduction in the capital allocation for minor works, vehicles and equipment from £1.33 million to £1.076 million is placing an additional strain on the revenue budget and delaying important developments. Private finance initiative projects are being investigated, although, even if they are successful, they are unlikely to relieve pressure on the capital programme for the next financial year or two.

The damping procedure introduced as additional rule 1 is welcome, as otherwise the funding formula changes would have produced a further reduction in spending power in the North Wales police of about £1.5 million. There is real concern that the protection of additional rule 1 will be removed in the short to medium term. That would require a major reduction in the size of the police force and in its ability to provide the community with the level of policing they expect from provisions announced in the proposal and additional rule 2.

There is no doubt that there will be a reversal in the recent trend of recruiting some additional officers. Despite having recently achieved significant efficiency savings, including a major reduction in supervisory ranks, the force will be forced to consider further staff cuts as a result of the proposed settlement. There appears to be an assumption that a flatter management structure is required, although commanders and managers in the North Wales police are already spread too thinly.

An additional burden is the need to provide legal representation—this burden is unique to the North Wales police area—at the north Wales child abuse inquiry. There will be a cost of £1.6 million over two financial years. That is proving to be a major drain on resources, and in a year of negligible growth there is no option other than to reduce the capacity of services and to delay further some essential developments. The force's reserves of £1 million are, of course, insufficient to absorb anything other than a minor contribution.

The settlement allows for little real growth. The demand for police services and the expectations of the north Wales community are growing at a greater rate than resources are being applied. The announcement that the 1997-98 settlement includes funding for additional police officers has further heightened public expectations.

The reality is that the settlement barely provides for pay and price increases. In addition, the environment in which police officers work has a greater prospect for hostility and violence. Police officers must be given adequate protection. The additional cost of providing body armour, CS spray, the new batons and so on must be provided from the current, rather static budget. That will inevitably mean reduced services.

The growth in pensions, already referred to by the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle), is being provided at the expense of the operational budget; pensions are being paid from the settlement. The net cost of police pensions in north Wales is growing at 10 per cent. per annum. As the settlement has been capped at 3.9 per cent. for 1997-98, it has been necessary to reduce operational budgets by £500,000 to compensate. That equates to a reduction of 20 police officers. That situation should not be allowed to carry on indefinitely, or the service to the community will undoubtedly be eroded year on year. A fully funded police pension budget must be provided separately from the operational budget.

The use of a formula as a means of allocation to police forces within the overall police settlement is clearly not working adequately. The majority of forces are now given protection from reduced allocations because of the formula under rule 1. The amount of protection for the North Wales police under this rule for 1997-98 is £733,000. There can be no guarantee that that protection will continue in subsequent years. The formula needs a thorough review as a matter of great urgency. It impacts badly on the North Wales police, but I have no doubt that it impacts on every other police force as well.

In summary—I know that other hon. Members are anxious to speak—1997-98 will be a difficult year for the North Wales police, because of the restricted growth in the budget. The costs of the child inquiry compound that problem. The force has a firm commitment to improving front-line officer numbers and their efficiency and safety, but the necessary funds are not available. There is concern about the long-term consequences of funding changes, particularly if the damping provisions are removed too rapidly. Capital funding has reduced the force to below subsistence level.

This is an urgent call from a responsible, cost-effective police force. It has an excellent record which is second to none. The concerns are about maintaining that excellence. If the Government are serious about crime, they have a golden opportunity to assist the people of north Wales, and my constituency in particular. I hope that they will talk to representatives of the police authority over the coming weeks and that these real concerns will be met with proper, detailed and responsible action on behalf of the people of north Wales.

9.20 pm

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): I am glad to follow the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd). I was also pleased to hear the cogent and well-informed speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael).

The not inconsiderable sum of £35,695,797 has been granted to the North Wales police authority. The formula used by the Government to calculate that sum is quite algebraic. Some of the headings include residents in lone parent families, total unemployment figures, long-term unemployment figures and young male unemployment figures, as well as a reference to sparsity. All those factors are good reasons why the North Wales police authority should have a substantial Government grant.

I should like to emphasise strongly that the North Wales police authority has a particular problem currently—the public inquiry on child abuse in north Wales being chaired by Judge Ronald Waterhouse QC. The inquiry is due to continue for more than a year. It is putting serious pressure on the North Wales police authority—so much so that I fear that, if the authority

has to find the substantial sums needed to cope with the challenge of that inquiry, operational provision may be reduced and the financial embarrassment of the police force will be considerable. I make my special plea to the Minister to ask her Department to think again about how it can help the North Wales police authority with the inquiry, which places a heavy burden on it.

I pay my own tribute to the police authority. It is a good authority—its leadership is good and its officers are good. From my experience as a constituency member, there is no doubt in my mind that the force wishes to help the people whom it has the duty to serve. I shall be the first to say that, as a Member of Parliament, I get a good service from it.

North Wales is a far-flung area, stretching from Aberdovey in the south-west to Prestatyn in the north-east, and from Holyhead to Saltney in my constituency. That is a large tract of land. In it there is mountainous and estuarial terrain. There are deeply rural as well as urban areas, and a bilingual police force is required. There are great pressures on budgets, and chief constables and other senior police officers are examining extremely carefully how they might continue the services that they provide—they cannot increase them—given the proposed grant and the fact that the child abuse inquiry will continue for longer than a year.

There have recently been closures of police stations in my constituency, such as those in the villages of Broughton, Sandycroft and Caergwrle. Those communities have been deprived of the direct assistance of their police station. As a consequence, I have received representations from town and community councils as well as from voluntary organisations and pensioner associations on Deeside.

It would be churlish, however, not to say that the recently formed community police stations are making a good stab at providing a comprehensive service to my constituents on Deeside and in Buckley, but there is anxiety, and some resentment, in the villages that have been deprived of police stations. I have not been able to assuage those responses to the closures.

My constituents believe that there should be more uniformed officers—more than now appear—who should be seen more regularly. We are, however, grateful in my constituency for what we have in the urban area of Deeside and the township of Buckley. We want to see more uniformed officers in the housing estates and in shopping areas. Without doubt, there is growing anxiety among the communities that I represent. That anxiety reflects the crimes that are committed. There are worries especially among young mothers and those who would describe themselves as retired and drawing pensions.

There is an increasing and comprehensive problem. No village is unaffected by drug and substance abuse. That is a worrying development, and it is arguably a problem throughout the nation. There is much anti-social behaviour in my constituency, involving neighbours on most of the estates. There is increasing vandalism, break-ins are regular and youngsters are often more than disrespectful to pensioners. Pensioners complain to me of foul-mouthed abuse from youths and even from young children. Burglaries are increasing and there is a fair incidence of violent crime. Only last year, in the township of Shotton, there was an armed bank robbery. There was a successful outcome to the case, but I wish to respond to the anxiety in my communities and in others.

If there is to be less anxiety and more successful crime protection, I urge the Government further to consider their employment policies. If more real jobs were available to school leavers—if young people had the guarantee of access to real jobs that would pay a living wage rather than temporary jobs—I have no doubt that there would be less crime. The Government should tackle the problems of long-term and youth unemployment with more determination. They need more realistic policies on training and should provide better investment for education, which would lead to less crime by young people.

I have spoken of a climate of fear and anxiety, which can be tackled only by more visible policing and fairer funding for police authorities, not least the excellent North Wales police authority.

9.30 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The settlement will not meet the known needs of the police service. The increase in the total standard spending assessment is £220 million, but the local authority associations estimate that the inescapable costs of the continuing employment of existing police officers and staff mean that the increase needed is higher—at least £250 million. That would not allow for the pressures on the police that require additional expenditure, including the cost of the DNA database, the increased workload and the demand for more closed circuit television, which can be a valuable crime-fighting resource.

We have recently heard absurd reports that tens of thousands of speeding motorists are escaping prosecution because the police cannot afford to put film in roadside cameras. The Association of Chief Police Officers has also made that point—and the cost of pursuing the cases presents a further deterrent. Some £40 million of the grant is the next instalment of the extra money that is supposed to provide an extra 5,000 police officers. In many forces, no extra officers will be provided because of the other pressures on police budgets.

As has been said, the effect of the settlement will be a shift in the source of the money to fund the police from the Government to council tax payers. The Government's funding increase averages just over 2 per cent., which is well below the 3.2 per cent. maximum increase in police authority budgets permitted under the capping rules. The intention is to make the Government look good at the expense of local authorities. That is demonstrated by the way in which the Government gloss over the point in their press releases. For example, Dorset police intend to spend at capping level in the coming year, and expenditure will therefore rise by about 3.2 per cent. The result for the council tax payer will be an increase of around 10 per cent. in what they paid towards the police last year. Each council tax payer will pay £63—an increase of more than £5.50 on last year—and the Government should make that clear. Government statements about finances should be explicit and honest, but perhaps that is asking too much.

There is a further reason why the additional funding will not result in the total number of extra officers that the Government have promised. They estimate that every extra police officer costs £20,000: the cost is nearer £23,000. Even if all the additional grant could be used for extra officers, it would provide only an extra 2,600 police officers. In Warwickshire, the cuts of £6 million for the

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

1995-96 financial year are still being felt—59 fewer officers since 1992—and the police authority has been unable to replace retiring officers since it was formed in 1995.

Hampshire police are determined to recruit more police officers. Last year that meant that they more than reached the Government's target for extra police officers. This year, however, medium-term financial insecurity means that they will be unable to recruit extra officers. Some £2.8 million of Hampshire's money will be spent on pensions, and the authority will also be seriously affected by the cuts in capital expenditure. Nationally, pensions now amount to an eighth of police spending. The grant, which will have an uneven impact, will present severe budget problems for many police authorities. I am glad that the Minister recognised that, and I hope that she will continue to work on that troublesome aspect of budgeting in the police service.

Capital grants and credit approvals will be cut by £20 million, which represents a 10.4 per cent. decrease—following the 11 per cent. reduction in the current year. That can have a serious effect on revenue budgets because it prevents beneficial efficiency savings and the police authorities' maintaining their capital infrastructure to improve efficiency and enable police officers to deliver an effective service to the public.

In this year's formula, we have not only rule 1 but rule 3—a new feature of the funding formula. The additional rules work against the claim that the settlement takes full account of objectively assessed needs in each police area. Rule 3 has a quite different effect. Northumbria police lose £3 million as a result of the application of rules 1 and 3. That represents a lot of police officers, equipment and crime fighting. If the Home Secretary believes that there is a problem with the formula, he should alter it on an objective basis, not fiddle around with it or manipulate it at will. The formula will have a very significant effect on council tax. It looks as if the Home Secretary can devise additional rules so as to smile on one police authority and frown on another.

The outlook for police funding is very bleak because the drift of Government policy is to shift expenditure on to prisons. Not only does overcrowding call for the building of a series of new prisons, which the Government have accepted, but the Crime (Sentences) Bill will require a further 12 prisons. All such expenditure is likely to be at the expense of other Home Office services, including the police. Although it is very unlikely indeed that present Ministers will be in power in years to come, we are contemplating a rapid decline in police funding.

Ministers make much of the possibilities of using private finance. We may use the private finance initiative for police stations or have sponsored police cars with the sponsor's logo on the side. All that is of course beneath the dignity of the Queen's yacht, but it is not supposed to be beneath the dignity of the keeper of the Queen's peace. The Government have yet to develop a consistent attitude to what areas of public service are appropriate either for the PFI or, even more important, for sponsorship, which they regard as acceptable in the police service. Sponsorship especially presents potential dangers.

The reality for those of us who are especially concerned to see more police officers on the beat is that their number fell by almost 1,000 between 1992 and 1996. Whatever the Government can inject in an attempt to recover lost ground does not detract from the fact that they did not deliver what they promised in 1992 and will not be able to deliver the reality of the Prime Minister's promise.

Such a point was vividly brought out and carefully documented by the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael)—all the research and information was apparent. It took a number of interventions to underline the fact that his speech was, however, misleading, in that the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) has made it clear that, under Labour, nothing will be any different; nothing will change. He has taken the view, on wider grounds, that there can be no change in Government spending plans. I am afraid that the implication of speeches that constantly attack the insufficiency of resources must be that more resources will be found from somewhere. That has been the drift of the speeches of the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth, but Labour cannot go on getting away with that.

Mr. Michael: I suppose that the right hon. Gentleman will go on to make his own party's spending commitments for the police and other things. I simply do not accept that nothing will change. The amount of money available will certainly not change, but what will change under a Labour Government is, first, honesty about how we deal with such matters, and secondly, the priorities of tackling the problems of crime that have been exacerbated by the Government's policies—visibly, considering the mountain of crime that has been created since they came to power. Those two changes will make a great deal of difference.

Mr. Beith: I should be delighted if the hon. Gentleman or, indeed, any member of any party in any future Government was able to meet the first of those commitments, and Government press releases honestly stated what was happening. That is a very desirable objective, which I entirely endorse. Changing priorities require the placing of additional resources in particular areas, some of which the hon. Gentleman mentioned. It would make a great deal of difference to fighting crime, especially youth crime, if we spent more money on education, as I am sure he agrees. That is another area in which the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East has made it clear that no more money can be committed.

Mr. Michael: Education is one of Labour's five specific commitments. Another is to provide jobs and opportunities for young people in the 18 to 25 age group. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that that would make a significant contribution to the environment in which—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. We are getting rather wide of the debate.

Mr. Beith: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The drift of speeches that say that there are insufficient resources for the police must be a preparedness to commit more resources to them. In pursuit of the hon. Gentleman's policy of honesty about statements on public finance, he should say that Labour could not find any more money, so the only improvements that it could achieve would be in spending existing money in different ways. That involves pretty uncomfortable resource decisions.

The Liberal Democrats have made a specific commitment to finding the money that would be required to recruit a further 1,000 police officers. I do not claim that we can solve all the other problems that have been identified in speeches tonight. Unless some extra resources are delivered to the police, the promises made by both the other parties will not be fulfilled.

The diversion of resources from the police into the prison system, which I criticised as part of the drift of Government policy, also applies to the Labour party, which has supported much of the legislation that would bring it about.

Miss Widdecombe: The right hon. Gentleman has honestly said that he would increase the number of police officers even further, and has acknowledged that that would have resource implications. Has he calculated how great those implications would be, and how does he intend to raise the money?

Mr. Beith: We would need about £100 million, and every one of our Budget presentations in the past two years has set out ways in which we would fund it. The commitment is specific, and in the run-up to the election we will do the costings again and demonstrate precisely how it would be done. It is not an enormous commitment, but we think that it is cost-effective and addresses the need sensed by the public to have more police officers available in communities, to deter crime and restore confidence, and not to do so in such a way that they are constantly being recalled into other parts of the hard-pressed police service.

In many a force, the efforts at community policing are constantly undermined by the desperate need to withdraw officers for other duties. We need a more settled system of community policing than that, and we have made a commitment to ensure that that is achieved.

9.41 pm

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): The people of Merseyside are deeply worried about the way in which the new system of police grant allocation has adversely affected their area. The Minister will be well aware of that, as many representations were made in the past financial year about the problems facing the area in the transition from the old to the new system.

Merseyside has in the past two years suffered a significant reduction—more than 400—in the number of officers that it can employ, despite the fact that the precept paid by local people has risen 50 per cent. in the past three years. Taking account of the settlement that the Minister announced tonight, which assumes a 16.9 per cent. increase for the financial year 1997-98, Merseyside council tax payers—the people of Wirral, as well as the four other local authorities—will be paying the third largest precept in the country.

It is the fastest rising precept in the country—because of the particular problems of Merseyside police, of which the Minister will be well aware. Some are technical and concern the way in which pensions are funded; others concern the decline in population that Merseyside has experienced pretty consistently over the past 20 years, without experiencing any decrease in crime. There has been a 41 per cent. increase in crime in the area since 1979.

Many people will be aware of the difficulties faced by the chief constable in the Liverpool area over the past couple of years. There has been a substantial increase in drug and gang-related crime, and an alarming increase in the use of firearms. Figures from the House of Commons Library show that crime in the Merseyside area is 8 per cent. higher than the national average. The increase in violent crime is 33 per cent. above the national average. The nature of that crime—drug-related, gangland-related and drug wars, with people gunned down in the street—requires a particular response, which is expensive of resources if law and order is properly to be kept.

The high level of crime has a particularly difficult effect on other, perhaps quieter areas of the Merseyside region, such as mine on the Wirral peninsula. Officers who are an increasingly scarce resource are drafted over the river to help with incidents and emergencies. I shall give one example of how the loss of more than 400 officers in the past two years has affected the situation on the ground. A constituent who contacted me recently had been awakened one night by banging on her front door. She went out and realised that a young woman was being attacked and had fled to the front of her house for help. She got the woman inside to safety and called the police. She had a hysterical woman who had been subjected to a nasty physical assault on her hands. It took the police 45 minutes to respond, not because they wanted to take 45 minutes to respond to emergency calls, but simply because they did not have the officers.

I contacted a local superintendent about that incident. He revealed to me that, in Wallasey, the staffing level on the night shift was two sergeants and 15 constables. If there is a serious incident somewhere else in the Merseyside area, those police officers are diverted there. That leaves local commanders little ability to respond to incidents in my constituency and areas such as Wirral, South where people have particular difficulties. My constituents and the people of the Wirral are worried that, under the Government's funding formula, they are being asked to pay a greater share of the cost of their police force through the council tax, but less money is directed to put officers on the beat to protect them. They are paying a great deal more and getting less cover for it.

As I am concerned about crime as an issue, I conducted a crime survey in my constituency. Another has been conducted in Wirral, South. The response was interesting. It demonstrated what people at the receiving end of the announcements that the Minister made in the House tonight think about the service that they receive.

My survey was of more than 600 people, so it was a reasonable size. Of the respondents, 71 per cent. felt vulnerable all or some of the time in public places. In Wirral, South the figure was 53 per cent. In Wallasey, 37 per cent. felt vulnerable in their own homes. Interestingly, the figure for Wirral was 42 per cent.—more people there felt vulnerable in their own home. In Wallasey, 30 per cent. of respondents said that they had been a victim of crime in the past two years and 83 per cent. had reported those crimes to the police. In Wirral, South, 49 per cent. of people had been a victim of crime in the past two years. In my constituency, just 8 per cent. of the victims were aware that an arrest had been made for the crimes committed against them. In Wirral, South the figure was much lower—only 5 per cent.

People realise that crime is increasing—they are increasingly victims of it. They also know that detection rates are falling and that they are expected to pay more in

[Ms Angela Eagle]

council tax for a police service that is less and less likely to be able to provide the number of officers necessary for their safety.

The overwhelming view of the people in both Wirral, South and Wallasey who responded to the surveys was that they wanted more police on the beat as a way of deterring the pettier forms of crime and to reassure them that there is a reasonable degree of law and order in their community. During the past two years, the result of the Conservative party's funding of the police service in Merseyside has been that, although people have wanted more police on the beat and paid more for them, they have actually had fewer.

What is expected to happen up to 2000 as a result of the progressive introduction of the new police funding formula, which the Minister's statement introduces for another year, is an additional loss of more than 200 police officers, and some support staff going as well. Those figures are not made up—they come directly from the chief constable's forward budget plans. Because of the injustices to the Merseyside police force inherent in the settlement, we are to expect a loss of revenue of £16 million by 2000-01. My constituents find it hard to understand why they must pay more but get less; and why, as crime levels rise, as levels of violent crime rise, and as people's fear of crime rises, our ability to respond to it, to reassure them and to stamp it out is falling.

That does not sit well with much of the Conservative party's rhetoric about crime, and it is on that record that they will be judged in the coming election and by-election. I want the Minister to give assurances that she will examine the particular problems facing Merseyside because of the way in which the funding formula has been introduced and because we have particular disadvantages resulting from the structure of the force that we had, which the funding formula fails to recognise. Of course we welcome the acknowledgement of the problems with funding pensions, but there are other difficulties, such as higher levels of violent crime and crimes that are difficult to solve, labour intensive and require immediate responses from officers on the ground, thus drawing them away from other places.

The people of Merseyside will judge the Government on how they listen to the problems of funding Merseyside police that I am outlining tonight when they come to decide how serious the Conservative party is about doing the best it can to obviate the huge increases in crime over which it has presided during its many years in office.

9.52 pm

Miss Widdecombe: I should have liked to say that this has been an interesting debate, but what has been most interesting is that it has exposed the utter sham of Labour's policy. Labour Members have spent the entire debate criticising resources, yet, as the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) rightly pointed out, at the same time they admit that they would not make any extra money available.

Mr. Michael: The whole purpose of our remarks has been to expose the fact that the Government are pretending that they are providing resources to the police, but that they have not provided resources to the police, are not providing resources to the police and are not providing the increased police numbers promised by the Prime Minister. They are failing.

Miss Widdecombe: It is a fact of life that we now have 16,000 more officers than we had when the Labour party was in power. It is a fact of life that the Labour party, which criticises us for the resources we provide but which does not promise any more, in the last two years of its last term of office—which, I am sure, the entire nation remembers with horror—decreased spending on the police in real terms, first, by 5.5 per cent. and then by an additional 0.5 per cent. We need no lessons from the Labour party on resourcing the police.

Labour Members say, "It is unfair that the council tax payer is bearing some of the burden," but central Government bear between 80 and 85 per cent. Do we assume that the council tax payer would pay less towards the police in the highly unlikely event that there was ever a Labour Government?

Mr. Michael: The hon. Lady is back in opposition mode, asking questions. I said that the Home Secretary has pretended to provide resources to the police but has not done so. He is providing an increase to the police that does not keep pace with inflation. He is making local authorities find the money for the police. Does she not understand the figures that she is speaking to?

Miss Widdecombe: I fully understand the figures, but we do not appear to have heard, amidst the large amount of criticism, a clear statement of what the Labour party would do. We have no idea whether the council tax payer would pay less under Labour. *[Interruption.]* The problem with the Opposition is that they are deluding themselves that they will soon be sitting on the Government Benches, so they are afraid of putting flesh on the bones of what they say, but they cannot quite get out of the habit. They tell the people of Britain that we are not resourcing the police properly when they will not commit themselves to paying a penny more than us.

There have been many calls for this debate to be fairly reflected elsewhere. I hope that that point is made repeatedly, because it is high time that the people of Britain sussed out the con trick that Labour Members are playing.

Mr. Michael: The con trick is the one that the hon. Lady is trying to play on the people of the country. The con trick, to use her term, is a Prime Minister who promises 1,000 extra police officers and does not deliver—who promises 5,000 extra police officers and does not provide the resources. That is the con trick that the Government are trying to play on the people of the country. It is a disgrace, and they have been nailed in the debate tonight.

Miss Widdecombe: Far short of being nailed, I demonstrated clearly that we did provide the extra funding. I showed that the number of officers increased by 845 or so in that year. The trouble is that the hon. Gentleman, wanting to complain about resources but being unable to promise extra resources, not knowing

which other way to turn, simply flatly denies every fact that I give him but has no evidence to back up what he says.

Mr. Michael *rose—*

Miss Widdecombe: I have heard enough nonsense. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I do not like nonsense, because I like sense to be talked in the House. The hon. Gentleman is right that I do not like the nonsense that he talks, and I do not intend to listen to much more of it tonight.

Mr. Michael *rose—*

Miss Widdecombe: I will not give way this time, but I may later. I want to make progress.

Mr. Michael: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it appropriate for the hon. Lady to refer to Home Office figures for which she is responsible as "nonsense"?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister is responsible for her own speech, as the hon. Gentleman well knows.

Miss Widdecombe: The trouble is that the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) cannot understand what he is being told. The nonsense that I was referring to was that which is being talked by the Opposition tonight, not by the Government.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth had the gall to say that violent crime was up. If Labour is so worried about violent crime, why did its Members abstain on the Crime (Sentences) Bill only a couple of weeks ago? Why did they vote against increasing penalties for taking a gun to the scene of a crime? If they are so worried about violent crime, given that much of it is drugs related, why did not they support the Bill's provisions on mandatory sentences for those peddling drugs?

Mr. Michael: The hon. Lady is asking questions again. Why was there nothing about crime, violence or guns in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, which was supposed to be a landmark Act, until Labour moved amendments to it? She is wrong. We have set the agenda on these issues. The Government have repeatedly voted down Labour proposals to deal with violent crime and these issues. The Minister just repeats the mantra, and she is wrong.

Miss Widdecombe: The Labour agenda on crime is to say one thing and vote in the Lobby for something quite different. The only difference this time is that, instead of voting with their feet, Labour Members sat on their hands. They could not even make up their minds what they wanted to do. The hon. Gentleman knows that his party is all talk and no do when the time comes to deliver on the measures.

A number of interesting remarks were made in the debate, including several about Merseyside. Some of those were also made by the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth, and I answered them. Other interesting comments related to north Wales. It was pointed out that there is already a substantial increase in resources for north Wales. I take the point about the problem of the child abuse inquiry, but it is open to the North Wales police to apply to the Home Office if extra expenditure is incurred. That serious matter was raised by the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones). Further serious points were raised by the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd), who has apologised for not being able to be present for the rest of the debate.

I have heard nothing from the Opposition tonight that convinces me that they even understand the figures or the problems of crime, or that they have the will to do anything about it. Everything that Labour Front Benchers have said tonight, with the exception of one or two detailed points made by hon. Members behind the Front Bench, has been geared to one message: we do not like what the Government are doing, but we will do the same ourselves, although we will not vote that way in the meantime because we cannot make up our minds. Their approach is a shambles and a sham.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Police Grant Report (England and Wales) 1997–98 (HC 208), which was laid before this House on 27th January, be approved.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): With permission, I shall put together the following two motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

LEGAL PROFESSION

That the draft Executry Practitioners (Scotland) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 13th January, be approved.

That the draft Independent Qualified Conveyancers (Scotland) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 13th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Carrington.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

INDUSTRIAL ORGANISATION AND DEVELOPMENT

That the draft Potato Industry Development Council Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 13th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Carrington.]*

Question agreed to.

POLICE (PROPERTY) BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Police (Property) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the provisions of the Act in the sums which under any other enactment are paid out of money so provided.—*[Mr. Carrington.]*

PETITION

Bridges (River Calder)

10.2 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): I am grateful for the opportunity to present to the House a petition on behalf of Sharon Jackson of Thornhill Lees in Dewsbury and 1,700 other constituents of mine. The petition has been organised—very bravely—by Sharon Jackson, following the tragic death of her eight-year-old son David, who fell to his death from a local bridge over the River Calder.

We all sympathise with David's family and recognise the need to protect other families in Dewsbury from any unnecessary hardship or suffering of a similar nature. The purpose of the petition is to help to ensure that such accidents do not happen again. The petition declares:

That people in Dewsbury are concerned about the safety of bridges crossing the River Calder and that an eight-year-old boy, David Jackson, fell from one such bridge to his death in April 1994.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons request that the relevant Government Department ensures that the bridge is made safe or demolished, in order to prevent any further fatalities.

To lie upon the Table.

Public Services (East Midlands)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Carrington.]*

10.3 pm

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): The strongest argument for an east midlands regional assembly is the way in which the outgoing Tory Government have mistreated and neglected our region, its cities and its counties of Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Derbyshire and Northamptonshire. The only good thing about such a catastrophic failure of central Government is that it speeds the creation of more democratic and accountable forms of government which are familiar in most western democracies, including an east midlands regional assembly and more effective and independent local government.

Already the Yorkshire and Humberside region has set up an assembly, and all the local councils in the region have signed up and paid their subscriptions. Well ahead of legislation, one region is ready to go, and there may be others. Local councils in the east midlands should take heed and get their collective act together in the 13 weeks that remain before a change of Government.

I am delighted to see my hon. Friends the Members for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping), for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) and for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) in the Chamber. Several of my other colleagues may join the debate later. Shortly before Christmas, east midlands Members of Parliament from all parties met a delegation comprising council leaders of all political persuasions and regional Confederation of British Industry and chamber of commerce representatives. They were lobbying, on behalf of the east midlands, for what they called their "missing millions". Their case is incontrovertible: by any measure, the east midlands is not getting its slice of the cake.

We get less than our fair share of Government grants, of lottery schemes, hospital expenditure, and transport, housing, the arts and European funding. It makes a grand total of £700 million—which is a lot of missing money. The people of the east midlands are council tax payers and income tax payers, and we are entitled to our fair share of the pie—we do not want more than that—but we are clearly not getting it at the moment. That is partly because we do not speak with one voice on behalf of our region in the way that the north-east or the south-west do—and good luck to them. Our own regional assembly would be a step in the right direction.

I have called this Adjournment debate on behalf of the east midlands region, which has seen its public services squeezed and real opportunities for regional development lost as a result of Government underfunding. There are three key problems. First, local government in the east midlands has not received its fair share of the pie; secondly, local health services have suffered from disproportionate underfunding by the Government—a point that my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell) has made many times—and, thirdly, the region has received an under-allocation of lottery grants.

The past 20 years have seen a major decline in many of the east midlands' traditional industries. The Government decimated the coal industry—particularly in my county of

Nottinghamshire—and the steel industry, affecting Corby most obviously. Rail manufacturing was affected, thereby undermining the industrial base of Derby and Derbyshire. The textile and footwear industries through Northamptonshire to Mansfield and the engineering industry throughout the whole region have declined. What economic growth we gave seen has occurred largely in the service sector.

Against that background, we can see how important it is for local councils to provide quality services in order to combat deprivation and rebuild our economic base. However, failure to be given our fair share of Government grants, the Government's nationalisation of the business rate and restrictions on the spending of capital receipts have had serious consequences for the properly democratically elected local councils in our region.

Since 1991, the east midlands has fallen 5 per cent. behind the average standard spending assessments of the shire counties. That amounts to a Government fine of £94.4 million on taxpayers in our region. Will the Minister explain why that has occurred? In 1996-97, the region will receive £126 per head less than the English average standard spending assessment. Given Conservative capping policies, that money cannot be made good elsewhere. Will the Minister tell the people of Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Derbyshire, Northamptonshire and Lincolnshire why that is so?

Basic credit approvals available to east midlands councils have declined in the past four years in terms of moneys raised and percentages available. Hinckley, Bosworth, Daventry, and Wellingborough have received no basic credit approvals since 1992-93. That is also an acute problem in Northamptonshire and in many other parts of our region. Will the Minister tell those hard-pressed councils and their taxpayers why that is so?

A comparison of regional funding generated by the regional development offices shows that, while the East Midlands Development Company generates almost as much funding as other major RDOs, it receives considerably less grant from central Government. That point has been made by my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale), who is in the Chamber tonight. The Minister may smirk: only those boroughs that benefit from this perverse system, such as Westminster and Wandsworth—which is the Minister's former London borough—could smirk. If my city of Nottingham received the same grant as Westminster, not only would it not send out a demand for council tax, but it could send every council tax payer a cheque for £719. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) told me that council tax payers in his constituency would receive a cheque for more than £800. The same applies to Amber Valley, Erewash, Luton, South and Brigg and Cleethorpes, which are Conservative marginals.

I suspect that electors in those area, who subsidise the Government's policy and whose Members of Parliament voted for it, will watch carefully the events in the Chamber on Monday when we discuss the local government settlement for England and Wales. They will want to know which Lobby their Members of Parliament go through, and whether they vote to continue the imposition of the fine on people who live in those constituencies. If it is not a fair and equal deal for all people, it is not the way in which a British Government should behave.

Another area of discontent is the current system of national lottery grant allocation, which has worked to the detriment of the east midlands. It receives a derisory 2.8 per cent. of the total. Despite the welcome recent announcement about the Nottingham ice stadium, the region remains severely underfunded. Why should we have to beg for fair shares? Funding should be ours as of right. What a travesty it is that for every £100 of lottery tickets bought by people in the Tory marginals of Derby, North, Lincoln, Milton Keynes, South-West or Corby, only £25 comes back to them in lottery projects, whereas in Wandsworth, Westminster and other parts of London, £75 of every £100-worth of lottery ticket money goes back to the region.

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): Is my hon. Friend aware that no one knows how some of the people on the lottery boards got there? Some of them are place people, who are full-time local authority officials. Hardly any of them have been elected. They make some very wild decisions. If politicians made such decisions, they would be derided by the press on the front pages of local newspapers.

Mr. Allen: That is probably one of the reasons why, of more than 1,000 projects agreed by the Millennium Commission, only five have come to the east midlands. There is very little local and regional input.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Will my hon. Friend confirm that the east midlands receives only 0.68 per cent of funds for millennium projects? There are adventurous projects, such as the landmark projects that will do up miners' welfares, the project to recreate the Sherwood forest and the project to get the Grantham canal back into operation. There are good, prestigious projects that will bring new investment and new life to the east midlands. We should ask for an undertaking that those projects will take place to bring a new future in the 21st century.

Mr. Allen: I agree with my hon. Friend. We must reorient the way in which some of these funds are spent so that people throughout the land feel that they are getting a fair crack of the whip. Local people have a greater affinity with some of the important but smaller projects. People do not like the grandiose projects that take place more than a train journey away from where they live. Regional priorities should be better reflected in funding decisions. Lottery boards should have a regional infrastructure and tougher ministerial guidance.

The east midlands is also the poor relation on health. Not one district health authority in our region is in the top third of the funding table. Leicestershire and Nottingham health authorities languish at the bottom of the table, in 87th and 86th place respectively.

Mr. John Heppell (Nottingham, East): Is my hon. Friend aware of the stage that the crisis in the health service has now reached, at least in the Nottingham area? For nearly six months of the year, many of my constituents—along with those of my hon. Friend and other hon. Members who are present—have only an emergency service available. All routine operations are cancelled.

Mr. Allen: Thanks to the campaigning of, in particular, my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East, but also that of other hon. Members in the Nottingham area, even the Secretary of State had to admit in February that health services in Nottingham were underfunded by about £9 million, and were receiving considerably less than the Government's own figures demanded to meet the needs of Nottingham people. As my hon. Friend rightly pointed out, that has led to the postponement of so-called routine, non-emergency operations in our community medical centre in Nottingham for the remainder of the financial year. The Government must propose a way of ending the shortfall.

Again, we are not asking for money that people say we should not receive; we are asking for money that, according to the Government's own figures, local hospitals should receive. I am sure that my hon. Friends who are present could repeat that story throughout the region. Chesterfield and North Derbyshire Royal hospital has suffered a cut of £1.1 million from a budget of £59 million; two and a half wards and two operating theatres have been closed, and capital schemes have been deferred. Behind those statistics are real cases: real people need treatment, and are not receiving it.

It is possible to give similar examples in all policy areas—transport, European funds and education, which I know concerns certain hon. Members.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): In 1989, Derbyshire had a proud record of having generally smaller class sizes than any other shire county. In primary education, it was in second position, just behind Nottinghamshire. Now, it has larger class sizes than any other shire county. The same group of politicians are attempting to operate the same policies, but there is an external factor: the way in which the Government make the standard spending assessment.

Mr. Allen: I entirely agree. As I have said, the story is repeated in every area of policy. All the Opposition Members who are present have suffered from the nonsense of Government intervention in our region in regard to European funds—the RECHAR money, and the urban initiatives. No Government involvement is actually necessary, but they are blocking real money, particularly money for the former coal mining areas that were decimated by the Government's policies in the 1980s. The regional allocation of challenge funds with no clear rules for their sub-regional allocation leads to serious anomalies between places such as Nottingham and Sheffield, purely because they are covered by different Government regional offices.

This can only exacerbate the divisions and deprivations that exist in many areas. The sooner the faceless bureaucracy of Government regional offices that has been imposed on the regions by the Conservatives is brought under democratic control, the better. In a modern democracy, it is no longer acceptable for my region—and all the others—to be treated by London like some imperial outpost. It is government by a district officer appointed by Whitehall. It only needs a donkey and a fly swat to complete the picture of the Raj ruling in our region.

That is not acceptable in this day and age. Funding regimes should ensure that bids are not ruled out by virtue of regional allocation formulae based on criteria that are not open to public scrutiny and debate, or by a relatively low number of high-profile bids receiving a disproportionate amount of money, with the result that high-quality smaller bids are rejected. I could deal with many other aspects, such as city challenge and the regeneration budget, but I must leave the Minister some time in which to reply. I have allowed a number of my hon. Friends to intervene.

I have been careful to be modest: I have asked only for a fair allocation of existing resources, rather than suggesting that there should be a bigger pot in any one area. It is possible to present a case for the east midlands to receive more than its fair share, as the typical east midlands income is 11 per cent. below the average, and the average wage in every one of its counties is below the national average, but my argument, like that of east midlands local authority leaders, the regional Confederation of British Industry, the chamber of commerce in the east midlands and trade unions in the east midlands, has been not for more expenditure globally or throughout the United Kingdom, but just that we should receive our fair share. That is modest and I hope that the Government will respond to it.

Labour Members hope that, even at this late stage, the Government will admit that there is a problem, that it has devastating consequences for people in our region, and that it must be put right now or after the general election.

10.19 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): We talk about capping and this debate has capped an intriguing month. This month, we have been told by the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) that global expenditure will be kept down and that personal taxation will remain fixed—if we ever had the misfortune of a Labour Government—and the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration and I met between 80 and 100 local authorities. They sang the same tune. They were almost all Labour. A few were Liberal, but they seemed to be under the same banner.

We also met local authority associations, which came up with the same tune as we have been hearing this evening. They all wanted more money in the form of the standard spending assessment—more from central taxation. They wanted capping to be lifted so that, through the council tax, they could soak local people for more money. Most of them wanted the business rate to be put back in their hands so that they could set it and take it. They also wanted compulsory competitive tendering, which is a means of obtaining value for money, to be removed. All that is a claim for more taxes, more public expenditure and more money.

The other point that is worth thinking about was made by the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen): the old yarn over Westminster. That caused concern because he obviously does not understand the SSA system. He does not understand that it has been carefully worked out and that it has been recognised by independent experts as the best way for such a distribution. Of course the Labour Front-Bench environment team does not recognise experts.

There is a failure to recognise Westminster's needs. May I touch on some that are not found in the same proportion in the east midlands? Westminster has a higher proportion of people in shared or non-permanent accommodation than Hackney, Lambeth, Southwark or Tower Hamlets. Westminster has a higher proportion of people living in overcrowded accommodation than Islington, Lambeth, Southwark or anywhere in the east midlands. Westminster has a higher proportion of people born outside the European Community, the old Commonwealth or the United States of America than Hackney, Lambeth, Southwark or Tower Hamlets.

It is clear that the Government's correct intention is that the overall and fundamental aim is to reduce public sector borrowing. Despite that, they have managed to increase next year's expenditure provision to local authorities overall by 2.5 per cent.

This year, east midlands authorities will receive some £3 billion of taxpayers' money through the SSA. In addition, we have recognised the pressure on the national health service. Year in year out, extra money has gone in. I understand that North Derbyshire health authority recently issued a press statement saying that it received over £2.9 million more than it expected, and Nottingham health authority also received a larger budget than it expected.

Mr. Tipping: Will the Minister give way?

Sir Paul Beresford: I am afraid not. I have seven or eight minutes left. There is a lot to say, as much is happening in the region.

Every year, the Government regularly discuss possible changes to the method of the standard spending assessment with local authority associations and general agreement is reached. All the information is up to date. It is all available to the authorities, which take the opportunity during the consultation to put forward points. Although the Government make their commitment to local services through the SSA system, they are prepared to change it where good cause is shown. We expect local authorities to spend locally raised and Government resources wisely and well.

It was intriguing last week to see some local authority representatives trooping in and telling appalling mismanagement stories. Northampton is but one example. It expects the Government to provide funding of £1 million a year for loss of rent on a council-owned building. Some years ago, when the building had a tenant, the council was advised by its treasurer to sell it, but it refused. It is suffering from its own inefficiency, and expects the Government to bale it out.

Local authorities present shopping lists, and they are only that. They must recognise that this is 1997, not 1947, and that we need to think forward about different ways of operating. Public services today and tomorrow will depend more and more on private sector delivery. At the very least, local authorities should be looking towards using competitive tendering and the private finance initiative. The east midlands has received enormous and comprehensive support.

Mr. Tipping: Will the Minister give way?

Sir Paul Beresford: No. I have just a few minutes left and I have plenty to say.

Under capital challenge, 20 authorities in the east midlands have been successful and between them they will receive £42 million over the next three years. I give credit to the Under–Secretary of State for Social Security, my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell). As sponsoring Minister, he helped to support and promote the area's cause.

Mr. Tipping: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): I hope that in such a short debate it is a genuine point of order.

Mr. Tipping: The Minister mentioned the Under–Secretary of State for Social Security. Did the Minister give his hon. Friend notice that he would mention him? I draw to your attention the fact that there is not one Tory Member from the east midlands in the—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. As I feared, that was not a point of order.

Sir Paul Beresford: I did give my hon. Friend notice.

There is no doubt about the benefits of competition and partnership. They are the way forward, because they form the right approach and have helped the east midlands. City challenge has given each of the cities of Nottingham, Derby and Leicester Government support of £37.5 million to revive parts of their urban areas. That Government contribution is expected to lever in £413 million from the private sector and £150 million from elsewhere.

Under the single regeneration budget, 40 partnerships in all five counties in the east midlands will receive £142 million between them, and that will attract £320 million from the private sector. There is no doubt that communities in the east midlands have come out of the competitive process well. National lottery funds were mentioned. The hon. Member for Nottingham, North failed to recognise that those are not distributed geographically. They have to be applied for, and applications are judged on their merits rather than on their geographical origins.

Next year, the east midlands will receive £70 million under transport policies and programmes. That will allow considerable road improvements, package bids and road safety measures. Many transport projects will receive support from capital challenge and the region will get £94 million a year from the housing investment programme over the next two years.

The Government have an impressive record in helping to make the east midlands an attractive place in which to live and work. I know the area, because I go there frequently, and I know that it is impressively successful. Government programmes have helped to increase the competitiveness of the region, and overall growth to the year 2000 is expected to exceed the national average. The Government's prompt action in 1993 included a £200 million national package of support following coalfield closures, and the east midlands received more

[Sir Paul Beresford]

than £35 million of that. In addition, four coal enterprise zones were designated and are proving successful. We estimate that they will create about 6,000 new jobs.

Europe and European structural funds were mentioned. The 1994-99 programme will provide another £40 million and those grants will attract another £100 million. It is worth repeating some of the figures. SSA this year in the east midlands will amount to £3.061 billion. The 1997-98 estimate was £3.11 billion. Capital challenge for 20 authorities was £42 million and city challenge was £112.5 million. Challenge funding was £142 million. Those funds will lever in £733 million from the private sector. Over two years, TPP will bring in £70 million and HIP £94 million to the east midlands. European funding will provide the area with £240 million, whereas the response to the coal closures will bring it £35 million.

In the few moments I have left, I should remind Labour Members that they have failed to learn one basic fact: one should not judge the quality of a service by the amount of money—other people's money—spent on it. There is a tremendous amount of truth in a statement that is becoming an old saying: new Labour, new taxes.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 30 January 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

SELECTION

Ordered,

That Sir Fergus Montgomery be discharged from the Committee of Selection and Sir Irvine Patnick be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

Local Government Election

1. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received from (a) political parties and (b) other bodies about the (i) arrangements and (ii) timing of the local government election in Northern Ireland. [11967]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Sir Patrick Mayhew): I have received general representations about personation at elections in Northern Ireland; otherwise none.

Mr. Mackinlay: Does the Secretary of State understand that the good folk of Northern Ireland want, along with the rest of us, a general election so that they can say no to the privatisation of the Post Office and can elect a Government who will reduce the hospital waiting list and get youngsters back to work and on to proper training schemes? Is there not, however, a problem that the local government elections in Northern Ireland are scheduled for 21 May? It would be absurd for the general election to run in tandem with or to overlap those elections. Would it not be far better either to call a general election now, or to pass legislation that brought forward the local government elections in Northern Ireland to 1 May?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: If the people of Northern Ireland feel so strongly about the numerous matters with which the hon. Gentleman began his question, it is interesting that I have not received a single representation about them, which suggests that perhaps his research is not as profound as it usually is. As to moving the election date, it would be better to stay with the legislation that we have, but to do all in our power to make it work properly.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: Is the Secretary of State aware that many potential candidates are not particularly interested in the local government elections or in any date for them because of the lack of power in local government? Will he take administrative action to keep power away from unelected quangos and give it back to elected representatives?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am always ready, of course, to consider any particulars that are put to me, but part of the purpose of the talks process in which we are so laboriously engaged is to come through to an agreed political settlement that is based on consent, which will undoubtedly find a better way of governing Northern Ireland than exists under direct rule. That applies in particular to local government.

Dr. Hendron: The Secretary of State will confirm that he has had discussions with my party, the Social Democratic and Labour party, with regard to future elections, including the forthcoming local government and general elections. I refer to serious electoral fraud, where proven irregularities with regard to registration and vote stealing are well known, and where thousands of votes are stolen at each election. The biggest problem—the Secretary of State referred to it—is personation. Will he make a statement on the matter, bearing in mind that medical cards and social security documents are in no way proof of identity?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I pay tribute to the assiduity with which the hon. Gentleman has pursued his anxieties with me and with the chief electoral officer about personation and other frauds. It is true that he has seen me on a number of occasions. I have met other representatives of his party, who have also met the chief electoral officer. My officials are considering ways of combating alleged instances of fraud, some of which I am certain do exist. Intimidation plays a big part in them. We can have the legislation, but, for it to work, people have to be free of intimidation, and we all know who is doing the intimidating.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the majority of people throughout the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland are concerned most of all about the integrity of that United Kingdom, and that they would be well advised to have regard to that fact when deciding who to vote for in any election, at any time?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: It is true that a large majority of people living in Northern Ireland, let alone throughout the rest of the United Kingdom, strongly support the maintenance of the Union, which, as the Prime Minister has frequently said and as I am glad to endorse, gives added strength to each of the regions comprising the United Kingdom. As far as I can see, there is no prospect of people changing their minds about that in what people are pleased to call the foreseeable future.

Mr. Dowd: May I press the Secretary of State on the question that was asked by the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron) in the light of the impending local elections and, in particular, the general election? Is the Secretary of State satisfied that all actions have been taken, not just against personation but to protect the integrity and accuracy of the register? If he is not satisfied

will he say what further action the Government intend to take to minimise the opportunities for the profound abuse of the democratic process that has occurred in the recent past?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for drawing attention to the register. Northern Ireland has a peculiar advantage in that, largely, the registration process depends not upon postal returns but upon personal canvassing. As a consequence, it is widely thought that the register is more accurate than registers in many areas of Great Britain. The computer forms are collected by canvassers from each household. Of course, when people move, there are opportunities for personation. I have taken care to see that each and every one of the representations in this regard by hon. Members has been brought to the attention of the chief electoral officer. I repeat what I have said in the past: that intimidation and profoundly undemocratic attitudes on the part of Sinn Fein and particular others are responsible for electoral fraud.

11-plus System

2. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the Government's policy with respect to the province's 11–plus system of education. [11968]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Michael Ancram): Most areas of Northern Ireland have a selective system of secondary education. I have no plans to change the present system, which serves Northern Ireland well.

Mr. Brown: In view of that answer, does my hon. Friend agree that Northern Ireland's selective system of education delivers one of the highest qualities of education in the United Kingdom? Does he further agree that there is a case for considering selection throughout the kingdom? Is he aware that I went to a secondary modern school, having failed my 11-plus, and that I was able to get to university after taking my O and A-levels at that secondary modern?

Mr. Ancram: As my hon. Friend knows and is right to remind us, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education has already made it clear that our intention as a party and Government is to introduce increased selection in the rest of the United Kingdom. As Minister with responsibility for education in Northern Ireland, I can say that we have every right to be proud of the education system there which, as we know from yesterday's figures, produces at the top end of the GCSE scale 52 per cent. of pupils leaving with five or more GCSEs compared with 44 per cent. in England. Equally important at the lower end is the fact that 5 per cent. of Northern Ireland pupils leave secondary education without qualifications, compared with 8 per cent. in England. Those percentages speak for themselves in terms of the Northern Ireland system.

Rev. Martin Smyth: While I share the Secretary of State's confidence in our education system and appreciate that selection could come a year later, does he accept that some schools are surreptitiously avoiding the concept of selection? In terms of primary education, it is the controlled sector that is being endangered.

Mr. Ancram: I note what the hon. Gentleman says. I should be grateful if he would let me know of specific instances of the avoidance of selection. The purpose of the Northern Ireland education system is to produce choice and part of that is to have a selective system so that parents can put their children forward for selection in the transfer test, as about 70 per cent. do. It is important to recognise that it is not only Northern Ireland parents who recognise the value of selective education. The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), who sits on the Opposition Front Bench, also recognises it for her children.

Mr. Worthington: Can the Minister assure an incoming Labour Government that there will be money to run the education system that he has described? It is already known that the education and library boards are heading for a deficit of millions of pounds. There was supposed to be £8 million in the budget for nursery provision. That has disappeared. Some £2 million was to be saved by the change in education and library boards. What has happened to that money? Is it in the budget? What will be the cost of incorporation of the further education colleges, on which the Government have already spent £1 million and have not passed the legislation? In area after area, such as in school transport, there are supposed to be savings. There are some great black holes in the Northern Ireland education budget. Will the Minister open the books and tell us what is happening?

Mr. Ancram: Savings will be made in almost every area that the hon. Gentleman mentioned—if he and other hon. Members support legislation that the Government intend to introduce. I look forward to hearing of his support when that occurs. I was interested to hear him ask whether money will be available, because I had understood that the shadow Chancellor had made it clear that the Government's announced spending figures would not be changed in the unlikely event of an incoming Labour Government. Once again, as Opposition spokesmen have so often made clear, there is a distinct gulf between the shadow Chancellor's statements and shadow Ministers' spending projections.

Employment Opportunities

3. **Mr. Beggs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the present level of unemployment and on future employment opportunities in Northern Ireland. [11969]

Mr. Ancram: Unemployment is falling rapidly in Northern Ireland. During 1996, it fell by 12,000, and the figure is now the lowest in over 16 years. Employment also is at record levels—currently 573,160—and I am confident that the growing economy will continue to offer increasing job opportunities in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Beggs: The good news every month of falling unemployment is very welcome. We pay tribute to Baroness Denton and to the staff of the Industrial Development Board and the local enterprise development

unit on their success in job promotion. We also recognise that responsible trade unionism in Northern Ireland has provided stability in workplaces and given encouragement and confidence to employers and to investors. Does the Minister agree, however, that the best news that Northern Ireland could receive would be an announcement by Sinn Fein-IRA that there will be an end to terrorism and that there will be an unqualified and unconditional ceasefire and permanent peace—which would again bring a boost in investment and tourism?

Mr. Ancram: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his tribute to those agencies and persons, not least to my noble Friend Lady Denton. I will ensure that she is aware of the tribute. I also appreciate his comment on trades unions' conduct, which has certainly played a major part in achieving the stability that has made the figures possible.

I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman's comments on the effects of terrorism on job prospects. It would certainly be good for the Province and for its economy if the IRA were to cease violence. We must never forget the damage that is done to the economy and to job prospects by increasing levels of violence. Terrorism destroys the hopes of communities and families of being able to achieve a prosperous future. Nowhere was that fact more clearly demonstrated than two nights ago, when the IRA fired a weapon that missed its intended target but hit the Springvale training centre, which produces job skill training to try to get people into jobs.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Will the Minister join me in welcoming Shorts' announcement of 500 new jobs, to work on the new Bombardier regional jet? However, are Ministers not concerned that the beneficial effect that those jobs might have on employment figures will be undone by the revaluation of non-domestic properties—which, in some cases, will triple the rates paid by small shops and other small businesses—and that hundreds, if not thousands, of jobs could consequently be lost? Will the Government consider a transitional relief scheme so that people can move gradually to the higher rates, rather than having to endure the entire increase in one year?

Mr. Ancram: I certainly welcome the job announcements mentioned by the hon. Gentleman. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State, who is on the Treasury Bench, is considering the type of transitional scheme that he mentioned, and we will make announcements in due course.

Mr. Robert McCartney: Does the Minister think that the quite ferocious cuts in funds for the ACE—action for community employment—schemes, which are directed specifically at the long-term unemployed, are likely to assist that group of unemployed people in Northern Ireland? Does he not think that the matter ought to be reviewed and that those very valuable schemes should be supported instead of weakened?

Mr. Ancram: I hear what the hon. and learned Gentleman has to say. He knows that this year there has been a particularly difficult public expenditure round in which priorities have had to be examined carefully, not least because of the need to find £120 million to meet the increased costs that have arisen as a result of renewed violence and terrorism. In that context, a number of serious questions had to be asked about the allocation of resources. In the light of falling unemployment figures and the changed situation since the introduction of ACE, it was reckoned that these cuts had to be made, although it was a difficult choice.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Does my right hon. Friend recall that the part of Northern Ireland that experienced the greatest drop in the number of people out of work since the beginning of the temporary ceasefire was west Belfast? Will he confirm that, when the IRA goes back to killing—the way it killed Gerry McCabe, the Irish policeman, Frank Kerr, the postal worker in Newry, and many others—it is killing the job prospects of many of those who most need work, such as young Catholics in west Belfast?

Mr. Ancram: I agree with my hon. Friend. There is absolutely no doubt that terrorism and violence affect the prospects, not only of those against whom they are aimed but of the communities of the perpetrators. It is an insult to the futures of their children that the IRA continue with terror in the way it does—I roundly condemn it.

Mr. Illsley: We, too, welcome the dramatic fall in unemployment in Northern Ireland, but has not part of that dramatic fall been the result of the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance, which has forced a number of claimants off the job register because of the very strict conditions of the jobseeker's contract? Should not the Government reconsider the cuts to the action for community employment schemes, which have a proven record in providing employment for the long-term unemployed, especially at a time when the job skills programme is in a state of confusion?

Mr. Ancram: The introduction of the jobseeker's allowance may have had some impact but it was designed to ensure that those who claimed to be unemployed were genuinely unemployed. The way in which we can best serve the unemployed in Northern Ireland is to create more jobs and to have a growing economy. Instead of talking down the Northern Ireland economy, we should be talking it up.

Manufacturing output in Northern Ireland has increased by 1.7 per cent. in quarter two to three compared with 0.6 per cent. for the United Kingdom as a whole. Manufacturing exports in 1994-95 rose by 21 per cent. over the previous year—twice the UK rate. They are the signs of a growing economy that can produce jobs, and that is what we should be concentrating on.

Peace Process

4. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the latest position with the peace process. [11970]

6. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent contact he has had with political parties in Northern Ireland to promote peaceful dialogue. [11972]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Participants returned to the multi-party talks, initially for bilateral discussions, on

Monday 13 January. The first session of the opening plenary since the break was held last Monday. We believe that there remains scope for progress before the elections and we shall continue to make every effort to secure it. Sinn Fein continues to exclude itself from the process, in the absence of an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire.

Mrs. Fyfe: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. Will he say whether he has noticed the fact that 65 hon. Members have today signed early-day motion 461 which calls for a re-examination of the events of Bloody Sunday? Does he agree that an honest and open re-examination of those events could only help the peace process?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The events of Bloody Sunday constituted a tragedy—there is no doubt about that. That tragedy was investigated by Lord Chief Justice Widgery. If there is any substantial fresh evidence, it should be submitted to the authorities where it will receive full and proper consideration.

Mr. Corbyn: Does not the Secretary of State recognise that Don Mullin's recent book on the events of Bloody Sunday provides important and compelling new evidence which should be examined independently so that the deaths and tragedy can be dealt with properly and guilt properly ascribed? If we are to build a peace process, there must be dialogue, but grievances and injustice must be examined and dealt with. Surely that has to be the way forward; otherwise we descend once more into the violence of the past 25 years.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I recognise that, in the history of Ireland—Northern Ireland and the Republic—many grievous events have occurred that live long in people's memories. I do not regard that as a matter of criticism, although I wish that people looked forward as vigorously as they sometimes look back. If there is fresh evidence in Mr. Mullin's book, I find it surprising that it was not first submitted to the authorities, if it was thought to be of significance. That should happen now that the book has been published. Any fresh evidence will receive proper consideration.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I am sure that the Secretary of State will bear in mind that there have been bloody Mondays, bloody Tuesdays, bloody Wednesdays, bloody Thursdays, bloody Fridays and bloody Saturdays. What does he think of the attitude of IRA-Sinn Fein, who mouthed to the media about a peace process when their colleagues entered a sick children's hospital and tried to kill a colleague of mine and put a bullet through a baby's incubator? Will he investigate what happened two nights ago, when a crowd inside and outside that hospital rioted because the police tried to arrest a person who was hijacking a car?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The first part of my reply to the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) showed that I endorse what the hon. Gentleman says about previous outrages. Violence, from whatever quarter, is to be condemned. The Government and all people of decent mind unfailingly do so.

I notice that Sinn Fein now has a slogan,

"A fresh opportunity for peace."

It is remarkable that it should believe there to be a fresh opportunity for peace when the IRA, with which it is inextricably linked, has broken its ceasefire. There is no place for violence in the politics of any democracy.

I shall have the matter with which the hon. Gentleman concluded his question investigated.

Mr. Trimble: I ask the Secretary of State to turn his mind back three and a half months, to a paper that we submitted to him and the other participants in the inter-party talks. The paper showed how the talks could proceed to substantive issues quickly. Does he share my disappointment that, rather than following the path that we had mapped out, some parties preferred to give a higher priority to trying to involve Sinn Fein in the process, notwithstanding the abundant evidence that Sinn Fein-IRA are committed to violent methods and to a mixture of threat and political manoeuvre to achieve their ends? Does he agree that the resulting impasse must be tackled positively and that there is no point in us being stuck in that impasse? It is now necessary to find other ways to make progress.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I recall the paper to which the hon. Gentleman refers. It is, unhappily, beginning to be clear that Sinn Fein is unwilling to make the declared commitment to exclusively peaceful purposes that is the passport to the talks required of all parties. Nevertheless, it is necessary to proceed by consent within the rules of procedure agreed in the talks process. It has been necessary, in our judgment, to try to find an agreed solution to the problems of decommissioning arms. That is why we have taken so long over it. I know that the hon. Gentleman is impatient and wants to get to the substance. We should also like to get to the substance. We shall continue our efforts to find a way to do so by consent when we resume next week.

Mr. Dykes: May I ask my right hon. and learned Friend to return to those questions that were allowed by the Chair about events in 1972? I wish him well in the Government's continuing peace process. Given that the events of 1972 have been raised again, and bearing in mind the words of the Irish Foreign Minister—a respected figure in Irish and international politics, and in this country—would it not be right for the matter, which is of great concern, to be considered again, not least in view of the need to reassure the Catholic community in Northern Ireland?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Of course I know of my hon. Friend's concern and have seen the paper that he has recently published on the subject. Very manifest difficulties are involved in investigating afresh something that occurred 25 years ago, however serious it may be and tragic its consequences. However, I repeat that, if from whatever quarter fresh evidence of real substance is presented, it will be received and examined properly and thoroughly. We need no encouragement from sources outside, however distinguished, to do that.

Mr. Mallon: The Secretary of State will remember that, when the Prime Minister presented the proposals for multi-party talks, he assured everyone in writing that they would be real, and would meaningfully address the concerns of both communities, and that no single issue

would be allowed to block the substantive negotiations on the three strands. Eight months later, we have not even completed the opening agenda. Will the Secretary of State tell us in specific terms what steps the two Governments envisage taking to ensure that we progress into those negotiations, now and that the nature of the problem and the solution will not change simply because there is to be a general election?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I do not think that the general election has anything to do with the nature of the solution. The hon. Gentleman asked me what steps the two Governments can take to ensure that we move now into the substance. It is not within the power of the two Governments to ensure that we move now into the substance because that step has to be made in circumstances and on conditions that achieve sufficient agreement among the participants. There has been no change in the British Government's position since the time to which he referred. We have always made it clear, with the Irish Government, that those who will take part in the process of talks will be those who declare and show themselves to be wholly and exclusively committed to peaceful and democratic principles and methods. That is, of course, the significance of the decommissioning issue, which has proved, and is continuing to prove, so troublesome.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Given the apparently slow process of the all-party talks and the reluctance of some to participate in them at all, what is the current role and effect, if any, of dialogue between the British Government and, respectively, the Governments of the Republic of Ireland and the United States of America in possibly catalysing the effectiveness of the talks?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I pay tribute to the interest of the United States of America, and of course to the interest of the Government of the Republic of Ireland. In my view, the effect of American interest has been especially beneficial, with the chairmanship of Senator Mitchell and the President's encouragement. There is, however, no substitute for people coming to agreement. Imposition is not a very helpful concept when we are considering future political arrangements for Northern Ireland. Unless we are to continue with direct rule, people must come to agreement through their representatives. We must continue to press for that, however long it takes.

Mr. Hunter: With regard to the Bloody Sunday controversy, does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that we could spend a very long time going through the pages of Anglo-Irish history, apportioning and reapportioning blame, but the exercise would achieve nothing? It is far better to spend our time and energies building new relations than reliving past tragedies.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: My hon. Friend points to something of great importance. We have to look forward. An immensely long and very controversial history of course affects the whole of Ireland, but we must not be governed by it. I repeat that a full inquiry was conducted by the Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales, but if there is anything of substance and significance that anybody believes ought to be considered by the authorities, there will be no obstruction to that and it will be thoroughly reviewed. I agree with my hon. Friend's thrust that we must be looking forward.

Ms Mowlam: I would like to send my condolences to the families of those who died on Bloody Sunday and to all the families who have lost someone in the conflict in Northern Ireland. Does the Secretary of State agree that, although this is a difficult time for parties to take extra steps forward in the talks, the time will always be difficult, and that what is needed now is a determination from all parties to make some progress? Do the two Governments have any specific plans to encourage and assist the parties to take those steps?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I endorse what the hon. Lady said at the beginning of her remarks and her concern that people do not stay in rigid positions to the exclusion of sensible opportunities to make progress in the talks.

On the last part of the hon. Lady's question, this Government—for whom alone I can speak—are always available, in bilateral discussions or on other occasions, to discuss ways in which we could help with any other participant in the talks. That is the virtue of the bilateral talks in which we have been, and are still, engaged.

Guardsmen Fisher and Wright

5. **Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received in regard to Guardsmen Fisher and Wright, currently imprisoned in Northern Ireland. [11971]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Sir John Wheeler): A number of representations have been received from various public figures. These include representations received recently in support of comments made in a letter circulated by former Scots Guards officers.

Mr. Gallie: I thank my right hon. Friend. Is he aware of the exemplary service given by those two young men, who were prepared to lay down their lives to protect all the citizens of Northern Ireland? Is he further aware that, in the past, two soldiers who were convicted for similar crimes were released within three and a half years? Those young men have now been in prison for four and a half years. Does my right hon. Friend not feel that enough is enough? They offer no threat to society, and it is time they came out.

Sir John Wheeler: Of course I am aware of the character of the service that those two guardsmen may have given during their duties in Northern Ireland, but questions of guilt and innocence are matters for the courts to determine, and they have determined that Fisher and Wright had no lawful justification for firing at their victim. The cases of those guardsmen will now be considered in accordance with the terms of Mr. Justice Girvan's judgment, and the cases will be referred to the

Secretary of State, who will satisfy himself about any decision that is taken. I cannot, of course, prejudge the outcome of that exercise.

Mr. Dalyell: Would the Minister be prepared to meet Sir David Scott-Barrett and others who have pleaded the guardsmen's case?

Sir John Wheeler: Of course Ministers are always glad to meet distinguished persons to hear what they have to say, but I emphasise that Ministers cannot prejudge the outcome of proper inquiries.

Witnesses (Intimidation)

7. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received regarding intimidation of witnesses. [11973]

Sir John Wheeler: The Government have not received any recent representations regarding intimidation of witnesses.

Mr. Arnold: Is not the intimidation of witnesses a scandal and a perversion of the course of justice? What steps has my right hon. Friend taken to tighten up on that scandal?

Sir John Wheeler: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the concern that he has exhibited about the matter. It is a serious concern in Northern Ireland, and the Government have taken steps to strengthen the law. In 1996, a new statutory offence of intimidation of witnesses and jurors was created in the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order, which also covers pre-trial intimidation and revenge attacks after the trial. I agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of strengthening and maintaining the law to deal with that problem.

Mr. Maginnis: Does the Minister agree that the problem is not exclusively the intimidation of witnesses but the intimidation of entire local communities, whose members have been beaten, crucified upside down or shot? The whole issue must be examined in that light. Can he give us an idea of the number of brutal beatings and other punishments that have occurred in the past year? Has the retribution against people intimidating those communities been equal to the magnitude of the crime?

Sir John Wheeler: The hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to the fact that there are other forms of intimidation, especially of the nationalist population of Northern Ireland, by terrorist thugs. Since last year, there have been many hundred brutal attacks of great savagery. They are all investigated by the Royal Ulster Constabulary, which is of course dependent on information from the complainant; if that is forthcoming, people may be arrested, charged and placed before the courts. It is a most serious matter that engages the attention of the Government and of the Royal Ulster Constabulary every day.

Miss Hoey: Does the Minister agree that intimidation of witnesses can occur in cases of stalking? Why is the Protection from Harassment Bill not to apply to Northern Ireland except under the undemocratic procedures? Why is Northern Ireland not treated as part of the United Kingdom in that legislation?

Sir John Wheeler: I agree with the hon. Lady: it is important that protection is provided in such circumstances. As she knows, Northern Ireland has its own criminal justice system and body of law, and it will be the Government's intention to follow the line of England and Wales in a separate order, replicating what is done for England and Wales, as soon as possible.

BSE

8. **Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he has taken since 1 January to eradicate BSE from the beef herd in Northern Ireland and to have the ban on beef exports lifted. [11974]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The Government continue to take all steps recommended by the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee to eradicate BSE. That includes the recent implementation of the selective cull. The United Kingdom will shortly submit formal proposals for a certified herds scheme to the European Commission.

Mr. Ross: That is all very well as far as it goes, but will the Secretary of State give an assurance that there will be no delay by the Government in introducing a workable certified herds scheme in Northern Ireland, and that, when the cull takes place, there will be immediate EC verification, and Northern Ireland will not have to wait until the rest of the United Kingdom carries out its cull?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I can give the assurance that the selective cull will proceed quickly and will not take long, because it will not apply to a large number of animals. The certified herds scheme which will shortly be introduced by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on behalf of all the Agriculture Departments in the United Kingdom will be the result of a consultation exercise that has recently been completed.

Rev. William McCrea: Will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating the farmers of Northern Ireland on their courage and determination during the BSE crisis? Does he agree that Northern Ireland should be given special status in Europe as a priority, because of its excellent beef, and that that could be the way in which the United Kingdom as a whole could get out of the present mess concerning BSE in Europe?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I very much agree with what the hon. Gentleman says about the quality of Northern Ireland's beef. I am glad to say that that is evidenced by special contracts made by major importers and suppliers in Great Britain, in full recognition of the special quality of our beef, which in part derives from our electronic tracing scheme, which has been in place for the past eight years. Any scheme proposed on behalf of the United Kingdom will be a United Kingdom scheme, but it will undoubtedly be one from which Northern Ireland producers will be the first to benefit, for that reason.

Mr. Soley: Does the second part of the first answer to the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) mean

that, if the Government are unable to get certified agreement for the whole of the United Kingdom, they will go ahead with a separate application for Northern Ireland, which meets the requirements laid down by the European Union?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: We do not anticipate failing in our application for a United Kingdom certified herds scheme, because the case for it will be overwhelming. It will be put forward on behalf of the UK as a necessary step to give effect to the Florence agreement.

Inward Investment

9. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about inward investment into Northern Ireland. [11975]

Mr. Ancram: The year ending 31 March 1996 was the best ever for inward investment in Northern Ireland. Thirty-five projects were secured, offering 4,869 new jobs and representing total investment of £432 million. So far this year, 15 investments by externally owned companies have been secured for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Marshall: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. A company told me today that, by relocating from Belgium to Britain, it had cut total costs by 40 per cent. Does that not demonstrate the job-creating policies of this Government and the job-destructive characteristics of the social chapter and a national minimum wage?

Mr. Ancram: I agree totally with my hon. Friend. Again, that goes to show that the Government's policy in that area is totally right and in the interests of the people of Northern Ireland.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 January. [11997]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Sutcliffe: Is the Prime Minister aware of reports today that the national health service is in near-collapse in the north-west of England, with bed shortages and people waiting on trolleys? It is in crisis in Bradford as well, with 289 operations cancelled in the past quarter. A much-needed accident and emergency unit, which we were promised, has not been delivered after many years and we have the outrage of two new mixed-sex wards, which the Prime Minister said would not happen. Is not the truth that there are two health services, just as there are two Tory parties—a real health service which is near collapse and a fantasy health service which the Prime Minister talks about in the press?

Mr. Skinner: Tell us about fantasy land.

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman waits, he will hear what I have to say.

The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe) referred to the north-west. He might have begun by acknowledging the brand new £2.9 million extension to the accident and emergency department at the Royal Liverpool hospital, which opened a year or so ago and makes it one of the finest accident and emergency hospitals in the country. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Bradford, South shakes his head. He does not think that it is one of the finest; I do.

The demand for the national health service is rising and so is the capacity to meet that demand, which is why more patients are being treated. Every health authority has made its plans for dealing with the growth in demand this year, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already made additional sums available to deal with that demand.

Mr. Hayes: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the people of Gibraltar are fiercely proud of being British and do not want to be a province of Spain? Will my right hon. Friend continue vigorously to support the people of Gibraltar to ensure that they have the same freedom of movement and voting that is taken for granted in the rest of Europe?

The Prime Minister: Britain stands by its commitment to the people of Gibraltar, which was enshrined in the 1969 constitution. We will not be entering into arrangements under which the people of Gibraltar would pass under the sovereignty of another state against their freely and democratically expressed wishes. The Spanish Foreign Minister raised that matter informally with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State, as indeed he had done on a previous occasion. My right hon. and learned Friend rejected the idea, because such a proposal did not and would not have the consent of the people of Gibraltar.

Mr. Blair: A few weeks ago, the Prime Minister said that it was essential in the national interest that our options remained open on a single currency and that he expected Conservative candidates to stand on that national manifesto. Is that still his expectation of Conservative candidates?

The Prime Minister: I think that, before taking me to task on this, the right hon. Gentleman should perhaps talk to the scores of his own Members of Parliament that the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) said would oppose his stance. As the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney said:

"I think it almost an obligation to be honest with my own electorate."

But the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) would not understand that. He entered the House on an election address that demanded Britain's withdrawal from the Community, even though he said later:

"I wasn't actually opposed to membership of the E.C. . . . I said within the closed doors of the Labour party that I disagreed with that policy."

Behind closed doors he says one thing, in public another: not the politics of conviction, but convenience, saying anything to get a vote—and that is what he advocates to his candidates.

Mr. Blair: The Labour party put its manifesto to its membership and got 95 per cent. support—I doubt that

the Prime Minister could put his manifesto to his Cabinet and get 95 per cent. support. After all, I was only asking him to agree with what he himself said a few weeks ago. If he cannot say that he now expects Conservative candidates to do that, has he still the vestige of authority and courage left to stand at that Dispatch Box and say now that at least he strongly urges and seeks to persuade Conservative candidates to stand on his and the Government's position?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is just being plain silly. Is he telling the House that the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney, the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) are actually going to support his policy on Europe at the general election? He raises it on this day of all days—the first two Labour questioners on the Order Paper are among the 50 who say that we should not join a single currency. The right hon. Gentleman may ask his candidates to fib to the electorate—our candidates will set out their views, we will follow the policy that the Government have set out and people know our policy. What he is trying to do is to censor and smother what his party stands for.

Mr. Blair: I asked the Prime Minister two questions. I said, as he himself said a few weeks ago, "Does he expect them to stand on the same manifesto?" I answer, "Yes." I then asked him, "Will he at least seek to persuade people to stand on the same manifesto?" I answer, "Yes." He is so weak and powerless, he cannot even say. He cannot even get to that—*[Interruption.]* Is it not extraordinary—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must come to order.

Mr. Blair: Is it not extraordinary that the Prime Minister of our country cannot even urge his party to support his own position? Weak, weak, weak, weak. I tell him that his weakness and his failure of leadership are the reason his Government are the incompetent mess they are.

The Prime Minister: Whenever the right hon. Gentleman gets abusive, we know that he is losing. If he is concerned about strength, will he today sack the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), who yesterday contradicted what he said about tax? Will he today sack the Deputy Chief Whip of the Labour party, who yesterday contradicted what was said about tax? All the right hon. Gentleman does is heckle and waft his arms around in a hopeless gesture. Yes or no—will he sack them or not? It is his policy, they are members of his shadow Cabinet, and they have denied his policy.

We have set out consistently what our policy is. I have said that it is important to keep the options—all the options—open. The right hon. Gentleman sniggers—I am quoting his words, not mine. He has followed in grandmother's footsteps in following policy after policy of ours. He says that we should keep the options open. We keep the options open, but his policy apparently means something quite different, because he dare not admit what his policy is.

Hon. Members: Withdraw.

Mr. Ashby: Has my right hon. Friend seen the statement—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. [AN HON. MEMBER: "He was shouting abuse at the Prime Minister."] Order. If anyone has been abusive, they will indicate it to me. *[Interruption.]* Order. I think that a lot of hon. Members are suffering from pre-election tension. Let us get on with Question Time. There are hon. Members I want to call.

Mr. Ashby: My right hon. Friend has undoubtedly seen the statement by the chairman of Toyota. Does my right hon. Friend agree that Toyota came to this country because my right hon. Friend's policies provided the most favourable climate for companies such as Toyota to have a gateway into Europe? Does the chairman's statement not show that it is important that we should maintain that gateway—important that we should maintain our foot in Europe, so that we get increased investment?

The Prime Minister: We intend to maintain our voice in Europe—there should be absolutely no doubt about that—but we do not intend to follow slavishly whatever happens to be the favoured policy of some European Governments at any particular moment. We shall not follow policies that would be damaging to British interests. We shall not sign social chapters. *[Interruption.]* The deputy leader of the Labour party is scoffing, as usual. I tell him: one signature on the social chapter will mean half a million signatures on the dole.

Mr. Ashdown: The Prime Minister has pursued a conscientious and honourable policy in pursuing a path to peace in Northern Ireland and we have been unwavering in support of that. Does he realise that he will lose that, and much else besides, if he fails to apply rigorously, in full and now, the recommendations of the North report, which he brought into being, and jeopardises peace on the streets of Northern Ireland next summer for continuing Unionist support and a few more days in power?

The Prime Minister: In a few minutes, the right hon. Gentleman will hear a statement by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on the North report. However, in view of what he just said, I invite him to read the North report, and perhaps especially paragraph 1.49, which says:

"We are well aware that it is for the Government to take a view on how far it wishes to adopt our recommendations".

It goes on to say:

"No doubt there will be a period of consultation, and there may be some question as to how far new structures and procedures can be put in place in time for the 1997 'marching season'."

Some can be put in place, as my right hon. and learned Friend will tell the House, but the matter is more complex

than the right hon. Gentleman intimated. I suggest that he wait to listen to the detailed statement by my right hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one should not unfairly—or even fairly—always go back to what people put in their election addresses in the 1980s, but one might want to look at what they put in their election addresses at the last general election and then wonder how many of those policies they have reversed in the past five years?

The Prime Minister: I think it is possible— *[Interruption.]* I am prepared to offer a prize to anyone who can find five policies on which the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) has been consistent.

Mr. Hume: Is the Prime Minister aware that today is the 25th anniversary of one of the worst atrocities in the past 25 years in Northern Ireland, when the security forces shot dead 14 people on the streets of my city? Does he agree that the more than 3,000 people who have died in the past 25 years have all suffered atrocity, and that their families have suffered trauma because of such tragedies?

Given that that was the only atrocity that was carried out by the security forces with the ratification of Government, and given that the Prime Minister has told me in writing that those who were killed on Bloody Sunday should be regarded as innocent of any allegation that they were shot while handling firearms or explosives, can he please tell me why they were shot? If he does not know, does he not think that the matter requires public investigation?

The Prime Minister: I understand how the hon. Gentleman feels about the matter. Everybody knows his record in Northern Ireland over the years, and I pay due tribute to it.

The hon. Gentleman spoke of ratification by Government. I think that he might wish to reconsider what he said about that. The events of 25 years ago constituted a terrible tragedy. I concede that to the hon. Gentleman. I believe that everyone is determined that the lessons of that day are never forgotten. That, too, I share with the hon. Gentleman.

The actions at the time were fully investigated by the Widgery committee. I know of no reason at present to reopen that inquiry. If anyone has fresh, relevant evidence, of course it should be sent to the proper authorities. The important point is that everyone acknowledges the tragedy of what happened a quarter of a century ago today. The Government, with the hon. Gentleman's help and, I concede, with the help of the leader of the Liberal party, the leader of the Labour party and many others, have been trying to reach a situation in Northern Ireland where there never, ever again need be any prospect of such an event recurring. That is what I passionately want. I do not believe that anyone doubts that. Without fresh evidence, I see no advantage in raking over old problems. If there were fresh evidence, of course we would examine it.

Northern Ireland Parades (North Report)

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Sir Patrick Mayhew): With permission, Madam Speaker, I will make a statement about the report of the independent review of parades and marches in Northern Ireland, which was published this morning in Belfast.

Last summer, public disorder occurred in Northern Ireland on a very grave scale, associated in particular, but not exclusively, with a parade at Drumcree. Immense disruption was caused, with massive damage to property, including churches and schools. The murder of a taxi driver may also have been related. Deep and lasting injury was inflicted on both sides of the community, and on the Royal Ulster Constabulary, who were placed in an intolerable position. Actual and threatened force obliged the Chief Constable to reverse a previous order, in the interest of avoiding loss of life, which is always his first duty. The improvement in Northern Ireland's image, which is so important economically in particular, was sharply reversed.

In the light of those shocking events, I announced on 15 July the establishment of the review, with the task of making recommendations about the future management of controversial parades.

The review was asked to consider the existing arrangements for handling public processions and open-air meetings in Northern Ireland, including the adequacy of the current legal provisions; the powers and responsibilities of the Secretary of State, the police and others; the possible need for new machinery; and the possible role for and composition of codes of practice relating to parades and meetings.

The review body comprised Dr. Peter North, vice-chancellor of Oxford university, the Very Rev. Dr. John Dunlop and Father Oliver Crilly. We are all indebted to Dr. North and his colleagues for the energy, determination and thoroughness with which they have tackled their very difficult task.

The report is a long and closely argued document, with more than 40 recommendations. It proposes, as the foundation of its other recommendations, that seven fundamental principles should form the basis for the development of processes and procedures governing parades. I should say immediately that the Government accept those principles, which include both the protection of the right to peaceful free assembly and the need to ensure—preferably through local accommodation—that the exercise of that right takes proper account of foreseeable effects on relationships within the community.

The report emphasises the predominant importance of reaching local agreement on every contentious parade. It goes on to recommend that an independent commission should be established as a focus for promoting and facilitating mediation and the search for such local accommodation in respect of contentious marches. It also proposes that, in default of successful mediation, the commission would have legal powers to issue a determination in respect of a contentious parade, but with a power for the Chief Constable—if he is concerned about it—to refer such a determination to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State would then decide the matter by endorsing, revising or reversing the determination, applying the same statutory criteria as the commission.

Furthermore, it is proposed that a senior police officer could override a determination on the day of a parade if the police found that, as a result of the likely impact on public order, they were unable to uphold it. The report recommends that a new offence be created of deliberately contravening, through force of numbers or threat of disorder, a decision of the commission—for example, by seeking to block an authorised parade.

The report also recommends that the statutory criteria for making decisions on parades set out in the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 should be enlarged to enable specific consideration to be given to the wider impact of contentious parades on relationships within the community. It also makes a wide range of further major recommendations, including, for example, the extension of the period of notice of a planned parade required to be given to the police from the current period of not fewer than seven days to not fewer than 21 days; and the preparation of a statutory code of conduct covering the behaviour of parade participants and protesters.

We recognise the report's description of the parades issue as a microcosm of the wider political problems of Northern Ireland, and as one that has the capacity to polarise the community and to engage levels of emotion and commitment that few other issues reach. Because of that, the Government have a responsibility to take the issues forward as far as possible on a basis of widespread agreement within the community so that whatever new arrangements are put in place may be recognised as fair and workable, and therefore acceptable. In that way, they stand the best chance of being effective and successful. As Dr. North and his colleagues say:

"our shared view"

is

"that the way to the complete resolution of the issue is through the community working together in search of mutual accommodation."

It is against this background that the Government have considered the proposals contained in the report.

The Government agree that an independent body could indeed play a constructive and valuable role in helping to resolve disputes concerning contentious parades. The Government believe that a new body of that kind could provide a valuable focus and a catalyst for mediation and conciliation efforts at local level. In respect of these non-adjudicatory functions, the Government endorse the report's recommendations, which they believe should be implemented without delay.

At the same time, the Government recognise that the proposal that an independent body should, as part of its duties, take over the RUC's decision-making power in respect of parades is a radical and far-reaching one. The report notes the wide range of views that it received on precisely that issue. Therefore, it would not, in our view, be right for Government—without further but time-limited consultation—to reach a decision on so fundamental a proposal.

It therefore expresses no opinion on it either way, but it will seek the views of interested groups on the report's proposal that the commission should have a decision-making role of this kind and, if so, on the way in which it might be exercised. That consultation will also encompass those of the North recommendations linked directly to the role of a commission, including those directed at the possible expansion of the statutory criteria, the publication of guidelines that the commission would

take into account and the creation of a new criminal offence of setting out deliberately to contravene a legal determination.

This consultation will not duplicate the consultation already conducted by Dr. North and his colleagues, but will be a precisely focused and time-limited exercise to give public representatives and others who are directly concerned the opportunity to comment on an important matter of real concern to them and those whom they represent. The Government envisage that the period of consultation will last until the end of March. In any event, implementation of the recommendation, if that were to be the decision eventually reached, would require a statutory basis. While final decisions on the way forward on this issue may fall to the new Parliament, the Government, for their part, are clear that any such provision should be provided by primary legislation—by Bill rather than by Order in Council.

The Government therefore intend to establish, as soon as possible, an independent body of five people, to be known as the Parades Commission, with the mediation, conciliation and education roles recommended in the report. We intend that the new commission should be in place ahead of this year's marching season, precisely because we recognise that it has a valuable role to play, potentially, of that character, and could also have the capacity to act as a valuable and reassuring channel of communication with all interested parties, including the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Secretary of State. Further details of its operation will be promulgated when the membership of the commission is announced. Legislation will not be required for this purpose.

Turning to the report's recommendations that are not directly linked to the role of a commission and do not therefore fall to be considered as part of the consultation exercise, the Government accept them all, subject to further consideration of how these might best be implemented in practice.

In particular, we agree that a code of conduct, covering parades, protests and open-air public meetings, should be prepared and published for consultation as soon as practicable. We agree that a registration scheme for bands should be introduced as soon as the necessary practical arrangements can be put in place.

We agree that the period of notice for parades should be extended from seven to 21 days, that the amendments that the report proposes to article 3 of the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 should be implemented, and that consideration should be given to the changes suggested to articles 4(1)(b) and 7; and that appropriate provisions for the control of alcohol in respect of those travelling to both processions and open-air meetings in Northern Ireland should be introduced. We shall implement these changes as soon as practicable.

We agree that parade organisers should not be required to post bonds or provide proof of insurance cover, and that steps should not be taken to seek a contribution to policing costs from parade organisers or protesters.

The House will, I think, join me in thanking Dr. North and his colleagues for producing this report, which represents an extremely important contribution to our consideration of these difficult and complex matters.

The events of last summer cast a pall of fear across Northern Ireland. As the report states, an abyss of anarchy opened up. All people of good will must surely demand that there be no repetition, but no mechanisms and no procedures can be enough on their own.

There needs to be within all who live in Northern Ireland the will and the personal determination that last year's terrible events shall never again occur. To that end, the Government pledge that they will play their own part to the full.

Ms Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. I also thank the authors of the report, Dr. Peter North, Father Oliver Crilly and the Very Rev. John Dunlop, and their staff. It is a thorough and useful report that addresses issues of significance that in the end require politicians to make political judgments.

At heart, the issue is about the rule of law. We believe that the rule of law is paramount, and we hope that all parties in the House will join us in fully supporting the rule of law.

The review conducted by Dr. Peter North and his colleagues was demanded, as the Secretary of State said, by the events of Drumcree last year, when, as the Royal Ulster Constabulary former Chief Constable said,

"the consent to comply with the rule of law did not exist."

The police were put in an impossible position. The House has a duty to do all that it can to prevent such a situation from arising again. The security forces in Northern Ireland enforce the will of the House with day-to-day courage and determination. We should not ask them to play piggy in the middle again.

In August, we saw a glimmer of hope when, as a result of a clear Government decision, and alongside local efforts by the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) and Mr. Alistair Simpson of the Apprentice Boys, the tensions were effectively contained.

We must keep this problem in proportion. Of the many hundreds of parades that occurred last year, only a handful created problems. Every effort must be made to ensure that, whenever possible, local agreement is reached through discussion and mediation, as the report acknowledges. Only when those efforts are exhausted should other, more formal, mechanisms be employed.

To those who say that the recommendations of the report could breach their fundamental rights, I say this: the right to march is a fundamental human right. We support that right and it is fully supported in the report, which says:

"The right to peaceful free assembly should be protected".

But, as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition would say, all rights carry responsibilities. The responsibility in this case is to take account of the likely effect exercising one's right to march may have on relationships with other parts of the community.

The report is no panacea, and further examination, either by the Government or by a commission, is clearly required in certain areas, such as the content of a code of conduct, or the length of period of notice for parades. Will the Secretary of State enter into immediate discussion with us and others? By the end of February there could be consensus and continued bipartisanship on measures that could be put in place immediately in March, either legislatively or administratively, so that any Government will be better prepared for the 1997 marching season.

[Ms Marjorie Mowlam]

I agree with the Secretary of State that it is important to get this right: we will store up trouble for the years ahead if we do not. Unless the right hon. and learned Gentleman acts on the guts of the report, the staged approach that he recommends will be undermined.

After thoroughly examining the views of all interested parties, members of the review team recommended that, on balance, what is central is that an independent commission should be created, that it should not be an advisory body but that its conclusions should have the force of law, subject of course to appeal and review. We support the recommendation, and would like the Secretary of State to explain to the House why further consultations are necessary on that point. What views will he seek that have not already been sought by the reviewers? Furthermore, why does he think that in just eight weeks he will be able to improve on the conclusions that those who conducted the review reached over five months?

Will the Secretary of State clarify—I am not sure whether I have understood the report correctly—why he believes that a commission would take over the RUC's powers? My understanding is that the RUC would retain the power to ask for any decision to be reviewed by the Secretary of State, and would maintain operational flexibility.

We have been constructively critical: we have tried to make positive suggestions on this issue for more than 18 months, and we have urged the Secretary of State to take further action. We are in the business not of casting blame but of accepting responsibility. We have co-operated successfully with the Government throughout the past 18 months—most recently, over the Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning Bill—and we shall continue to give bipartisan support in the search for peace in Northern Ireland. We offer the Secretary of State our full support again today for the legislation that we urge him to introduce based on this report.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her concluding remarks. I gladly pay tribute to her party for the co-operation that it has given the Government in carrying out responsibilities that transcend party political tactics and matters of party political significance.

I am also grateful for her opening remarks, especially for her acknowledgement that every effort must at all times be made to reach local agreement. These are contentious marches because they arouse contention in the localities that they affect. The thrust of the report is that only after mediation and conciliation efforts have failed will there be a place for adjudication. That will always be second best to agreement. I think that the hon. Lady and I are at one of that.

I also acknowledge what the hon. Lady said about the qualified nature of all rights of this character. The report is correct in saying that if a right to march or protest is to be exercised, it must always be exercised with regard to how such action will impinge on opposite rights that are engaged at the same time and in the same locality. It is a question of balance, or, as the report puts it, of proportionality.

The hon. Lady asked whether the Government would consult the Opposition about what might be able to be put in place by the end of February. I have no difficulty in saying, "Yes, we will"—and, indeed, that we will consult all others who have a proper interest. We want to establish, as quickly as is practicable, a commission with what, rather uncomfortably, I have called the non-adjudicatory responsibilities that the report specifies, and we will do that.

I am grateful for what the hon. Lady said about the importance of getting this right. Lest anyone complain about the fact that we are consulting, I reiterate what the Prime Minister has already reminded the House. The report itself says:

> "No doubt there will be a period of consultation."

It also says:

> "We are well aware that it is for the Government to take a view on how far it wishes to adopt our recommendations."

It is to get it right on the second limb of the recommendations that the Government are proposing a tightly focused and short-term period of consultation. In the meantime, we express no opinion one way or the other on that part of the recommendations. That is why we make that point.

The consultation exercise is not a re-run of the review. That was another of the hon. Lady's questions. Interested parties have already had an opportunity to present their views, but they will not have seen the report's far-reaching and important recommendations until today. We recognise that we have a heavy responsibility to take the report and the issues forward, on the basis of the widest possible agreement within the community. That is why we are proposing a consultation period that is precisely focused and time-limited. We are committed—once we have made decisions in the light of that consultation—to implement them as soon as possible.

The hon. Lady asked why I had said that this would be taking powers from the RUC. She is right in saying that the report says that, in the absence of mediation, the commission would have the determining power itself, but that would be subject—if the Chief Constable were concerned about it—to the Chief Constable's power to refer the matter to the Secretary of State, who thereafter would be the determining authority. That is, of course, a radical departure from the present position, in which the Chief Constable both makes the decision and enforces it, in the light only of considerations relating to public order.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I welcome the Secretary of State's undertaking that any implementation of the report will be by proper legislation, rather than by means of the thoroughly unsatisfactory Order in Council procedure. I also welcome his decision to consult further on the more radical proposals in the report—proposals that do indeed have constitutional implications. In doing that, the right hon. and learned Gentleman is drawing a distinction between the conciliation functions suggested for the commission, and the adjudication functions. He has put his finger on an important point: that conciliation and adjudication are, by their very nature, two different functions, and that to give them to the same body will result in the adjudication function distorting and undermining the question of conciliation.

Does the Secretary of State agree that, in the present circumstances, the overriding need is to maintain the Queen's peace and to leave the highways free for all who wish to proceed along them peacefully? Does he agree that that responsibility must rest with the police and the

Government? As the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) said, at the end of the day these are matters requiring political judgment.

I understand the desire to promote conciliation, but let me put two points to the Secretary of State. One has to bear it in mind that, if one creates too elaborate a machinery, it gives rise to more rather than fewer problems, and some elements in society in Northern Ireland are determined to use the problems to create serious public disorder.

That brings me to a point that amazed me when reading the report. I have had only a few hours to read it, and perhaps the Secretary of State can correct me, but I think that the report contains no reference to the IRA, to Sinn Fein and to those elements that are associated with them, which have used these occasions to foment serious public disorder. Is it not a serious failing that the report has failed to consider the basic underlying problem, and does that not to some extent undermine the approach?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's welcome for aspects of what I have said, and can move to his following points. He asks whether conciliation and adjudication are not very different concepts. Of course that is correct—they are. One of the objections to the present jurisdiction of the Chief Constable under the legislation is that he is both the decider of the issue, after attempts to conciliate and to find a local agreement, and thereafter the enforcer. That point was made by many people, apparently, to the commission. The hon. Gentleman's point as to whether the one can be done properly together with the other by the same body is a proper matter for consultation. It is one of the issues that will necessarily be discussed in the period that I have described.

The hon. Gentleman speaks of the Chief Constable's duties. Of course the parades give rise to difficult and delicate public order issues—we all know that—but the issues are not limited to public order. They give rise to wider aspects, which may be described as aspects of community relations or political aspects. As I have said, saving of life must always be the Chief Constable's first duty. Whether there is a satisfactory manner in which an independent body can take the decisions that will have major effects on public order and safety, determining them in the light of the principles that have been given, is exactly the type of matter about which we need to hear advice.

Although many of these protests are genuinely made, there are some indications, as we all know, that they are used for strictly political purposes. I cannot point to a reference of the sort that the hon. Gentleman asks me about, but reality and realism suggest that that reference is there, and the report does say that there is a real question for consideration as to what will be the trigger mechanism by which the commission's jurisdiction will be engaged.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): Does the Secretary of State think that, because of the seriousness of the matter, he should meet the leaders of all parties in the House and further discuss the matter because, as the hon. Member for Redcar said, if we do not get it right this time, in years to come, we will reap? I remind the House that we are reaping today. We are reaping the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987. I and other Unionist Members warned the House that that legislation would be a calamity.

I remind the House that every Unionist Member but three—the then hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady), and the right hon. Members for Lagan Valley (Sir J. Molyneaux) and for Strangford (Mr. Taylor)—did short gaol sentences because we felt that it was our duty to breach that law to call the people's attention to its seriousness. The Secretary of State is well aware of one matter—that of traditional parades. When the right to them was breached by being removed from the legislation, there was all this trouble with such parades. Who made the statement that traditional parades would have to be removed from the legislation? It was none other than the Dublin authorities. They made it clear at the time and we protested in the House. We went to gaol so that people would be aware of the seriousness of the matter.

It is all very well for the hon. Member for Redcar to say that no civil rights are involved. Why cannot have the public order legislation that applies to the rest of the United Kingdom? Why is it unlawful for me to do something in Northern Ireland that it is perfectly lawful for me to do after I have crossed a stretch of water? Hon. Members need not tell me that there are differences, because there are differences over here, such as racial tensions. We do not have racial tensions: we have tensions of the other sort.

The leader of the Liberal Democrat party said that the measures should be enacted immediately, but to do that would make no difference whatever to the present situation. The *Belfast Telegraph* thought that it could get support for them, so it ran a poll and thought that it would come out wonderfully. But the Secretary of State knows that the poll showed that, by a ratio of five to one, the parades would have to go on. To say that that can be remedied by a little education by a commission is nonsense.

This is a serious matter and it will have to be dealt with seriously. If people want to parade to a church building and are refused permission, as my constituents have been, they may have every window in the church broken and graves desecrated. Graffiti on the walls of the Orange hall stated, "The Orange Order will never walk". Such situations must be dealt with seriously. Will the Secretary of State ensure that whatever laws are put on the statute book everybody will be equally subject to them so that all are under the same law? Republican bands do not give seven days' notice: they walk and nothing is done about it.

Madam Speaker: Before the Secretary of State responds, I remind the House that we are asking questions on a serious report. I do not seek long comments and speeches but brisk questions and comments. Several hon. Members are on their feet, and I shall do my best to call as many as possible.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that this is a serious matter. We must get it right, and it must be approached in a serious way. It would not be approached seriously if we implemented the report without giving people the opportunity of the character that I have described to express their opinions about the report's recommendations. I gladly give an undertaking

[Sir Patrick Mayhew]

that I will meet all party leaders and all others in a representative capacity who have an interest in these matters and wish to see me during the consultation period. That is important.

The hon. Gentleman asked why Northern Ireland needs something different from the rest of the United Kingdom. I must tell him that it is for the same unhappy reason as we need other provisions to enable the security forces to deal with powerful factors. The situation in Northern Ireland is different, the history is different, the forces and the influences are different and that needs to be recognised in our legislation. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he said. I do not think that there will be the same need for him to feel, as he said at the beginning of his intervention, that his views have not been considered.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): I compliment the North committee on the thoroughness with which, in the time available, it did a very difficult job. It did that job very well. But I must express my deep concern that the Government have taken the decision that the so-called "period of consultation" will very substantially postpone the date on which they and the House will make a decision on the matter. A decision will have to be made. Does the Secretary of State agree that there are only three options: that the Secretary of State will make the decisions; that the Chief Constable will make the decisions; or that a body, as recommended by the North committee, will make the decisions?

We know the views of the previous Chief Constable. He said that they were sick to death of being caught in the middle and of having to make political decisions. Is the Secretary of State aware of the perception that will now be abroad in the north of Ireland—that a British Government are again long-fingering something to get themselves over their problems in the House of Commons, and that, in the summer months, the well-being of the people of the north of Ireland will be secondary to that consideration? That is a cynical view. I am not saying that it is my view, but it is a perception.

We have discussed this matter all my political life, and hon. Members from every party have discussed it with the Secretary of State and others. If Opposition Members were to assure the Secretary of State that legislation to put the proposals in place would not be opposed and that parliamentary time would be agreed to ensure that primary legislation is allowed to give the matter the serious consideration that it deserves, will the right hon. and learned Gentleman proceed to introduce legislation? If so, when we reach the awful summer months that we must face, the decisions will at least have been made, the uncertainty will have been removed and the legislative process will have been decided.

Will the Secretary of State respond to the offers that I believe will be made by the Labour party, by the Liberal Democrats and certainly by our party and many of the other smaller parties to facilitate legislation, for the sake of the people of the north of Ireland?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful for the compliment, which I am glad to endorse, paid by the hon. Gentleman to the quality of the report and to those who are responsible for it. On his last point, although I cannot commit business managers, I shall express a personal preference—which I believe the Government share—that the Government, once we have reached a conclusion on the matters covered by the consultation that we recommend and wish to conduct, implement the decision as soon as possible, especially if it requires legislation. That is the best practical answer I can give the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Gentleman said that there was a perception that the Government are putting the matter on the long finger and binning it. I am glad that he did not say that he holds that view himself, because it would be quite wrong to do so. The answer to the charge can be found in the passage, which the Prime Minister has already read out today, at paragraph 1.49, page 9 of the report. The commission itself states:

"No doubt there will be a period of consultation".

It makes that statement in a manner that implies that it believes that doing so would be entirely reasonable. That is the answer to any cynical perception.

If I wanted to recommend means by which the matter could run away into the sand, I would recommend an open-ended period of consultation—not only on the second but on the first limb of the recommendations. I am not doing so at all, and I do not have the slightest difficulty in resisting and rebutting any perceptions of that character.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, for those of us who have had to grapple with this most difficult and taxing of problems, there was nothing wrong with the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987, and that it could have worked perfectly well had all those concerned been willing to behave reasonably and to co-operate? Is it not the case, therefore, that any new proposals will need to command the widest possible support? In that connection, I warmly endorse the position that he has adopted, which is, I think, contrary to that of the leader of the Liberal party, who suggested that this is an occasion to ram legislation on to the statute book immediately. My right hon. and learned Friend is profoundly wise to have a brief period of consultation to see whether he can get wide support for the proposals, which will at least give them a better hope of working.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I very much agree with my right hon. Friend. He has carried these responsibilities, and I am certain that he is right to point to the pre-eminent importance of getting the will to co-operate, or local agreement. Legislation can play a part, but it can be no substitute for the desire for a sensible and workable means to be achieved whereby the competing rights can be properly balanced. I very much welcome my right hon. Friend's approval for the period of consultation that we propose.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman, who has had very distinguished experience as a Law Officer over a number of years, agree that the introduction of a requirement to co-operate with a commission that has a conciliatory and adjudicatory role

before undertaking a sectarian march is a very small price to pay for the privilege of being able to march in that way?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I do not wish to depart from what I said in the statement, but the Government do not express an opinion one way or the other on what I might call the adjudicatory recommendations of the commission. It is self-evident—every hon. Member will agree—that there is a duty on all who wish to undertake a march or who wish to protest against such a march to co-operate with the relevant authorities.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): I warmly welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's statement. Will he agree that this is a time for very great caution? It would be unreasonable to impose unnecessary or excessive demands on the organisers of more than 3,100 nationalist and Unionist marches that habitually take place each year without disorder. May I draw his attention in particular to recommendation 20 of the summary of recommendations, which states that the police should retain the power to intervene on public order grounds

"in the extreme circumstances of the determination of the Parades Commission being defied".

Does not this subordinate the police to an appointed commission rather than the democratically elected and accountable Government? Is not this a fundamental departure—one that is highly questionable and which some hon. Members may find it hard to accept?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: After nearly five years in this job, I see considerable sense in being generally rather cautious. Equally, there are circumstances when it is important to take hold of an issue and drive it. That is why I have thought it right to embrace and endorse straight away the non-adjudicatory recommendations of the report. It is right that there should be a commission. Naturally, we will want to see how best we can implement some of the matters that fall within that limb of the report. Therefore, whereas the more cautious approach might be to say that we shall consult about the whole boiling, I believe it to be right to take the course that we are taking in that regard.

As for the second limb—the adjudicatory functions—it is right to be cautious. It is, however, right to limit our consultation to a short period—a couple of months. There is an important constitutional position that the Chief Constable has operational responsibility. I shall not express an opinion one way or another; I simply observe that the report recommends that the chief officer on the spot will have the right to override any determination if he considers that his obligation to preserve life makes that necessary.

Mr. Robert McCartney (North Down): Does the Secretary of State agree that since the commencement of the peace process, dating from the Downing street declaration in December 1993, there has been a marked increase in the deterioration of community relations in Northern Ireland? Does he agree that the parades issue, for which the report is said to provide a panacea, is only a symptom of a much deeper condition, attributable to the Government's policy, which has unrealistically excited the expectations of the minority community while fuelling the anxiety—some might even say paranoia—of the majority community that their rights in many aspects of civil life are being gradually eroded? The Government's policy is the cause of the problem.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: No. I am rather disappointed by that contribution from the hon. and learned Gentleman. I do not think that it is factually right that a deterioration in community relations can be observed from the time of the Downing street declaration at the end of 1993. I think that the reverse is the case. There has, unfortunately, been a sharp worsening of community relations since the events of last summer. There is no doubt about that. Everybody that I know of agrees that there has been an increased polarisation and an increase in fear and bad relations between the two sides of the community.

As for the second part of the hon. and learned Gentleman's question, I think that fear lies at the root of many people's attitudes in Northern Ireland to a great extent. I recognise a fear among Unionists that there is a preordained ratchet process by which they irrevocably come nearer and nearer to what they most fear—the ending of the Union. That fear is not justified, but it exists. There is fear on the other side as well. Again, that fear is not justified in many instances, I believe.

The body recommended setting up a commission to take account of those fears and to give focus to the mediating and conciliatory jobs currently done by people in an unfocused way when a difficult march is incipient. I think that that will be valuable, which is why we have thought it right to endorse it straight away.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): Does the Secretary of State accept that one of the most powerful arguments for allowing the proposed Parades Commission to exercise the power to determine a legally binding order on a march is that it would not put the Chief Constable in the invidious position in which he found himself last year?

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): That is not right.

Mr. Soley: That Chief Constable was retiring, but had he been newly in position, his position would have become untenable after Drumcree. Perhaps the Secretary of State will remind the Unionist party, from which I am receiving some comments at the moment, that enforcing the rule of law in Northern Ireland is vital and is a first priority for whichever party wins the next election. We shall not shirk that duty. It needs to be made abundantly clear that any challenge to the rule of law that took place last year has enormous implications for the people of Northern Ireland.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I have had some part in enforcing the rule of law in Northern Ireland since I first became Solicitor-General about 14 years ago, so I endorse the importance of that. I have always held it to be a prime responsibility of the Government. I am not going to get drawn into any evaluation of the merits of the proposal that the commission shall decide these matters. I think that it would be wrong to do so. I want to see what advice is offered. It is a matter of record that the last Chief Constable said that he was fed up with the police having to make decisions in such circumstances. It does not follow from that that it would be wrong or right to endorse the proposal that has been put forward. We want to hear people's views.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Will the Secretary of State clarify some doubt in my mind? Was there a degree

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

of economy or of elasticity of the truth when he referred to the Chief Constable having to reverse a decision because of threats? The reality is that the first decision was taken because of threats of violence as well as a suspected input from the Maryfield secretariat. Has he paid particular attention to the review team's comments about the enforcement of the public order order, since it has not been enforced against those who have tried to impede by force legally organised processions? Does he recognise that the authorities in Northern Ireland know long before 21 days about a walk of the institution of which I have been a member for many years. The period of six days was proposed by the House and we have abided by it.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The Chief Constable gave a very full account of the events of July and his part in them when he gave an extended interview on BBC radio to Mr. Barry Cowan. It is worth while looking at that. I am pretty sure that I ensured that a transcript was put in the Library, but if I did not, I shall see to it that one is put there.

In the interview, the Chief Constable made it absolutely clear that he took each decision in the light of his professional assessment of the likely disorder that would follow, and that, in particular, the second decision was taken because he could not guarantee that lives would not be lost in circumstances that he reasonably foresaw. I have said before and I repeat, although I do not want us to get into fighting the battles of the past, that I believe that the Chief Constable was right in each of those decisions. We must consider whether we can find a way by which such decisions can be taken in the absence of successful mediation that will be more widely acceptable. Time and again, the report comes back to the need for wide acceptability of mechanisms and procedures.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): Is it not remarkable that, on the report's principal recommendation, the Government offer no opinion to the House, but say, "We have not come to an opinion. We are going to consult further and then we will come to an opinion"? Is it not rather ridiculous that, on the principal recommendation, the Government are not in any way giving a voice or a lead to people within these islands on what they consider should be the best course of action to take? Are they not in fact dodging the issue and putting it on the back boiler? By virtue of the timetable as laid down by the Secretary of State, even with all the good will in the world from all the other parties to facilitate legislation, we will not have anything in place before, at the earliest, half-way through the marching season, when some of the most dangerous marches will have already taken place.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The hon. Gentleman's second proposition does not follow, and I am afraid that the first really shows that he is a subscriber to the Red Queen style of making decisions: verdict first, evidence afterwards.

Mr. McNamara: You are the Duke of Plaza-Toro!

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I thought that I had heard what the hon. Gentleman had to say. He carried some responsibilities for these affairs until he was relieved of them. I prefer to take the advantage of two months' consultation, which would, particularly with good will, leave time for any resulting legislation to be put in place during the coming summer, when the principally contentious marches are likely to occur.

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): The Secretary of State drew attention to the interview given by the former Chief Constable. Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that some of us were surprised by the Chief Constable's attitude, but that we have listened with stunned amazement to statements today that the security forces should not be piggy in the middle? It was my impression that we maintained the army and police to be piggy in the middle to protect the law-abiding from the violent, armed conspiracy of the IRA. Is the Secretary of State not yet aware that, until he faces up to the fact that the IRA is committed to ensuring that there is no community agreement, and acts accordingly, he will be in constant trouble over marches? When will he live in the real world instead of the fantasy world that is detailed in the report?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I do not mind being criticised for what I have said, but I take mild exception to being criticised for what I have not said. I have not said that the security forces should not be piggy in the middle, as the hon. Gentleman put it. Of course it is their unpleasant and dangerous job, if hostilities break out, to keep the peace, and that means being in the middle. We have to discover the best means of ensuring that the security forces do not get engaged in occasions that can take place with enjoyment and peacefully, as the report points out.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Earlier today at Question Time, the Secretary of State, speaking of Bloody Sunday, said that we should not look back so much as look forward; but do not some of the most provocative and sectarian marches in Northern Ireland commemorate events of centuries ago? As for the IRA, did not Drumcree provide the propaganda that it so desperately requires, as did the terrible and tragic events of Bloody Sunday 25 years ago? Is not that also one of the lessons that we should learn?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: When one looks back at the events of last summer, one can see examples of atrocious behaviour among both sides of the community. A member of the RUC on duty at that time would not have distinguished much difference in unpleasantness between what was thrown by one side or the other. It is in the light of that reflection that we need to look forward. Of course we have to take account of the events of last summer: were it not for those events, this body might not have been asked to do the job that it has been given. We have the report and we should do our best to assess the merits of what it recommends and then take appropriate action.

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): Is it not the case that the report tells us nothing new? It tells us that 80 per cent. of society in Northern Ireland is tolerant of marches and that 80 per cent. is tolerant of protest. International protocols allow for that, anyway. Is it not the case that the 0.03 per cent. aggravation that occurred last year during marches was orchestrated by IRA ex-convicts, Mr. Brendan McKenna and Mr. Gerard Rice? Is not this tome a result of the action of those IRA felons? Would we not get everything out of proportion if we catered for such people in the manner that is suggested?

How will it help the Chief Constable if he disagrees with a recommendation of the commission and he defies the commission and goes to the Secretary of State, who agrees with it? For operational reasons, the Chief Constable would also have to defy the Secretary of State. Where will the Chief Constable's friends be? Will he not be all the more piggy in the middle? Should not we simplify the process by having registration and a code of conduct and letting him get on with the job that he is qualified to do?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: That solution is one that can perfectly properly be suggested in the consultation period that I am offering. It is at one end of the spectrum. The hon. Gentleman questions whether the report tells us anything new, but that depends on what one has believed in the past. The trouble with objective truths is that people tend to resist the suggestion that they are true by reference to whichever person happens to be uttering them. The report in any event provides an independent voice to set out matters that we may have known already; at least it is independent and cannot be charged with partisan desires to distort.

Dr. Joe Hendron (Belfast, West): My father is buried in the Catholic graveyard at Drumcree, so I understand the situation there well. The Secretary of State will recall the meeting that I had with him on the evening of 12 July regarding the parade to be held the next day on the Ormeau road. I know that he will agree that the people of Northern Ireland, from both communities, and in some areas more than others, are deeply concerned about what might happen this summer.

I listened carefully to what the Secretary of State said, and I appreciate his point about two months' consultation. Like others, I would have thought that most of the consultation was already done, but I accept his point that he will consult party leaders and others. Surely a few weeks—perhaps until the end of February—would be long enough for such consultations, and a Bill could then be introduced to enact the necessary legislation. I believe that that is what the people of both communities would want, so that the matter can be settled before the general election.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Of course I recall the meeting to which the hon. Gentleman refers. I also recall his genuine concern and the helpful way in which he always approaches such matters. It is a matter of judgment: I believe that less than two months would not be realistic if one wants seriously to test opinion and to use the results in a helpful way. It is essential that whatever we do should carry the best prospect of acceptability, and that will be the case if we have a tightly focused, time-limited two-month period of consultation on that aspect of the report.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): As the Secretary of State is being criticised by those on both sides of the argument in Northern Ireland, does he feel that he has just about got it right? His response is not negative; it is to accept one limb of the argument—the seven principles in the conclusion—and to have time-limited discussions in connection with the second limb. Many might think that that was just about the right approach in the extremely difficult circumstances that exist in Northern Ireland.

Among the matters to be discussed in that eight-week period will be the triggering mechanism for specific marches to be examined. The report says that such examination is to be triggered by the police, the commission or the public. A great deal of attention needs to be paid to which groups of the public trigger the provisions and to whether they are genuinely representative, or bogus groups set up for the purpose.

Perhaps wider principles, such as a Bill of Rights guaranteeing human rights, should be thought about in the process, even if at a later stage.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his remarks. The ideal is not to be criticised from both sides of the spectrum, but to be applauded from both sides. However, if one is so criticised, one can take some comfort from the possibility that one has got it right, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for inferring that he thinks that we have. The trigger is a difficult one. Someone suggested to me that there is a danger that one is simply creating a factory for grievances. We do not want to do that. The report makes it clear that in the vast majority of parades it would not be appropriate for the commission to be involved. One of the functions of the consultation period is to consider the appropriate trigger.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I hope that the Secretary of State will forgive me if I refrain from applauding him on this occasion. May I remind him that Dr. North, who is not regarded as a radical legal thinker, lists in appendix 1 those persons and bodies providing submissions and contributions to the review team. The list runs to six pages. Is it the Secretary of State's intention to invite those persons and bodies to submit their considered opinions of the findings in the report? If that is not his intention and he intends to consult others, why will it take two months? Why not a month, as the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron) suggested, so that legislation can pass through the House?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: We can argue whether it should be one month, six weeks, two months, three months or whatever. It is left at large and one has to make a judgment. Of course I do not intend to consult everyone who appears in appendix 1. I have said that it is right for public representatives and those who lead bodies that are directly interested in the subject to express their views on that aspect of the commission's report. There was a time when most people, not least in the Liberal party, thought that it was rather a good thing to take soundings. That is what I wish to do. I do not wish to incur the additional charge that I am adopting, hook, line and sinker and without even a couple of months of consultation a radical departure that also has certain constitutional connotations. If I did not adopt this course, it would be a charge properly brought.

Food Safety

4.36 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Douglas Hogg): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement on arrangements for handling food safety.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and I are announcing today, together with my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Government's intention to create an independent food safety council, whose chairman will be our main adviser on food safety.

The council will advise Ministers on food safety and related matters. Its membership will be drawn from a wide range of fields with an interest in the safety of the food supply. It will include both scientific experts and lay members, including consumers. The council and the food safety adviser will report jointly to my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Health, for Scotland and for Wales, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and myself as Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Our intention is that the council and the adviser should be free to advise on any matters related to the safety, quality, labelling and authenticity of food. They should also be available as an authoritative source of advice to the general public. The council will make an annual report to Ministers, which will be laid before Parliament. The conclusions of its meetings will be published, as will any other formal reports that it may make to Ministers.

Those arrangements will strengthen the existing network of advisory committees, but will not detract from the role of the individual expert committees. The food safety adviser will work closely with the chief medical officers. Although reporting to Ministers, he or she will not be a civil servant.

In addition, I have today formally appointed the chief medical officer, Sir Kenneth Calman, as adviser to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on public health matters. That formalises arrangements that, in practice, have applied for many years. That appointment took place today. We will be making all the other appointments to which I referred—the council and the chairman—after the general election.

These measures will provide an important strengthening of the arrangements for handling food safety matters in this country. Our proposals will introduce a valuable new element of independent oversight, while retaining the vital principle that food safety must be a matter on which Ministers are directly accountable to the House. The new arrangements will provide for independent advice, publicly given, from a source that the public can trust and will help to assure consumers that they can be confident in the safety and quality of their food. I commend those arrangements to the House.

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): Is the Minister aware that there will be widespread agreement with his quite explicit statement today that the general public have lost confidence in the Government on food safety issues? I remind him that, in the face of arguments from bodies such as the Consumers Association and the Labour party, he and his predecessors persistently argued that the present arrangements were right and that no change was required. Indeed, less than a year ago, the Prime Minister told my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition that our calls for change were "public relations nonsense."

However, I put it to the Minister that the new arrangements he is proposing today are inadequate. As far as the official Opposition are concerned, they are no substitute for an open and independent food standards agency with real authority. A food safety adviser and a part-time council will command neither the resources nor the authority to effectively tackle these important issues.

May I put three short questions to the Minister? First, why have the Government changed their minds and decided that the machinery of government in this area now needs to be changed? Why have they accepted that argument? Secondly, what resources will the council and the food safety adviser control to support them in their tasks? Thirdly, can he confirm that the Government do not intend to implement any of these proposals this side of the general election?

Finally, I put it to the Minister that, while public relations and presentation matter in this area, what is really important is the need to effectively tackle the underlying issues—issues such as avoiding the huge BSE-CJD crisis and preventing the recent tragic loss of life from E. coli in central Scotland. Not only are these belated proposals inadequate, but every day it becomes clearer that neither the Minister nor the Government are up to the task of tackling effectively these desperately important food safety issues.

Mr. Hogg: As I said in my statement, it is our intention to make the appointments, other than that of Sir Kenneth Calman, after the general election.

Let us understand the reasons why we are taking this action. It is perfectly true that the public have become cautious—indeed, sceptical—when Ministers and officials identified with the Departments talk about food safety. There are a variety of reasons for that feeling, and although, in my view, it is quite unfounded, it is a fact, and we have to address facts of that nature. My Department already has access to a range of independent professional advice, but what is important now is to try to set out a set of institutions that make those facts plain and are capable of reassuring the public.

The Labour party's position, as I understand the hon. Gentleman, is to propose an agency; but let us examine what he is talking about. It amounts to this: first, that the agency is to be accountable to Ministers—that is the desire of the House—but, secondly, that it is to be the implementing executive authority. In other words, it would be commenting on policies that it had implemented itself. It would have every reason, therefore, to defend that which it was implementing.

Our proposals are much more imaginative than that, because what we have done is to separate the functions. Ministers remain responsible for the formulation and implementation of policy; they have to explain policy and, when necessary, defend it. The council and the adviser have a different role: they are independent—they are not civil servants—they are free-standing, and they are not responsible for the implementation of policy. They can therefore stand back and, in a public and authoritative

way, comment on the general issues and then, if they want to, criticise the implementation of policy as done by Ministers. That is done consciously and intentionally to create a rod for our own back. That is what we intend to do.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): Has the Minister actually read the Pennington report on the E. coli outbreak in my constituency, which was the immediate trigger for this change of front on the part of the Government? Professor Pennington recommended that the outbreak control team should be independent of the health board and of the local authority, and that it should be headed by a person who can make decisions. If that is true of the agency delivering the service in the event of an outbreak, how much more true is it of the advice and recommendations to Ministers in the planning of the process?

Mr. Hogg: In the first place, the E. coli outbreak is not the trigger for my announcement today. This policy has been in formulation for many months.

One needs to go to the essential reason why we are introducing the proposals; it is to recognise that there is a public scepticism about what Ministers and officials say about food safety. What we want to do is separate the functions so that Ministers remain responsible for policy, its formulation and implementation, and for that they are accountable to the House, which is the proper place for them to be accountable.

At the same time, and separate from that, we are setting up an authoritative, independent and prestigious body which will express views in a public way on the general questions of food safety, and will also, if it so chooses, express views on narrower questions relating to the implementation of policy. By dividing the functions, we have brought about a very high degree of reassurance.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Will my right hon. and learned Friend accept that the majority of hon. Members who look at this matter sensibly will accept that it is right and proper that steps should be taken to ensure that public confidence can, at all times, be restored in the way in which the bodies he announced will set out to do? It does little credit to the Opposition when they attempt to turn this into a political slanging match. Will he give an assurance, however, that it is not the intention that the measures announced should be a criticism of the agriculture industry, whose members have striven so hard to try to rectify the problems in the past?

Mr. Hogg: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for the generous way in which he has received the proposals. The agriculture industry, along with many other interest groups, will be represented on the council, but in the end it will be for the council to determine into which matters it wishes to inquire and what its views are. To that extent, I cannot fetter in any way the council's discretion; nor would I wish to do so. Public reassurance and confidence depends on the independence of the council and the adviser and the regard in which they are held by the public as a whole.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): The Minister has on several occasions today admitted honestly that the public perceive him, his Government colleagues and his scientific advisers to be basically untrustworthy and incredible on matters of food safety; I acknowledge that he recognises that fact. However, given that he is making this announcement in the form of an election promise and not for immediate action, why does he believe that that perception will now be transformed?

Mr. Hogg: We are all in the business of facing facts, and, after the experience of the past 12 months regarding BSE, it would be idle and foolish for me not to accept that the public do not have the degree of confidence that I would like them to have and which I believe would be justified, when Ministers and officials associated with Departments talk about food safety. They do not, and that is a fact; and we must address that issue.

We have tried to create a separation of powers, a separation of functions, which is reassuring in itself, and we are determined to ensure that the people appointed to the council generally and to the post of adviser are people of great distinction—not civil servants, not beholden to the Government of the day, not beholden to Departments, but distinguished people who carry the authority of their own knowledge and standing among their peers. I believe that that will have a profound effect, for the good, on public confidence.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Can my right hon. and learned friend think of anything that might have been done over the last 10 years, had the special adviser already been in post? Is it not a fact that the Government have always sought the very best scientific advice and that that will continue under the new arrangement, but that, if it helps to give the public and the consumer greater reassurance about the safety of British food—which is the best in the world—that is all to the good?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend makes an important point, because a range of very important independent advisory committees already exists. The best known is the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, whose chairman, Professor Pattison, is a man of the greatest distinction. We have relied heavily on the advice of those advisory committees, and on SEAC in particular, regarding BSE. However, what we have in mind goes beyond the area covered by the specialist committees, will be more general in its scope and will be a great deal more public, and that is our intention.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I have listened carefully to the Minister. Who will have the final say as to who is appointed to the council? Will it be the fiefdom of Sir Kenneth Calman, a highly regarded individual, or will there be a ministerial input as to who will serve on the council? Who will pay for the council, and what is the estimated budget?

Mr. Hogg: As I said in my statement, the council will be appointed by my right hon. Friends. A number of my right hon. Friends are appointing Secretaries of State or Ministers for these purposes. Ultimately, the Ministers—my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health for example, and myself—will make the appointment, but it is in our interests to appoint people of standing and authority who will command respect.

Few people in the House who know anything about it would criticise the membership of our various advisory sub-committees, such as the Advisory Committee on

[Mr. Hogg]

Microbiological Safety of Food, the Advisory Committee on Novel Food and Processes, the Advisory Committee on Pesticides, and so on. I believe that everyone would accept that the membership of those specialist committees is a good one. SEAC is well known to the House, and Professor Pattison is a man of great distinction.

We intend to ensure that the membership of the council is as distinguished as we can make it, because it is in our interests that that should be the case.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): Does my right hon. and learned friend agree that, if he were to appoint someone with the independence, professionalism and appropriate expertise of successive chief medical officers of health, it would go a long way to reassure consumers and increase confidence? Has not that confidence been eroded in recent years by so-called food experts, who make outrageous statements, which are worked up by the media and are very difficult for him and his colleagues to disprove?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend makes an important point in the latter part of his question. As to the former part, the status of the chief medical officer is a good analogy. It is not quite the same, but it is very similar to the concept that we have in mind. I believe that most hon. Members would accept that, when the chief medical officer speaks, he speaks with real independence and authority. We are seeking to create someone very similar in connection with food safety.

We are likely to appoint as food safety adviser a scientist or someone from that type of background, rather than a generalist such as a lawyer, an official or even, dare I say it, a former Member of the House.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Does the Minister accept that, in the view of Sir David Carter, the chief medical officer of Scotland, and Professor Pennington, some of the most useful and constructive elements on E. coli came from West Lothian council, represented by Crawford Morgan and Alec Campbell, because they had knowledge of the first major outbreak—the Red House Dairy outbreak? Will the Minister ask whoever is appointed, at a very early stage, to ask West Lothian council to present its detailed and constructive views on E. coli?

Mr. Hogg: That goes outwith the scope of the statement, but I am sure that the food safety adviser, the chairman of the council, will in due time have his attention drawn to all relevant matters, which might include the point made by the hon. Gentleman; in any event, it might be possible for the hon. Gentleman, if he wins his seat, to put those points to the chairman of the council.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): I welcome the appointment of the council. Further to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander), I too am anxious that the scaremongers who have caused huge damage to our food industry over recent years do not talk themselves on to the council. Will my right hon. and learned Friend say precisely how the people serving on the council will be recruited? Will it be by public advertisement and after due consultation?

Mr. Hogg: I draw a slight distinction for these purposes, if I might, between the chairman and the council members. It is likely that, in the case of the chairman of the council, the food safety adviser, we shall advertise publicly, but we may also employ headhunters. For council members, it is very likely that we shall advertise publicly; we may also go through the appropriate channels for suggestions.

We are very anxious that the council, with its chairman, should be seen to be a prestigious, independent body, so we shall seek candidates who command respect.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Is this the Government's response to the call made earlier this month by the president of the National Farmers Union of Scotland for a food safety body that commands the support and confidence of consumers? Cannot the Minister grasp the fact that we do not need just another advisory council? What consumers and every part of the industry require, and what Parliament should demand, is an effective food safety agency with executive power to control the whole issue.

Mr. Hogg: A moment's reflection will make it plain to the hon. Gentleman that what we are proposing is infinitely better than what he just suggested. I suspect that he is suggesting three things, although he only said two. He wants an agency with executive responsibility. He wants that agency to explain and justify the safety of food, explaining and justifying the actions that have been taken by the agency. It would be fair to say that he would like the agency to be accountable to Ministers.

The problem—or one of the problems—with what the hon. Gentleman suggests is that the agency, on his model, would be responsible, not only for implementing policy, but for justifying and defending it. That does not seem to me to be a very sensible way to proceed, because the agency would have every incentive to justify that which it had done.

We are proposing a separation of functions: the Minister is responsible for the formulation, defence and explanation of policy, but others who are not responsible for the formulation of policy and have no inherent reason to defend it will tell the public their opinion, first as to the generality of the question and, secondly, as to any specific points relating to policy that the council and the adviser might choose.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, whichever party is in power, a strong Ministry of Food and Agriculture is necessary? If it were replaced, as the Labour party suggests, by one Minister of State in the Department of the Environment and one in the Department of Health, our standing in Europe would be further diminished. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the general public, apart from the food fascists, need much reassurance, and that the appointment will reassure the public that much of what we do is the best in Europe, and will identify the necessary adjustments?

Mr. Hogg: Both parts of my hon. Friend's question are very sound. Let me focus on the first part, regarding the

status of the Minister of Agriculture. From time to time, the Labour party has suggested downgrading the status of the Minister of Agriculture to that of a Minister of State. That would be a grave error, because the pressures in Europe for the reform of the common agricultural policy are great and will gather speed.

It is vital that the interests of British agriculture are properly represented at the Agriculture Council. All the Ministers at the Agriculture Council are of Cabinet level. If the Opposition argue for the status of the British Minister of Agriculture to be diminished, the interests of British agriculture will be gravely damaged

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): Can the Minister tell the House why it has taken the Government so long to announce the setting up of such a puny and inadequate body in response to concerns that go beyond BSE, E. coli and baby milk, and encompass issues such as Alar in apple juice, salmonella in eggs, organophosphates in root vegetables, listeria in cheese—the list goes on? Does he not understand that a part-time food safety adviser is no substitute for an independent food standards agency to reassure the public, particularly people who are bringing up children and want to do the best for them, and to enforce the rights of consumers to enjoy the best standards of food hygiene and safety?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Lady has not thought through the policy that she or those on her Front Bench are trying to put across. Their concept of an agency involves at least two elements: first, that the agency is responsible for implementing food safety policy, and secondly, that the agency is responsible for reassuring the public as to the success of the policy that it itself has introduced and implemented.

That system would not reassure the public. Such an agency would have every incentive, personal and political, to justify the action that it has previously taken. What we are doing is much more dramatic. We are separating the functions, so that the food safety council or the adviser can say publicly to the House or to the public at large that Ministers have got it wrong, if that is the council's considered view.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that all Conservative Members wish him well with his latest development of policy? It is important that we reassure consumers of food safety and of the value of the product. Can he assure the House that, in arriving at today's announcement, he and his ministerial colleagues and officials carefully considered the example of the Food and Drug Administration in the United States, to see whether any appropriate lessons could be learnt from that structure and approach? Many of my constituents would favour that model.

Mr. Hogg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support. Yes, indeed, we did look at a number of models, and at the Food and Drug Administration in particular. The FDA is not quite as some people think it is. For example, meat and poultry safety in the United States is the responsibility not of the FDA, but of the Department of Agriculture.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Will the Minister reflect on my experience in dealing with his Ministry on a relevant matter? Following unsatisfactory correspondence in 1995, I raised during the March BSE debate the unsatisfactory situation in regard to contaminated and condemned meat. The Ministry seemed to be negligently complacent about the matter, although it may now have begun to realise that a serious problem exists.

My local authority has taken the lead on behalf of several others, and has incurred enormous costs in pursuing the matter in the interests of public health. When the council approached the Department of the Environment the other day for support because of the enormous costs that it has incurred, it received short shrift.

Does the Minister understand that those of us who are aware of the problem will wonder how he can find the resources for yet another quango, and deny them to those who do not need imagination because they are—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. That is a very long question.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman's comments sound like a criticism of the much more expensive policies for an agency advanced by those on his Front Bench, or a request for additional public spending. On the first part of his question, the fact that he was able to raise the matter with Ministers, and the fact that, under our system, they are accountable demonstrate the good sense of our approach.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Minister aware that the public will take the view that, every time there is a crisis, the Government make up their approach to food safety as they go along? With BSE, E. coli, and even dioxins about eight years ago, some of us called for a separation of duties. The problem with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is that it is linked to the rich farming lobby. Until there is a separation of duties, the public will understand that the Tory party running the Ministry cares only about the rich farmers who line its pockets and vote for it.

Mr. Hogg: In rather a convoluted way, I think the hon. Gentleman is giving me his support. As I have explained to the House, we are separating the functions in a dramatic way. We are making a division between the function of formulating and carrying through policy, which will be the responsibility of Ministers accountable to the House, and the function of the council, which will be to form views on food safety and related matters, and to communicate them publicly to the country, to Parliament and elsewhere. That division of functions is at the heart of our proposals—and, incidentally, is denied by Members on the hon. Gentleman's own Front Bench.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): May I urge a little humility on the Minister when he replies to questions? After all, he has an awful lot to be humble about, in terms of his recent track record. Does he not grasp the fact that no one will believe that any food safety organisation or committee will be genuinely impartial if it must report to a Minister in a producing Department such as his?

Unless the consumer and the producer are kept separate, no one will believe that a Minister such as himself is not primarily concerned with the interests of the

[Mr. Tony Banks]

producer. Although I do not expect him to be the Minister reporting to the House on appointments, can he tell us what sector of the economy he expects the new chairman to come from? Will the animal welfare organisations be involved? It is the way in which we have been treating animals that has led to so many diseases creeping into the human food chain.

Mr. Hogg: There is a pleasing irony in the hon. Gentleman urging me to be humble. Nevertheless, I shall take advice whence it comes.

On the broad question, we have every interest in choosing as members of the council independent-minded, prestigious people who speak with real authority. We have every interest, too, in ensuring that the chairman of the council is such a person, so that he or she speaks with real authority when expressing opinions. The chairman and the council will be under a duty to go public with their views. For example, they will make an annual report to Ministers, which will be laid before Parliament, and the conclusions of their meetings and of any formal reports that they may make during the year will be published. Those people will have authority because of their background and experience. They will also wish to be judged well by their peers, and I think that that will greatly enhance the authority of their pronouncements.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am prepared to take questions from those hon. Members who are already standing, but perhaps the questions could be shorter and snappier.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Is this not an entirely fraudulent proposal, given the Government's neglect of food safety enforcement? Is it not a fact that, in 1992, environmental health officers served 22,000 improvement notices, but that in 1995 that figure plummeted to 2,000—barely one tenth of its former level? Next Monday, the House will consider the revenue support grant settlement. Why do the Government propose to cut the other services block that directly affects the resourcing of environmental health departments up and down the country? Let the Minister answer this point—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I asked for short and snappy questions. I call Mr. Hogg.

Mr. Hogg: To be short and snappy: the hon. Gentleman is talking nonsense.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Has the Minister studied the incident that occurred in the United States in 1989, when 37 people died and 1,500 were disabled after eating a food supplement that had been genetically modified and which contained a toxin previously unknown to science? Why has genetically modified food been mixed with other food in this country so that it cannot be identified?

Although Asda and Iceland have said that they will ban genetically modified food, they cannot deliver on that promise because of the mix-up. Genetically modified food in confectionary form is on sale within the Palace. This experiment with human health is being carried out not for the benefit of consumers, but for the benefit of foreign companies' profits. Will the Minister give an assurance that, in future, consumers may choose between foods that are genetically modified and those that are not, as they cannot do so at present?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Questions are getting long again.

Mr. Hogg: I know that there is concern about genetically modified foodstuffs. However, it is a general issue, and I shall not elaborate in the context of this question. The fact that there is much public anxiety about genetically modified foodstuffs underlines the importance of our proposal. The Food Safety Council would be in a position to address precisely that question—together with related questions of labelling and so forth—and to make its views known to the House and to the public at large. That is a very powerful argument as to why we should adopt that policy.

Business of the House

5.12 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I should like to make a statement about the business for next week:

MONDAY 3 FEBRUARY—Motions on the English Revenue Support Grant Reports. Details will be given in the *Official Report.*

TUESDAY 4 FEBRUARY—Remaining stages of the Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill.

Motions on the Welsh Revenue Support Grant Reports. Details will be given in the *Official Report.*

WEDNESDAY 5 FEBRUARY—Until 2 pm, debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Opposition Day [4th allotted day].

Until about 7 pm, a debate on health. Followed by a debate on investing in early years, primary and secondary education. Both debates will arise on motions in the name of the Liberal Democrats.

THURSDAY 6 FEBRUARY—Debate on the Royal Air Force on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 7 FEBRUARY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 10 FEBRUARY—Until about 7 pm, Second Reading of the Merchant Shipping and Maritime Security Bill [Lords].

Second Reading of the Welsh Development Agency Bill.

[*Monday 3 February—Relevant Reports: Local Government Finance Report (England) 1997-98; Special Grant Report (No. 23); Limitation of Council Tax and Precepts (Relevant Notional Amounts) Report (England) 1997-98.*

Wednesday 5 February—Relevant Reports: Local Government Finance Report (Wales) 1997-98; Special Grant Report (Wales) 1997; Limitation of Council Tax (Relevant Notional Amounts) Report (Wales) 1997-98.

Wednesday 12 February: European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Community Document: 5217/97, Commission Report on Raw Tobacco. Relevant European Legislation Committee Report: HC 36-xi (1996-97).

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community Document: 5147/96, Takeover Bids. Relevant European Legislation Committee Reports: HC 51-xxix (1995-96) and HC 51-xiv (1995-96).] Madam Deputy Speaker, I regret that, once again, I am unable to go much beyond the business for the first week—but at least it makes the business statement shorter and snappier.

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): In view of Madam Speaker's statement on Tuesday—which was widely welcomed on both sides of the House—about Parliament being brought into disrepute by sleaze allegations involving a small number of hon. Members, will the Lord President, in his capacity as Chairman of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges, confirm to the House that that Committee and the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards are working flat out to try to conclude all outstanding matters as soon as possible? I am sure that such confirmation would not constitute a breach of the confidentiality of the Committee.

The House will have noted that there is to be a debate next week on the Royal Air Force. While I am sure that no one objects to it, will the Leader of the House ensure that Ministers who speak in the debate are able to explain in detail the possible consequences for the RAF and other parts of the defence budget of the Government's decision to spend £60 million of taxpayers' money on the new royal yacht?

Will the Leader of the House comment on the point of order that was raised yesterday by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) regarding the answering of written parliamentary questions? The Leader of the House may know that that parliamentary question has now been answered, but hon. Members should not have to make points of order in the House to elicit answers from Ministers. In view of my experience, can he say whether the normal convention of Ministers always meeting hon. Members to discuss local matters remains operational, following two refusals by Education Ministers to meet a delegation from Mirfield in my constituency?

Can time be found in the near future for a debate on an issue that the Leader of the House did not cover in his statement: the consequences of bus deregulation? I draw his attention to a report entitled "Making Connections" which was published yesterday and which the *Yorkshire Evening Post* summarised as saying:

"bus services will never improve while profits are put ahead of customers".

As the Secretary of State for the Environment co-chaired the body that wrote the report, surely the House should debate the matter.

Finally, in view of his answers in recent weeks, has the Leader of the House considered making space in our Question Time rota for questions to the member of the Government who is usually known as the chairman of the Conservative party? If the Leader of the House cannot provide precise information today about the Wirral, South by-election, can the chairman of the Conservative party come to the Dispatch Box?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Lady will not be surprised to learn that I, like other hon. Members, welcomed the measured and balanced way in which Madam Speaker commented on Monday on behalf of the House on an issue about which we all feel strongly. Understandably, the hon. Lady asked me, as Chairman of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges—she is a distinguished member of that body—to confirm that the Committee is making every effort to conclude consideration of the various matters before us. I certainly confirm that—with the wholehearted support of all Committee members. The Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards is also playing an active role. Many of the matters are complex and extremely important and they must be considered properly, but we shall proceed with all possible speed.

I cannot predict the contents of the speech of the Minister who will speak in the Royal Air Force debate, as I have not discussed it with him. However, I shall draw to his attention the hon. Lady's point about what she would like to be in it.

[Mr. Newton]

The hon. Lady referred to the point of order raised yesterday by the hon. Member for Perry Bar, who I see sitting, diligently, beside her. The hon. Gentleman knows that I took action as soon as he raised his point of order to ensure that, by the end of the day, his question had been answered. Indeed, he has received a letter of apology from my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary. The implication of that is clear. I accept, of course, that such errors should not occur and that we should make every effort to avoid them. I think that it is clear from my right hon. Friend's letter to the hon. Gentleman that he, too, accepts that. To put it simply and straightforwardly, it was an error. Every effort will be made to prevent such an error occurring again.

In the end, individual Ministers must make judgments in particular circumstances on whether to meet delegations. I understand why the hon. Lady has raised the matter. I am not in a position to comment in detail, because I was hitherto unaware of the facts that she stated. I shall ensure that her concern is brought to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment.

I have not yet had a chance to study the report on bus deregulation. I have, however, seen some of the press reports. The Government's position is that we welcome the independent report. We shall be studying the recommendations carefully.

I thought that the hon. Lady gave a rather unbalanced account of the bus industry, but I shall not go on about that at length. There is no doubt, however—it is certainly observable in the areas with which I am concerned—that deregulation and privatisation have brought a great deal of innovation, including new types of bus, which in many instances have provided greater flexibility. Perhaps the hon. Lady should have mentioned that investment by the industry in new buses has increased in each of the past four years.

Finally, I shall take up the hon. Lady's rather ingenious point about the Wirral, South by-election. I am not in a position to add to what I said last week, which I accept was not very much. I have no plans for making changes in the questions rota for the remainder of the Parliament.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): During next week, will my right hon. Friend recall the statement made by our right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, supported by those on the Opposition Front Bench, about the need to work for simplification of tax law? Will he consider that the Procedure Committee has now reported on a procedure that should, perhaps, be used to bring about simplification? Will my right hon. Friend consult the Opposition spokesman to ascertain whether a debate can be held—and perhaps action taken—fairly soon to ensure that that procedure is in place so that the work on simplification can proceed immediately in a new Parliament?

Mr. Newton: I think that I might reveal that my right hon. Friend had already marked my card on that matter. He did so less formally last night. In my usual way, I offered a cautious but sympathetic reply. I shall offer again this afternoon, more formally, a cautious but sympathetic reply.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): First, may I acknowledge the Opposition day on Wednesday, which the Leader of the House has arranged, to which we look forward?

Before we get into the general election campaign, will it be possible to have a debate on the independence of the Office for National Statistics, which is regularly accused of being led by the Government and doing the Government's bidding, but probably no more so than in the article today that suggests that, yesterday, it had prepared for the Department of Health, at the Department's request, statistics about health service spending which showed that official spending on the health service had decreased by £1 billion in the past three years? As the office was required to produce the information for "Social Trends", to be published today, and it was spotted yesterday, a new document was produced which showed that NHS spending had increased in the past three years.

There is decreasing credibility in an office of government that is open to manipulation by the governing party of the day. Whichever party is in power, it is important that offices of information and statistics are independent of any political party and able to provide independent facts, both for politicians and for the public.

Mr. Newton: I do not accept that there has been any manipulation. Independent or otherwise, the office is as capable of making mistakes as any other. This morning, the author of "Social Trends" said:

"The original chart was incorrect . . . we found we had been using the wrong figures".

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Is my right hon. Friend yet in a position to say anything about a debate on the integrity of the United Kingdom? May I draw his attention to early-day motion 464, and express the hope that the Government will give a speedy passage to the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Bill, which would protect the rights of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, and which has completed all its stages in another place?

[*That this House welcomes the passage of the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Bill through the House of Lords; and urges Her Majesty's Government to ensure the speedy completion of its remaining stages so that approximately 5000 ethnic minority non-Chinese living in Hong Kong can apply for British citizenship and the right of abode in the United Kingdom as a recognition of their contribution to the life of Hong Kong and their loyalty to the Crown, and in order to give them the same degree of security as those who have either full British citizenship or Chinese nationality.*]

Mr. Newton: I am not in a position to add to the generally sympathetic reply that I gave my hon. Friend last week. As I have already said, at present I am not able to go beyond Monday 10 February in giving an indication of business. I continue, however, to bear the wish to have such a debate very much in mind.

I shall consider what my hon. Friend has said about the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Bill. I should make it clear that the position of ethnic minorities is already adequately safeguarded, in our view, by the guarantee that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave in March 1996.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): To take up the first issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury

(Mrs. Taylor), we do not doubt that "every effort" is being made, "at all possible speed" to draw the matter to a conclusion. We know, however, that battalions of lawyers are involved. It is a Jarndyce *v.* Jarndyce situation.

I am one of the few who was in this place at the time of Profumo, when Iain Macleod was the Leader of the House. Iain Macleod, in his position, summoned colleagues to ask them some very direct questions. Once present colleagues have answered the very direct questions posed by the programme and the book "Sleaze"—it was written by David Leigh and Ed Vulliamy—two things can happen. Either they admit that what is said is true, in which case certain consequences follow, or they do not. If they do not, they must be asked to go to lawyers.

The question then arises about payment for lawyers. That is something that the House had better consider. There is no hope under the present system of getting—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I invite the hon. Member and all others to put their points in question form.

Mr. Newton: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's strength of feeling. I must make the point, however, that it is not much more than a year since the House, after the work of a Select Committee, which I chaired, had an extensive debate and put in place the revised machinery for investigating complaints about hon. Members. The important independent ingredient—as many people thought—was injected by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. In the first instance, it is for the commissioner to investigate complaints and then to report to the Select Committee, which can take evidence if it wishes to do so. It would be wrong to seek to interfere with those processes in the middle of an investigation. If we sought to revise those processes substantially, that would lead only to further delay.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): May I ask my right hon. Friend to arrange an early debate on education? Has he read the report in tonight's *Evening Standard*, in which it is stated that 43 per cent. of parents in Islington have followed the lead of the pied piper of Islington and opted to have their children educated outside the local comprehensive schools? Does not that demonstrate the poor standards in Islington, the merits of choice as introduced by the Government and the hypocrisy of those who voted against the expansion of grant-maintained schools earlier this week?

Mr. Newton: Happily, those on the Liberal Benches have arranged for just such a debate next week. I look forward, subject to his catching your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, to my hon. Friend's vigorous contribution.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 457, which is headed "Wrexham Central Station and Railtrack"?

[*That this House deplores the attempt by Railtrack to close Wrexham Central Station in a bid to increase profits from the development of surrounding land; notes the findings of the RUCC for Wales following a recent public inquiry that the closure of the station and its replacement by one some 400 yards further away from Wrexham town centre would cause hardship to the town and to rail users and should not be allowed to go ahead; further notes that Railtrack has ignored these recommendations and is seeking to persuade the Rail Regulator not to accept the RUCC findings; and calls on Railtrack to abandon its closure proposals, produce plans for development keeping Wrexham Central Station roughly in its present central position and to start behaving in a manner suitable to that of a rail company and not a property company.*]

The motion was tabled today and has already succeeded in attracting 113 signatures. If the right hon. Gentleman reads the motion, he will find that Railtrack is seeking to make development profits for its shareholders at the expense of the travelling public. The matter is serious, because we need to preserve our railway system. Will the right hon. Gentleman be able to find some time before the Session ends for a debate on the important matter to which the motion refers?

Mr. Newton: I rather doubt that I shall be able to find time for such a debate, but my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is due to answer questions on Monday 10 February. Meanwhile, the hon. Gentleman will know that procedures are laid down in the Railways Act 1993 that cover matters such as the one that he has raised. Anyone who is aggrieved by a decision made by the Rail Regulator has a right to refer that decision to the Secretary of State for Transport, who is thus in a quasi-judicial position and would be unable now to comment on the merits or otherwise of such a case.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Will my right hon. Friend find time to have a debate next week on extradition? Is he aware of a tragic case earlier this week? The Devon and Cornwall police had arranged for a murder suspect to be under surveillance in Australia, but the suspect committed suicide. Is he also aware of the numerous examples of the failure of other European countries to extradite terrorist suspects when there is considerable evidence against them? Is it not high time that we exposed the lack of co-operation between European Union countries on this key issue, which is of enormous importance to all our citizens?

Mr. Newton: I am unable to comment on the particular case to which my hon. Friend referred. I shall be happy to draw his concerns and the points that he made to the attention of my right hon. Friends.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): May we have a debate on the use made by Government Departments of postcode areas to collect information and to decide on the distribution of awards and grants? Post-code areas are for the administrative convenience of the Post Office, but their extensive use by Government Departments creates anomalies. For instance, the S12 and S18 areas in my constituency have not been triggered for cold weather payments, but the neighbouring S31, and the S42 and S44, which are further away, were triggered before Christmas because of the weather conditions. Different areas are linked to different stations. Some hold the peculiar belief that areas with a low number, such as

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

S12 and S18, are part of South Yorkshire and are not in Derbyshire. That confusion is in the minds of Government Departments and not in the Post Office's mind.

Mr. Newton: It is five years since I was responsible for the detailed administration of the cold weather payments scheme and, given the hon. Gentleman's question, I am relieved about that. I shall ensure that those of my right hon. Friends who are currently responsible for the scheme have their attention draw to the hon. Gentleman's point.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Can my right hon. Friend find time for perhaps a small debate in the near future on the need for objective, continuous and reliable data on economic and social issues in order to develop sound policy? That would give the House an opportunity to make the case for the continuation rather than the scrapping of the general household survey.

Mr. Newton: That question came up last week. I shall not seek to add to the comments that I made at that time. I note my hon. Friend's question as, I am sure, will my right hon. Friend who is responsible for these matters.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy (Liverpool, Broadgreen): Notwithstanding the debate on education that is due to take place next week, will the Leader of the House arrange for the Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment—the hon. Member for Mid–Worcestershire (Mr. Forth)—to make a statement in the House to explain the extraordinary events that took place earlier today? He was unceremoniously ordered off the premises of one of the country's leading grammar schools, Wirral grammar school for girls, when his by-election stunt went disastrously wrong. Given that that Minister is responsible for security and discipline in our schools, he has shown himself to be manifestly unfit to represent the Government.

Mr. Newton: I see no reason to accept the hon. Lady's somewhat tendentious account. Although I am aware that there seems to have been some confusion on the site this morning, I have not seen a detailed report of what occurred, and I do not propose to comment further without more information.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Would it be appropriate to have a debate on whether the United Kingdom should adopt American practice and require party political leaders to disclose their medical records? We saw today the Leader of the Opposition collapse in a fit at the end of his question. It was worrying to hear him shouting into the air the words, "Weak, weak, weak, weak," as he collapsed. That is surely an indication that the Leader of the Opposition's mental state should be examined at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): At least he has more hair than the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Newton: I think that it is by now observable that I do my best to maintain a relatively non-partisan approach as Leader of the House. My wisest course, therefore, is to acknowledge my hon. Friend's question.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): May we have a statement from the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on the crisis in further education? The Leader of the House will recall that, this time last week, I told him about the 37 redundancies at Nelson and Colne college. It is now perfectly clear from the annual report of the Further Education Funding Council that the crisis is systemic, and that more than 200 further education colleges are moving into deficit. This is an important issue, and the Secretary of State should come to the House to explain herself.

When I raised this matter last Thursday, the Leader of the House invited me to raise the matter with the Secretary of State during Education questions yesterday. I got to my feet 14 times, but tragically I did not catch Madam Speaker's eye. People in my constituency want to know what the Secretary of State will do about this problem.

Mr. Newton: It is probably unwise of me to do so, but I suggest that this is a matter for the Chair and not for me. In view of what I have heard since I came into the Chamber, the hon. Gentleman may improve his chances by reducing the length of his questions. I cannot add to the steer that I gave him last week. However, I express my sympathy to him for the fact that he was not called yesterday.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): As it will be some time before we discuss the Police Bill in this House, will the Leader of the House arrange for the Home Secretary to make a statement next week to allay the growing fears of Roman Catholic priests, and priests, ministers and pastors of other denominations, who are concerned about the implications of the police's bugging powers under the Bill for the seal of confession or the traditional pastoral counselling given by ministers of religion to their flocks? There is a fear that, unless the Bill contains an explicit exemption to protect the seal of confession and counselling by ministers of religion, there will be a great temptation for police who are trying to get a prosecution to bug those confidential discussions. That confidentiality has been honoured by the state since time immemorial.

Mr. Newton: I am aware of the concerns that have been expressed by the people to whom the hon. Gentleman refers and, indeed, by some others. Equally, he will be clear that the concerns expressed in the other place are being carefully considered by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, but I cannot predict what conclusions he will reach.

Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe (Bradford, South): Will the Leader of the House comment on two Bills that are making progress in the other place; the Protection from Harassment Bill and the Firearms (Amendment) Bill, which are important to hon. Members and to the country? What is happening with those Bills? Is it true that the delay in the House of Lords is due to the actions of the Liberal Democrats?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman's latter point is interesting: it had not previously been drawn to my attention. As the Liberal Democrats support those Bills, that would be strange and require a bit of explaining. The hon. Gentleman will understand that it is normally thought inappropriate for Ministers in this place to comment on the progress of business in the other place.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): When will the writ for the Wirral, South by-election be moved? It is odd that

we are told in the press that it will be this day or that day. Is it not important to take this matter into account when Ministers, one of whom is responsible for discipline in education, go up to Wirral, invade a girls school playground, act like intruders and have to be unceremoniously bundled out by the headmaster? Is it not time that the by-election was put on a proper footing, so that it can be conducted with due decorum?

Mr. Newton: That was a somewhat curious mix of questions and comment. I have already made such comment as I am able to at this stage in response to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy), and I do not think that I will go beyond that in response to the hon. Gentleman's ingenuity.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): When can we debate the need to reduce the salaries of Education Ministers? It is not only in Dewsbury that Ministers appear to be demob-happy. In Newport, the local council has sought an interview with the appropriate Minister in the Welsh Office to discuss a £3 million shortfall in the education budget, which is entirely the Government's fault, but the Minister has refused to speak to the council. That is extraordinary behaviour. I assume that Ministers have cleared their desks; if they have, and are not doing their jobs, their salaries should be cut—or they should be told to carry on with their jobs.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will not expect me to do other than repeat more or less what I said to the hon. Member for Dewsbury but, in the same spirit, I shall ensure that the attention of Welsh Office Ministers is drawn to their concern.

Mr. Tony Banks: May I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to early-day motion 447?

[*That this House is concerned at the development of surrogate childbirth; believes that, whilst it is acceptable for surrogacy to be available in cases where natural conception and childbirth is not possible, it is unacceptable for surrogacy to be extended to commercial transactions or for the sake of personal convenience; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to allow a full debate on the moral and ethical implications of surrogacy.*]

Although I am personally in favour of surrogacy in respect of couples with physical problems, moral and ethical considerations clearly need to be taken into account, especially in cases in which it may be economically convenient for one partner or the other to "rent a womb". There are considerable causes for disquiet here. As the matter is being discussed outside the House, surely we should debate it in the House.

Mr. Newton: These are matters of great debate and concern among a wide range of people. Such issues are normally dealt with on a free vote in the House. I shall ensure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health looks carefully at what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Questions to the Prime Minister

5.41 pm

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Earlier today, during Prime Minister's Question Time, a number of lengthy questions were asked. I was going to raise the issue of the closure of St. Margaret's fire station by the over-extended Kent county council, but I was unable to do so. Mine was Question 4. Many of the questions asked by Opposition Members had clearly been written by those at Walworth road, and were far too long: they could not get the lines out in time. Could the possibility of a system involving shorter questions at Prime Minister's Question Time be investigated?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): The hon. Gentleman must leave that in the hands of the Chair.

Orders of the Day

Civil Procedure Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

5.42 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Gary Streeter): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The British legal system has a history of which we can and should be proud. British justice is renowned the world over. Fundamental to its success has been the ability of our legal system to adapt to changing requirements. It has evolved over many centuries, responding to new problems, new situations and new challenges. The civil justice reforms on which the Government are now embarking represent a further step in that evolutionary process. We are responding to the challenges thrown up by modern society; more than that, we are laying the foundations for the system of justice that will enable it to meet the challenges of the future.

In 1994, the Lord Chancellor commissioned Lord Woolf to conduct an inquiry into the rules and procedures of the civil courts. The Government recognised that fundamental changes were required to combat the persistent problems of procedural complexity, undue delays and high costs in our courts. In July last year, Lord Woolf presented his final report, offering a body of recommendations designed to meet the continual challenge of access to justice. Those recommendations form the basis of the Government's reform package.

The reforms of the civil justice system go hand in hand with our reforms of the legal aid system. These reforms will enable us to get better control over legal aid spending, and to target resources more effectively on those who need them most. With the reforms, we shall be able to make limited resources stretch further, and enable more people to get help with their legal problems.

The central messages underlying the reforms launched by the Bill are that civil litigation must become faster, cheaper and simpler. By "faster", we mean that it is our aim that, once cases enter the litigation process, they should proceed along managed tracks to specified deadlines that are adhered to by all parties. We also mean that procedures should be in place to ensure that the real issues of a case are brought out into the open from the outset. By "cheaper", we mean that the cost of litigation, both to individual litigants and to the public generally, must be reduced. It cannot be right that—as is true of too many cases in our system—the costs of taking or pursuing an action exceed the award made. Procedures must be proportionate to the claim.

By "simpler", we mean that litigants should be in a position to know in advance how much a court case is likely to cost and how long it is likely to take. That must be supported by effective sanctions to ensure that the timetables and cost limits are met in all but the most exceptional cases. The civil justice system and all those involved in it must respond to the needs of litigants, not the other way around.

The Bill represents the opening shot in our war against delay, excessive costs and bureaucracy in the civil justice system. It provides the framework to ensure that litigation is streamlined, efficient and properly focused on the needs of litigants.

The key to the reforms is the emphasis placed on the court's proper role in encouraging fair settlement, efficient case management of contested cases and a greater sense of proportion in the resources involved in the litigation process. Judicial case management will empower the courts to take greater responsibility for each case in the system. Courts will have more power to make decisions on how cases should proceed, to flush out the central issues at an early stage, to encourage settlement and to minimise costly and time-wasting delay. Case management will be supported by well-defined litigation "tracks" that will ensure that the appropriate level of court control is used to manage cases, and in the fast track by a new fixed-costs regime that will reward efficiency.

In addition, it is proposed that protocols will be developed to promote good practice among litigants and their advisers both before and during the litigation process. Coupled with the greater emphasis on alternative dispute resolution, it is intended to foster an atmosphere in which litigation is truly seen as the last resort.

To support these proposals, and to ensure that the civil justice system is truly accessible, it is our aim that procedures should be simple and easily comprehensible. The new procedures introduced under the reforms must be easily understood by all. Just as important, the new rules of court must facilitate such understanding. There has been a great measure of support for the simpler approach adopted in the new-look rules which accompanied Lord Woolf's final report. They have been drafted in clear English with a view to being comprehensible to a wider audience, not just to qualified lawyers.

The reforms represent a challenging task for the courts. The judiciary, and the court staff who support them, will have to learn new techniques; they will have to adopt a far more proactive approach, and take far more responsibility for ensuring that cases progress as quickly and as efficiently as possible. To support this new role, a comprehensive training programme for the judiciary is being embarked on. New computer systems are also being developed to ensure that technical support is available. We will ensure that the resources necessary to achieve those aims will be in place.

However, the reforms do not just represent a challenge to the judiciary or the courts. They demand at least as great a change in the current practices of the legal professions. If lawyers are to meet the demands of the courts, they must ensure that their practices are capable of delivering the goods. The reforms envisage efficient, proactive and flexible lawyers, making the most of modern technology. As Lord Woolf recognised, his recommendations require a change in culture among all the players in the system.

I am encouraged by the response of many lawyers, solicitors and barristers alike, to the challenges with which we have presented them. Many firms are now setting in place new systems to enable them to plan their cases effectively, to allow them to budget properly and to ensure that they are in full control of their case loads. The professions as a whole must follow suit if they are to ensure that they can meet the expectations of their clients in the new litigation landscape.

Lord Woolf was assisted by a group of dedicated assessors, by the participation of a wide variety of organisations in various working groups and by the

involvement of countless others in seminars, workshops and other discussions. I pay a warm tribute to all who have contributed. It is surely that inclusive approach that has secured such widespread support for the proposed reforms. The Government intend to proceed with the Bill's implementation in that vein.

The Lord Chancellor set out his plans for the implementation of the civil justice reforms in his strategy document "The Way Forward", which was published last October. It makes clear his commitment to the reforms and sets October 1998 as the target date for implementation of their central elements. The key changes that will be in place by October 1998 are the introduction of the fast track and the multi-track.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): In the context of what he has been saying, will the Minister give an assurance that the Lord Chancellor's Department will ensure that the court staff who are needed to deal with the extra work that will go through county court offices will be employed, so that we will not face delays caused by staff shortages in those offices? They are very short-staffed in some regions.

Mr. Streeter: It is certainly our intention to resource the alterations to the system properly. We will ensure that people are adequately trained, that the most modern and appropriate technology is in place, and of course that the appropriate number of staff are available to ensure that this system, which is all about speed and minimising delay, works effectively and properly—so I think that was a yes.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): I will refrain from making any political point about who will need to implement the Bill after the election, but the Minister is being somewhat disingenuous. The explanatory and financial memorandum states:

> "The costs of establishing and maintaining the Civil Justice Council are expected to be about £250,000 per annum and will be met from within existing provision. The Bill is not expected to have any other significant financial implications."

That may be narrowly and technically true, but it is not true in the wider context of the report.

Mr. Streeter: The hon. Gentleman is right. It is not true in the wider context of the report, which will of course take far greater resourcing to implement. Those resources are being and will be made available for training and information technology. The figure that the hon. Gentleman read out refers to the unified rule committee, which the Bill is all about, but I assure him that we will adequately resource this important and radical new system.

I mentioned earlier that the Bill paves the way for the reforms, rather than containing all those reforms. Given that, I shall set out briefly what it seeks to do.

The Bill's primary purpose is to provide for a unified set of rules of court. Those rules will govern the practice and procedure to be adopted in civil litigation in the High Court and the county courts—and, in relation to appeals, in the civil division of the Court of Appeal. Clause 1 therefore provides for the necessary rule-making powers. Those new rules, to be known as the civil procedure rules, will replace the existing supreme court rules and county court rules. The stated aim of the exercise of the rule-making powers is to secure that the civil justice system is accessible, fair and efficient.

The first draft of the new general rules was released with Lord Woolf's report and we have received more than 100 responses as part of the consultation procedure. Careful consideration will be given to all the responses received as the Lord Chancellor and the rule committee make progress towards finalising the draft rules.

Schedule 1 adds detail to the rule-making powers conferred by clause 1. It restates the present broad powers of the existing rule committees and expands them in some respects. It deals, for example, with the power to make rules regarding the delegated exercise of jurisdiction and with the powers regarding modifications of rules of evidence. It enables rules to be made for piloting new procedures.

Clause 2 sets out that the new rules are to be made by the civil procedure rule committee, whose membership is provided for. The balance of interests on the committee that is now provided for in the Bill represents a sensible compromise between allowing those with a stake in the system a voice on the committee and ensuring that the committee is of workmanlike size. Clause 2 also provides that the rule committee must consult before making rules, that it must meet when discussing rule changes and that it must make rules that are simple and simply expressed.

Clause 3 sets out that civil procedure rules are to be subject to the negative resolution procedure. The House will wish to know that, during the passage of the Bill in the other place, the Government gave an undertaking to provide for a debate in both Houses on the new unified code of rules, once they have been drafted, but before they are formally presented for approval, to enable Parliament's views to be reflected in the final rules.

Clause 4(1) enables the Lord Chancellor to make consequential amendments to other enactments where that is necessary or desirable in consequence of the rules made. That power is to be subject to the negative resolution procedure. Clause 4(2) will ensure that, before any rule is made that would override an existing enactment, that enactment must be amended, repealed or revoked by an order, and that the order will attract the affirmative resolution procedure.

Clause 5 provides that county court practice directions should be subject to the approval of the Lord Chancellor, or someone authorised to act on his behalf. It is intended that the Vice-Chancellor would fulfil that function. The clause also sets out that practice directions can be made concerning the transfer of proceedings and that practice directions may be made for specific courts or specific types of proceedings.

The Civil Justice Council is established by clause 6. The Government have listened carefully to the views that have been expressed following Lord Woolf's recommendations on the establishment of such a council. We accept that it can assist the success of the civil justice reforms and provide useful advice relevant to keeping the system under review.

Clause 7 arises from the decision following a recommendation made by the Judges Council that the Anton Piller jurisdiction should be put on a statutory footing. Until now, Anton Piller orders have been developed by the courts under their inherent jurisdiction. They order a person to permit entry to premises for the purpose of finding or safeguarding evidence that is needed for civil proceedings. The clause does not intend to alter the basis for those orders, but will replace the inherent basis on which courts currently grant them.

[Mr. Streeter]

Clause 8 provides the power for the Lord Chancellor to extend the circumstances in which the courts have power to order the disclosure of documents before legal proceedings. The clause is intended to give effect to Lord Woolf's recommendation that the power to order pre-action disclosure should be widened from the present power that pertains only to claims in respect of personal injuries and death.

I am sure that the House will agree that this is an important Bill, and that it provides a sound basis on which to take forward the fundamental reforms that were proposed by the noble Lord Woolf. We do not intend the momentum for change to dissipate. The civil justice system's evolutionary process continues. The Bill lays the foundation for a civil justice system that is fit for the 21st century, that is quicker, cheaper and simpler and that improves access to justice for all. I commend the Bill to the House.

5.56 pm

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): The Bill, though rightly described as modest in size, is great in its significance and in its potential impact on our civil justice system and its procedures, but perhaps even more importantly, its culture. Looking around at the limited number of Conservative, Labour and Liberal Members present, I notice a great and almost overwhelming preponderance of those with a professional interest in the matter. It would be tempting to conclude from that that the matter is largely technical and that the Bill is of interest only to lawyers, but when one considers the Woolf report, which led to the Bill, and when one examines the Bill, its significance is revealed as being altogether wider.

The Bill is about justice that is delivered in an assessable way, is affordable, and is delivered in plain simple language and in procedures which reflect that. Importantly, it is also about putting into place pathways which present an opportunity for alternative dispute resolution, so in terms of its impact it is much more than simply a matter of interest to lawyers. It is of interest to all people who have a dispute and a grievance that should be settled—all those who are all too often deterred by expense and delay from pursuing legitimate causes.

We must approach the Bill in the spirit of seeking to find a way that will deliver access to a civil justice system that our citizens, who look to the House for a lead and for their interests to be represented, can afford. It ill behoves the Government to describe the measure as their first shot—the words used by the Minister—in a war to promote affordable and more easily accessible civil justice whose procedures are less obscure than at present. That first shot has been fired within weeks of the end of the Government and after years of neglect of a system that has become increasingly expensive and riven with delay.

Court staff are increasingly stretched, morale is low and they are hard pressed to deliver justice. The Government have fired their first shot within days of an increase in fees that has effectively priced justice beyond the reach of many of our citizens. The Bill cannot be divorced from that background. In the debate and in Committee we shall pursue the Government because of their failure to underpin the Bill with practical measures that will deliver justice.

The Government have gone against both the spirit and the letter of Lord Woolf's report because they have failed to address the issue of cost. Despite all advice and warnings to the contrary, they have engaged in an insistent drive to make the courts self-financing. The Bill will not pave the way for the reforms that we all seek in civil justice because the court fees system prices justice beyond the reach of the ordinary citizen.

Lord Woolf said in his report, which was published in July, that as part of the review of court fees the position of a litigant of modest means should be protected from the undue impact of increased court fees. Lord Woolf's work forms the basis for the Bill, but without consulting or giving the House the opportunity to debate the measures the Government laid statutory instruments to increase court fees. That is totally unacceptable, and we have prayed against that increase so that we can have the opportunity to debate it.

Without a broader debate, discussions on the Bill are virtually meaningless—and that has an impact on our capacity to deliver justice to our people. In the absence of a broader debate, it is futile to look to the Bill to improve access to the courts for those who have causes to pursue. The increases in court fees will cost the legal aid fund about £14 million a year, which will have to be met by the taxpayer. That money would otherwise be available to increase the access of our citizens to the legal aid system. In just one year in the Government's life, 12 million people were rendered ineligible for legal aid.

I will give some examples of the increases in court fees. A petition for divorce will cost £150—up from £80. Until October 1995, the fee was £40. A debtor's petition for bankruptcy has gone up from £25 to £50; until October 1995 the fee was £20. There are new county court fees. An application by those with judgment debts seeking to set aside court orders of varied payment terms will now cost £10. Applications by tenants and borrowers seeking to suspend warrants for possession of their homes—a vital matter that is of interest not only to lawyers—will now cost £10. That is to try to stop the bailiffs coming in and taking possession of a home. The Minister raises his eyebrows. He is clearly indifferent to those who have lost their homes as a result of the Government's negligent failure properly to manage the economy.

Mr. Streeter *rose—*

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North) *rose—*

Mr. Boateng: The Minister has had his turn. I give way to my hon. Friend

Ms Walley: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not simply that people have to pay £10 to attempt to get justice through a county court, but that they may have to apply five or six times at £10 each time? That is what concerns people who are being denied justice. The Minister laughed when my hon. Friend referred to that.

Mr. Boateng: My hon. Friend is right. That is why not only the Law Society, the Bar Council and the Advice Services Alliance, but the National Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux and the National Consumer Council are speaking with one voice against the Government's proposals.

Mr. Streeter: I have a simple question for the hon. Gentleman. To reverse the court fee increases would cost

taxpayers £50 million. In the unlikely event of a Labour Government, would they reverse those increases at a cost of £50 million? If he is not saying that, his criticisms lack credibility. This is where realpolitik comes into play.

Mr. Boateng: The Minister knows that the Opposition have been absolutely clear. We have prayed against the increases in court fees and we and others have called for a cost-benefit analysis of the increases, because we are not satisfied that the increases are in the best interests of the court service and of our citizens. There is no question of maybe—I will make the position clear: we have no intention of reversing the increases, because that would pile injury on injury. Having expended the money to bring about the change, required court staff to make adjustments and budgeted for the process, there is no point in causing even greater loss to the Treasury.

Opposition Members are concerned that in future no court fees increases should be imposed which cannot be justified by a cost-benefit analysis. We say that the current increases are not based on a cost-benefit analysis, but are the result of Conservative Members' dogmatic and doctrinaire approach to the law and to justice, because they regard the court service and justice as a business. Opposition Members do not regard them as a business, but as a public service. That is the difference between Conservative and Opposition Members.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Is the answer to the very good question of the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) that a Labour Government would be opposed to increases in court fees but would not do anything about them once they had been imposed? That seems to be what the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) is saying. The House, the profession and the clients are entitled to an answer, yes or no, from the Labour party.

Mr. Boateng *rose—*

Mr. Carlile: If the hon. Gentleman will restrain himself for one moment and listen, I think that he will agree that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North is entitled to a yes or no answer from her Front-Bench spokesman to a very important question.

Mr. Boateng: The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), of whom I am very fond, and who speaks for the Liberal party, really must drag himself above the level of "Focus", his local free handout.

Mr. Carlile: Yes or no? I want an answer to the question.

Mr. Boateng: No, we know that every remark uttered by the hon. and learned Gentleman, who is a party spokesman, has a party political purpose—of course it does.

Mr. Carlile: Yes or no?

Mr. Boateng: The hon. Gentleman should not pretend for one moment that his concern in asking that question is anything other than pressing his own party advantage.

Mr. Carlile: Yes or no?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I remind the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) about the rule against seated interventions, however provocative he may feel the position to be.

Mr. Boateng: The answer—which I give without any provocation or prompting—is that we do not intend to reverse the increases, even though we are opposed to them. We do not believe in the philosophy that underpins them, and we do not intend to carry on with that philosophy. However, the increases have been made and the budget has been set; it would therefore be quite irresponsible to reverse them, and we do not intend to do so.

We do intend, however—this is another difference between Conservative and Opposition Members on this issue, as on so many others—to ensure that we do not introduce proposals, whether for increases in court fees or for any other proposed reform, that have not been properly costed and subjected to a cost-benefit analysis.

Mr. Streeter: We have done that.

Mr. Boateng: If the Minister has done that, why has he failed, time after time, to tell us how much the Bill will cost, or how much it will cost to implement the Woolf proposals? We have given him that opportunity before, and I will give him the opportunity now. I will happily sit down and allow the Minister to tell us how much the Bill will cost.

Mr. Streeter: The hon. Gentleman will realise that the main cost features of the Bill are for training and the implementation of the appropriate computer systems. Next year's training budget is about £3 million, and the budget for computer technology for the county courts alone is £5.5 million. All that training and technology will be geared to making a success of the Woolf reforms.

Mr. Boateng: The Minister has not told us where the money will come from.

Mr. Streeter: It is in the budget.

Mr. Boateng: If it is in the budget, what will be cut to pay for it? When the Lord Chancellor was asked that question, the Government displayed a remarkable reticence about where the money would be found. The Minister's own strategy document tells us that there will be transitional costs in implementing the reforms. Is he saying that the only transitional costs will be those that he has identified today? Is that what he is saying? There is suddenly an unexplained reticence on that point.

Mr. Streeter: I shall be replying to the debate, and I shall of course deal with the issue of resourcing.

Mr. Boateng: We may take it, therefore, that inquiries will by then have been made and that an answer will be given. Or perhaps there will be no answer: if there were an answer, we would have heard it.

Mr. Streeter: Get on with it.

Mr. Boateng: We have no intention of getting on with it.

Mr. Streeter: That is obvious.

Mr. Boateng: I make it clear that we have no intention of getting on with the Bill or with the proposals without

[Mr. Boateng]

knowing how much they will cost. We shall subject all the reforms to the most rigorous cost-benefit analysis before proceeding with them. It is absolutely clear that the Minister and the Government have not done so. They did not conduct such a process on court fees and they have not done so on Lord Woolf's proposals. They have introduced a Bill in a cost-benefit analysis vacuum—on a wish and a prayer—and they cannot say where the money will come from to pay for it.

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Reducing tax allowances.

Mr. Boateng: The hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) mutters from a sedentary position about reducing tax allowances, so there it is: there have been 22 tax increases since the most recent general election, and the increase in court fees is just another tax. The next time my right hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor produces a briefing on Tory tax rises, we shall have to include increased court fees as a tax rise, because that is precisely what they are—a tax on the poor and the under-privileged when they seek justice.

We have come to expect Conservative Members to impose taxes on people who go on holiday and those who want to do business. Now there is a tax on people who go to court to seek justice. The Government should be ashamed of themselves for introducing a Bill in that context.

How do the Government propose that the Bill should be implemented, and what training and information technology will be provided to ensure that it is successful? The Government have signally failed to realise the likely fundamental impact of these radical—a word that the Minister used, albeit in a rather tentative manner—proposals? He described them as radical, and they will indeed make a real difference to the way in which the civil justice system operates.

Have the Government considered establishing pilot projects to test implementation of the Bill's provisions? We welcome the fact that in another place the Bill was improved in one important respect, with the inclusion of what is now clause 6, which establishes the Civil Justice Council. That proposal was one of many which emanated from Lord Irvine of Lairg, the shadow Lord Chancellor.

The advantage of the Civil Justice Council is that, as an advisory body with functions related to promoting the aims of the civil justice system, it will be in a unique position to comment on any pilot schemes established to ensure that the Bill is effected in such a way as to achieve the objectives hoped for it. The need for such pilot projects is vividly illustrated by the impact that the Bill will have on fast-track procedures in relation to personal injuries. At this point, it would be right for us to outline some of our concerns about at least one of the recommendations made by Lord Woolf in his important, landmark report.

When it comes to personal injuries and claims designed to achieve a remedy for those who have suffered such injuries, Lord Woolf's report is perhaps lacking in the sense that he was precluded from addressing substantive issues of law reform. To that extent, therefore, an important opportunity for radical and positive reforms to personal injury law—linking the reform of the substantive law to reform of procedure—has been lost.

There is a real danger that the recommendation on the introduction of fast-track litigation in cases worth less than £10,000 will in fact lead to injustice for victims of personal injuries. There is a danger that there will be a shift of the cost burden away from those most able to bear it—those backed, very often, by the considerable resources of an insurance company—on to those least able to bear it, such as the worker injured in the course of his employment or the person who sustains an injury on the sidewalk as a result of local authority negligence; we all see such cases at our constituency surgeries. In other words, the cost burden could be shifted on to the small person who comes to court with a relatively modest injury in terms of the quantum of damages to be awarded, but who finds himself at a disadvantage as a result of being placed on the fast track, with all its limitations. We seek some assurances from the Government in that regard.

We are also eager to ensure a valuable consumer input into the functions and work of the civil procedure rule committee and the Civil Justice Council. It would be wrong if the rules to be made up and developed by the committee—rules that will govern the practice and procedure of the civil courts—were to be brought into effect without the affirmation of at least one lay or consumer representative on that committee. Such representation accords very much with the spirit and the letter of the Woolf proposals, which were concerned always to make sure that the law in this respect did not develop outside the world occupied by lay people, where the consumer interest rather than the interests of lawyers ought to be to the fore. We therefore seek some assurances from the Government on this point and some proof that the concerns expressed by consumer organisations, among others, have been met.

Finally—*[Interruption.]* I hear muttering and moaning from Conservative Members; they will soon be learning that one of the prerogatives of opposition is the capacity to go on and on in the public interest. I look at one or two Conservative Members who may be back after the general election and say, "You'll learn the rights of opposition soon enough and find in me and my colleagues"—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that he should be addressing me. I have noticed that the capacity to go on and on is not confined to one side of the House.

Mr. Boateng: I am suitably chastised, Madam Deputy Speaker, but let me point out to Conservative Members—including a new and only too happy arrival, the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff)—that we are concerned about the introduction of statutory instruments. It is only right that those instruments should be subject to the affirmative procedure, and not only in the early stages of the implementation of the proposals. The House is made up largely of lay people and should be able to bring to the consideration of matters of civil justice the common sense and practical grounding that ought to be their basis.

With those caveats, and having set out our concerns about the Government's failure to subject their proposals to a proper cost-benefit analysis, we welcome the Bill and will give it a fair—indeed, effusive—wind.

6.28 pm

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I begin by declaring an interest as a practitioner in this area of the law. I congratulate the hon. Member for Brent,

South (Mr. Boateng) on speaking for about 35 minutes on this uncontroversial Bill. It was, as always, a pleasure to listen to him. It was rather like watching one of those fellows at the funfair making candyfloss. I draw his attention to paragraph 39.5, subparagraph (2), on page 206 of the draft civil proceedings rules. He may find it instructive.

I was once told by a Government Whip that there was nothing worse than a Member of Parliament talking at length in Government time about a subject that he claimed to know something about. Lest my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway), who sits in silence on the Front Bench, should at some stage return to his previous existence—he once instructed me, and would be discouraged from doing so again—I shall confine my remarks to a few moments.

I broadly welcome the Bill. I have never understood why we needed a green book and a white book. I hope that the amalgamated rules will prove useful.

Mr. Boateng: A pale green book.

Mr. Garnier: Whether it will be a pale green book, a zebra book or any other colour of book does not really matter. The main thing is that the rules will be simple and simply expressed, which is welcome. I am also pleased to hear that we shall have a debate in due course on the rules. I am sure that the hon. Member for Brent, South will entertain us on that occasion as well.

I pick up on one reasonably good point that the hon. Member for Brent, South made about costs. I gently remind the Government that we should think carefully about the legal aid reforms referred to by my hon. Friend the Minister, and the increase in court charges, in the interests of public access to justice. I do not want to bring up the old cliché about the doors of the Ritz, but it is at the back of all our minds.

I should like to mention two or three issues in the Bill. The first relates to Anton Piller orders. I am glad that clause 7 will bring them under a statutory basis. May I, perhaps wickedly, ask my hon. Friend the Minister whether the desire to provide judicial authority for entry into private premises in civil litigation will inform our debates on the Police Bill?

Secondly, what extensions to the provisions on pre-action disclosure are envisaged under clause 8? As a libel practitioner, I am concerned that we should not allow—or at least we should be wary of allowing—irresponsible defendants to get pre-action discovery of documents to fish for a defence, having made an unsubstantiated allegation. I am reasonably sure that the Lord Chancellor does not have in mind allowing irresponsible defendants to go on fishing expeditions, but help on that would be gratefully received.

Finally, Madam Deputy Speaker—*[Interruption.]* I thought that I was beginning to interest you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Paragraph 2 of schedule 1 says:

"Civil Procedure Rules may provide for the exercise of the jurisdiction of any court within the scope of the rules by officers or other staff of the court."

I know the definition of officers, who are judges, but not of the "other staff". Will my hon. Friend write to me, if he does not have time to deal with it this evening, to tell me who those other staff are?

Those are my remarks for this evening. I trust that you have found them fascinating, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

6.33 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): That was indeed the fast track. The Bill and the "Access to Justice" report on which it is based represent the fruitful coming together of two men. The Lord Chancellor had the foresight to see the need for reform, the flexibility to change his position on the Civil Justice Council, following his reluctance about it on Second Reading, and, perhaps most importantly, the wisdom to pick the right man for the job—Lord Woolf.

Lord Woolf is a man of enormous diligence, towering intellect, vast legal experience and diplomatic skills. It is clear from the report that he consulted widely. The annexe shows those whom he consulted over two years, which included several overseas visits. He showed a commendable willingness to learn from foreign experience.

Similar reforms have been adopted in response to similar problems in some of our Commonwealth common law jurisdictions, including Australia, New Zealand and Canada, as well as several states in the United States. However, he did not go as far as the German system, under which fixed-price contracts are negotiated in advance between lawyer and client. That might be the most effective deterrent to time-wasting. It might have been instructive to look more closely at that aspect of the German system.

I first came across Lord Woolf when I was parliamentary private secretary to the then Attorney-General, the late Sam Silkin, who had an enormous regard for him, and who set him on the path to his well-deserved accelerated promotion. He is also the author of a very civilised report on prisons, which is light years from the attitude of the present Home Office team.

At one level, the Bill is a technical enabling Bill, giving a statutory framework to the recommendations in the report. The 370-page report is put into 11 clauses and two rather brief schedules. Perhaps the report is not very revolutionary, although Lord Woolf pointed out on Second Reading in the other place that the concept of a unified rule committee for the High Court and for county courts was first recommended by the judicature commission of 1872. The wheels grind rather slowly. The change is certainly welcome, and the merger should ensure consistency of practice at all levels of our court system.

The debate in the other place showed a substantial consensus, which has been largely reflected today. Given the importance of the subject and the fact that a number of other key issues depend on the passage of the Bill, I hope that the usual channels will ensure that it passes through all its stages before the election, whenever that may be.

I follow my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) in expressing sadness that the Bill, which purports to reduce the cost of justice, almost coincides with the County Court Fees (Amendment) Order 1996, which introduces such dramatic increases in fees. Everyone who has practised knows about long delays, often caused by having to wait until the relevant case papers reach the top of the solicitor's in tray. All such delays are for tactical reasons, of course.

[Mr. Donald Anderson]

I remember calculated delays in one case going on for so long without rebuke from the judge, who took a passive view, that, although the proportion of interest in the sizeable property in question had been determined, the value of that property doubled. Those delays were clearly wholly tactical, and were against the interests of the public and the legal aid fund.

By setting a timetable, we are seeking to put an end to delays, which, alas, arise mostly for the wrong reasons, although I concede that in many cases the delays from experts, for example, are outside the solicitor's control. However, although we hope to overcome delays, there are dangers in switching to judicial case management with the judges in the driving seat throughout. The new-style judges could possibly become over-zealous in their work, and therefore work to the disadvantage of justice.

I am not sure how that greater zeal can best be guarded against, but, if the new culture—the buzz phrase in the report—is to succeed, there must be a spirit of co-operation between the Bench and the Bar to ensure that there is a willingness to be flexible, to understand and to enter into proper and informed negotiations, instead of any dictatorship. That depends not only on the personality of the judges, especially district judges, whose role will be much enhanced, but on adequate training.

The purely adversarial system must be modified, and wherever possible, alternative disputes procedures encouraged. I recall that I once marshalled for the late Judge Leslie, who said something to the effect that the worst agreement is better than the worst imposed judgment. The willingness to find alternative disputes procedures and to avoid rancour and adversarial excesses should be sought through genuine discussion on timetabling and modifications, if necessary, in the light of difficulties that unexpectedly arise, and implemented with the co-operation of lawyers and the public.

Success obviously depends on training, especially in information technology, which in turn depends fundamentally on resources. I return to the point, which was made so well by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South, that resources must be made available and in time. The explanatory and financial memorandum mentions the very tip of the iceberg of resources.

Mr. Streeter: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for mentioning in response to his intervention that the £250,000, to which he is referring again, was for the rule committee. That sum is in fact for the Civil Justice Council.

Mr. Anderson: I noticed the inadvertent mistake, but thought it prudent not to intervene at that point.

There are no costings in the Woolf report. All of us recognise that, come what may, no crock of gold will appear after the election. This important reform will have to take its place alongside all other pressures. Although it will involve short-term expenditure, it is clear that, in the medium and longer term, there should be substantial savings to the public purse.

I could detain the House on a number of points of detail, such as consumer representation, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South referred; the difficulties that might arise in the fast-track procedure; the implications for the legal aid fund; and the affirmative or negative procedure for statutory instruments. I am, however, personally satisfied with the fact that the Government have said that there will be a debate in the House on the rules, and not persuaded that one would need to have other than the negative procedure thereafter for the generality of modifications.

The debate is important; its subject is likely to affect very many of our citizens. It is sad that there are not many more Members present, which is perhaps a reflection of the fact that it has become more and more difficult for lawyers to find their way, or to want to find their way, into the House. When I first entered the House, rather too long ago, very many heavy civil practitioners would have spoken in such a debate.

To a large extent, therefore, we must rely on the wisdom and expertise of those in the other place. It is significant that both the Lord Chief Justice and the Master of the Rolls contributed to the debate in the other place, while, save for those in the field of defamation law, it is difficult in this House to find any hon. Member who has a heavy civil practice. That is bad for the public, and bad for Parliament. Lord Woolf and the team of assessors around him deserve the thanks of the public and Parliament.

6.44 pm

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): It is difficult to find in the House any members of the Bar who have any practice at all, such are the pressures of modern legislation.

I hope that I can take it from what the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) said that we should not expect an ambush in the Lobby. Oh dear, I notice that the ogre at the feast, the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), is walking into the Chamber, assessing the possibilities of an ambush. I can inform him that many of my hon. Friends are even now populating the Tea Room and various other Rooms, and are ready to run back into the Chamber to vote.

I commend the hon. Member for Swansea, East for not indulging in the windbaggery in which his hon. Friend the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) indulged. We are getting used to being told that the Labour party will make things clear, but it never does. Labour Members huff and puff like the hon. Member for Brent, South, who raised his voice in anger at the court fees provisions, which are, of course, not directly relevant to the Bill. When he was asked the simple question, "Will Labour pay the money?" we did not get the answer.

I should like Labour's Chief Whip, the right hon. Member for Garscadden, to know just what a valiant effort his hon. Friend made to protect the Labour party's integrity—notwithstanding a tartan tax, a council tax, a young children's tax and a windfall tax, all of which could pay the £50 million for the court fees—because otherwise the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) would have had his guts for garters, as of course would the Opposition Chief Whip. I am afraid we must sidestep such issues in order to take this important piece of legislation seriously.

I congratulate my right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary on realising that, in this modern world of extensive rights and the extending perception and demanding of rights, we simply must have a civil justice

system that allows ordinary people of modest means access to justice as cheaply as possible. I commend the team for getting to grips with the problem in the way that it has.

What makes an elderly system expensive and prohibitive is its complexities and old-fashioned practices and attitudes. Once the problem was identified, it was obvious that Lord Woolf had the precise capabilities for sorting it out. The Woolf report has achieved just that, with the help of most able assessors.

Everyone concerned with the exercise, from my right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor and Lord Woolf downwards, must be congratulated on not only making comprehensive recommendations but getting them so nearly right that there is hardly any legitimate complaint from any direction. I hope that that is not because the area from which complaints and criticism is most likely to come is not convinced that the Woolf proposals will ever, effectively, see the light of day. That is a possible but—I hope—unlikely explanation for the silence of the genuine non-windbagging critics.

This Bill, as a first step, starts the process of improving access to justice according to Woolf. We have the amalgamation of court procedures and how to access them in one book. We have extended case management, which includes identifying and better defining the issues earlier; identifying the right court earlier; penalising time wasting; easing some of the unsatisfactory rules of evidence; and encouraging alternative methods of resolving disputes, so that litigation may become the last resort and not the first. All that is to be implemented by the end of 1998.

The Bill got off to a good start in the other place. It was improved there, especially by the inclusion of the Civil Justice Council, which the Lord Chancellor accepted. The Bill answers the headlines such as the one that appeared in *The Independent* on 4 December 1996:

"Foxing Woolf . . . Efforts to put radical civil justice reforms into practice are being hampered by a lack of co-ordination".

Such criticism has no foundation now that the changes in the other place have been accepted.

The Bill and the Woolf proposals are not the end of the matter, as is obvious from our debate. For the proposals to work, judges, counsel and solicitors will have to be trained and retrained at some cost. Judges will have to make more time to read cases, which happens in the criminal courts—where I work occasionally—only with much difficulty.

One of the main avenues of justice is legal aid. Unless we improve the legal aid rules and make it more widely and more fairly available, the system will not much improve, however impressive Lord Woolf's contribution to improving access to justice. Improvements in the system and in legal aid are the twin pillars of improved access to justice. However, those and other effects of Woolf will almost certainly mean more money, and no one and no party is keen on that. That fact may prevent us from getting too euphoric about Woolf, and therefore about the Bill.

For example, information technology always sounds as if it will reduce costs, but I am not sure it always does. I worked on a fraud trial with the help of computers and it was great fun, but I am sure that old-style booklets with coloured pie charts would have been cheaper, better and probably quicker.

One element that shines out from Lord Woolf's report, and its implementation in the Bill, is the degree of consultation and co-operation that has been not only permitted but encouraged between the many interested parties, including the Bar, solicitors, the Bench, consumers, operators, the Government and civil servants—the list at the back of Lord Woolf's report is endless.

A lengthy consultation does not, of course, always mean a good outcome, but absence of consultation usually leads to a bad outcome. The speed with which we introduce some criminal legislation sometimes leads to unnecessary aggravation and doubtful results, as the Government are currently experiencing with the Police Bill and the Crime (Sentences) Bill. I am sure that the two main problem areas in those Bills could have been solved with more consultation and agreement among all concerned before they were launched. The present example of consultation and co-operation in civil legislation may in time spread to criminal legislation.

When the Home Affairs Select Committee considered the subject of legal aid—principally criminal legal aid—two or three years ago, we were struck by the comparative lack of co-operation between the Law Society and the Bar Council. One of our recommendations was that they should get their acts together. No such criticism is possible of the Bill, and I hope that co-operation and the opportunity for reflection will be the norm in the future.

One legal wit recently remarked that the appointment of Lord Woolf as Master of the Rolls, Sir Richard Scott as Vice-Chancellor and Lord Bingham as Lord Chief Justice showed that any Tom, Dick and Harry could rise to the top of the legal profession. All those eminent and distinguished gentleman have, together with Jim, risen to the challenge of the reform of civil procedure, and we should wish that their labours bear profound and abundant fruit.

6.54 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): This is an important Bill that should, and is likely to, change the operation of civil litigation for the better. I am sure that all hon. Members have experience of constituents who have relatively small claims and who are afraid of going to law. They expect their Member of Parliament to wave a magic wand that would avoid the need to go to law. Often, we cannot do so. We have to tell them that their only recourse is to go to court and the best we can do is to recommend a competent solicitor. There are one or two such in the House today and I can see at least two on the Conservative Benches.

We steer our constituents in the right direction, but often they do not go to the solicitor because they remain afraid of litigation. They have two main fears. The first is the formality that they believe they will face in the courts because the rules were designed by lawyers for lawyers, not for the public. The second is, of course, the cost of going to court. Barristers, such as myself, who have conducted civil litigation find no pleasure in telling clients who are brought to see us that the cost of litigation for a relatively small claim simply is not worth the candle. We have to tell them that any claim for a few thousand pounds is not worth pursuing because of the risk that they might have to pay costs. That is not acceptable. If somebody has a claim for £3,000, £4,000 or £5,000, surely the civil

[Mr. Alex Carlile]

justice system should enable them to claim that money and recover it without the risk of more than that sum being swallowed up in costs. I have often given that advice to a client who has said, "But Mr. Carlile, it is a matter of principle." The only advice one can give is that litigation is not a matter of principle but a matter of business.

Small claims have become a very risky business. We must also bear in mind the fact that legal aid is not limitless, and nobody can pretend that it is. It could be better targeted in some areas and there is always room for improvement in a complex system. Reforming the civil procedure rules could help us to target legal aid on those cases where legal aid is really needed.

I applaud the efforts of Lord Woolf. He has already rightly been described as a remarkable judge. He is clear-thinking and he has produced excellent reports. He has also been flexible—he has listened to the representations made to him and made many changes to his preliminary ideas. He has responded to the concerns of consumer groups, of the profession and, of course, of the Government. I believe that he has produced a blueprint for a civilised civil justice system, which was certainly improved in the other place. I join the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) in commending the other place for introducing the Civil Justice Council, and the Government for accepting that important amendment.

When Lord Woolf was kind enough to ask for my views on certain aspects of his proposals. I suggested that he was slightly too tentative on the wise use of legal aid, and that the small claims procedure could be used for a more extensive range of cases. My experience as a constituency Member of Parliament of the small claims procedure is that, on the whole, district judges run it well.

The new breed of district judge, like the new breed of circuit judge sitting in the county court, is fully capable of sensitive judicial case management. As long as constituents present their cases in a measured, balanced and rational way and write down the basis of their claim, they tend to come back satisfied with the way in which the district judge has tried the case, sometimes even when they have lost or failed to recover the full amount of their claim.

I do not accept for one moment that there are special complexities in personal injuries actions. I have conducted many such actions over the years, for both plaintiffs and defendants, for trade unions on legal aid and for private clients who simply come through the doors via solicitors, and it has long been my view that the small claims procedure and the limit for those claims could be extended and that district judges could easily save the legal aid fund a great deal of wasted money by dealing with claims of a higher value. If that were done, legal aid could be much more specifically targeted where it is deserved.

I do not believe that plaintiffs making relatively small personal injuries claims would be substantially disadvantaged if they had the assistance of a better-trained court staff and the judicial case management that a district judge—usually a solicitor with long experience of preparing cases—is able to offer.

I applaud the introduction of an extended provision for pre-action discovery, which will be extremely useful, especially in cases of alleged breach of contract or in the many Welsh boundary disputes that those of us who practise in the Principality have experienced. Often, in pleading a claim over a boundary or right of way dispute, a huge amount of money is wasted in seeking to discover the contents of abstracts of title held in dusty boxes in solicitors' offices. It would be so much simpler if one could go for pre-action discovery before deciding whether to pursue the claim, and a great deal of money could be saved.

There is no doubt whatever that there is much dissatisfaction among staff in county court offices throughout the country. They work extremely hard, often under great pressure, and try to manage offices and courts, often without replacements for those who leave. If the Woolf reforms are to work, whichever Government implements them will have to ensure that staffing levels are brought to a proper establishment.

We must remember that, under the Woolf system, court staff will have to give an awful lot more advice to people handling their own actions, who will perhaps have been given guidance, but not detailed legal advice, by consumer advice centres—citizens advice bureaux and the like. There must be enough staff to deal courteously and quickly with members of the public, and to do that successfully the staff will have to be trained.

At the moment, it is extremely rare—it sometimes happens in country towns—for the court staff to be willing to take the time to advise in person a litigant making a small claim to put into that claim phrases such as "breach of contract", "interest", "damages", "pain, suffering and loss of amenity" and all the other phrases that trip off lawyers' tongues with such ease. Court staff will have to be properly trained to give such basic advice without compromising the essential impartiality of a court officer.

It is extremely important, as we go down this exciting road in developing the civil courts, that we should not close county courts, so that the system becomes more user-friendly but the user cannot get to the system because it is too remote. In mid-Wales, where I live and have practised for many years, and which I will represent until the general election, and in north Wales and all rural areas, the provision of reasonably accessible county courts is important; it is worth paying for, because it gives the fundamental access to justice that people require.

In early discussions of the Woolf proposals, there was a fear that there would be far fewer centres dealing with civil proceedings. That proved to be unfounded, after Lord Woolf listened carefully to representations. I hope that the Minister will express a commitment to retaining as many county courts as possible, so that people living in the remoter areas of England and Wales will be able to have access to those courts and to use their facilities.

I deplore the level of the fees increases, which will make some litigation extremely difficult to afford. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) was absolutely right to raise the matter earlier. I also deplore the way in which her question was responded to by the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng).

The hon. Gentleman has a burgeoning career in the media: we see him as a pundit, a television judge and a presenter of great skill, but he will never find a place on the radio programme "Just a Minute". With a great deal of repetition, deviation and hesitation, he told us that although he, too, deplores the swingeing increases in court

fees introduced by the Government, if he is in government in a few weeks' time he will not do anything about it. I find that a bit of a puzzle. I suppose that I must learn more about new Labour to understand how we can achieve a better standard of living without spending any more money. Perhaps the magic will be revealed to us at some time in the future, but it does not sound logical to me—a mere humble journeyman lawyer.

I hope that whatever Government is in office after the general election will be prepared to review court fees. If those fees serve to discourage members of the public from using the civil litigation system in their proper interests, I hope that the Government will be prepared to reconsider them and, above all, will try to ensure that the Woolf reforms themselves are kept under review, so that we do not have to go for 50, 75 or 100 years before reforming another collapsed and creaking system.

7.8 pm

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke–on–Trent, North): Unlike many hon. Members who have spoken this evening, I do not have a professional interest in the subject. I must take issue with my very good—and hon.—Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) and say that, as well as being discussed by those with a professional interest, the issue of access to the criminal justice system for everyone should be considered by other hon. Members, because access to social justice is extremely important. That is the impression that I get from the many constituents who attend my surgeries.

I sometimes think that, if I had been a lawyer, I would be a millionaire, because of the fees that I would have received for all the letters that I have written. I see some hon. Members shaking their heads, but I wonder.

The Law Society is not an organisation that I have had a lot of time for, because of what has happened in Stoke-on-Trent and the problems with mine shafts. There has been much talk of consultation and new partnerships. I wish that those partnerships had been extended to prevent some of those problems. Along with other hon. Members representing North Staffordshire, however, I have been approached by lawyers who operate there and I value my close working relationship with them.

Broadly speaking, the legislation is a preliminary and necessary step to implementing Lord Woolf's proposal by consolidating the complex rules for both high and county court civil actions. I cannot help thinking, however, that—as is typical with the Government—the Woolf proposals are being viewed in isolation. That theme has emerged in this debate. The Government are dealing with the recommendations in isolation, separate from the equally important area of legal aid reform. Like the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) I hope that we can consider that matter in detail.

After the general election, it will be up to a Labour Government to look more fully into how we implement Lord Woolf's proposals, with an overall review of the justice system. We should consider not only legal aid but the provision of legal services.

The main problem with the Bill is the inadequate funding of the reforms. I heard what the Minister said and his reply about costings and additional costs, but we have not had an assurance that there will be adequate funding of the various measures in the Bill. I am also concerned that most of the legal profession, especially the high street firms, will be inadequately prepared to meet the new demands, regardless of what has been said about training. I urge the Minister to consider those issues carefully.

Another fear is that the Government seem to be using the Woolf proposals as an excuse to consumerise, which might lead to further privatisation of justice. We have to be careful not to go down the road of business interests above public service. That is a crucial issue and we need to keep a close watch over it.

What it comes down to is, have we got a guarantee that all citizens have access to the law? Judging by their letters, many of my constituents for one reason or another—largely cost—do not feel that they have access to the law. In 1979, under a Labour Government, 74 per cent. of households qualified for legal aid. After 18 years of Tory misrule, only 48 per cent. do so. In effect, that amounts to a denial of people's rights.

Access to the law is becoming a luxury, as I see in my daily contacts with constituents—for example, those who have worked all their lives in the potteries and have repetitive strain injury or some other injury. They do not have access to the law, because they cannot afford it. I urge the Government to deal with those issues. With the withdrawal of legal aid, people either have no recourse to the law or are thrown on to the contingency fee scheme, on a no-win, no-fee basis and are, again, at the mercy of lawyers. To me, that is not equal access to social justice.

Most important, I wanted to make a short contribution to the debate because, in addition to the withdrawal of legal aid the Government have increased the cost of using the courts. I have been lobbied extensively, not least by the Stoke-on-Trent citizens advice bureau, which, with its expertise, brought it home to me what a difference the increased costs will make to people in Stoke-on-Trent. As I said in an intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), it is not merely a question of the £10 increase for access to one county court. People could find that, for various reasons, they needed to raise about eight different aspects and could thus end up with a bill for £80 or £100. That is outside the budget of many of my constituents, who cannot afford to pay and so do not have access to the county courts.

I look to my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South to pray against the proposals to increase costs. It is not a question of what happens after the increases have been implemented. We all understand the situation. The important thing is to stop such increases getting on to the statute book in the first place. If we are really concerned about access to the social justice system for all, that is where the emphasis must lie.

It concerns me that the Bill has been proposed in isolation from the other main legal issues that must be tackled. It is typical of the Government that we have had to wait so long—18 years—for some progress, but that it is not all-embracing progress giving everyone access to the law. I want civil justice to be discussed and reformed as a whole and I shall be looking to my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South to ensure that he and my hon. Friends do just that in the months ahead.

7.16 pm

Mr. Boateng: We have had a good debate, and it is right that we should have ended on the note provided by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke–on–Trent, North (Ms Walley), who reminded us—on the basis of

[Mr. Boateng]

representations that she had received from solicitors and people giving advice and assistance throughout north Staffordshire—of the impact of our deliberations on civil justice on ordinary people and of their concerns.

Opening the debate, the Minister told us that he believed that it was right that the reforms of civil justice and of legal aid should go hand in hand. Those were his words and he said that that was the Government's intention. The Opposition's response is, "If only that were true." Let me share one example of where it is patently not.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), who speaks from the Liberal Benches, reminded us of the role of the county court and of county court and district court judges and their staffs in the delivery of legal services. They will undoubtedly have an even more important role to play after enactment of the Bill in the light of Lord Woolf's report, as he envisaged that they would provide information and help litigants to progress their case.

What court staff? How are they to be trained? I ask, "What court staff?" in the context of the redundancies that have already been announced in the light of the introduction of information technology. It has been made clear that staff will have to go as information technology is introduced.

Information technology is to be introduced on the basis that Lord Woolf has recommended it and that it is cost effective and makes sense. How can it make sense to lay off staff as information technology is introduced when it is envisaged that county court staff will have to play a greater role than ever in that they will be holding out an offer of a service of providing

"information and help to litigants"

whom they are currently not in a position to help? Indeed, county court staff are currently officially prevented from giving advice and assistance to litigants. Even though many of them wish to do so, their job specifications and the rules under which they operate preclude it.

Where are the staff to come from? Never mind how they are to be trained and how their training is to be paid for, where are the staff to come from if they have been laid off, and how much will it cost to keep them in place? That is not a transitional cost. The Minister has not even mentioned staff costs.

The matter goes beyond that, to the important role—the key role—of district judges. We are told that the Government's reforms of legal aid and of civil justice go hand in hand, but they do not. They do not for one clear reason. I shall give a practical example. We know that there is a pilot project for a legal services committee in the north-west. We know that the committee does valuable work, ensuring that the interests of the whole community are represented and that the resources of personnel within the community are marshalled in the interest of the development of legal services. The consumer is there; the producer is there; the local authority is there; and, most important, the district judge is there, representing the branch of the judiciary that is closest to the people, and deals with the small claims court and with the litigant in person.

The Lord Chancellor's Department has announced that district judges are not to serve on the soon-to-be-appointed legal services committees. Why? Lord Woolf clearly envisages a greater role for district judges in case management and in the delivery of legal services, yet the very branch of the judiciary which is best placed to deliver that service, that has an overview of the service, that reflects the ethos that the Bill seeks to encapsulate—the culture of common sense, practicality, speed and plain language—and which is most closely aligned to all those characteristics is precluded from serving on the legal services committees. It makes no sense, and gives the lie to the Government's suggestion that the two reforms are going hand in hand.

I ask the Minister to respond to that and to show that the Government will make no final decision on the role to be played by district judges on the soon-to-be-appointed legal services committees. That is essential if we are to see the Bill as the grounding for changes that are to come.

It does not end there, because the Minister has to answer the question about resources that was raised by several Opposition Members. It is not enough for him to seek to limit the cost as he has. He is being disingenuous, even if we are talking only of the training in case management that is required. Lord Justice Henry, the chairman of the Judicial Studies Board, said that there would need to be

"a substantial increase in the Board's Annual Budget",

which is now £3.2 million. How much is that substantial increase to be? Have the Government budgeted for it in the existing budget of the Lord Chancellor's Department? We want to know.

Lord Woolf himself recognises the importance of case management—*[Interruption.]* I see the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) shaking his watch arm. The advice that his silent, sedentary friend is giving is absolutely right, because Lord Woolf makes the point that we have to have

"realistic provision made for reading time for judges".

How much reading time, and at what cost? The hon. Member for Worcester is quite right to wave his watch. We want to know how much that time will cost, and if the hon. Gentleman chooses to give a graphic demonstration—albeit limited to his own wrist—of the significance of time, so be it. We need to know, and the Minister must take time to tell us and those who look to this House. Members of the profession, consumer organisations and the public are concerned about the Government's seriousness about the reforms. We ought to know how much they will cost.

With all those issues as yet unresolved, the Minister cannot expect us to take seriously his protestations that he and the Government have been candid about their disclosure of the costs of the report. They are not being candid. They are not being candid about the costs, and they show no sign of any real willingness to publish those costs. Until they do, the suspicion among the public will be that the Government intend to embark on a process in which they wish the end without willing the means. That simply is not good enough.

That is why we have made it clear that, immediately after the next general election, when the people have given their verdict, we will undertake a wide-ranging reform of both the civil justice system and civil legal aid. It will be a combined reform that will subject the Woolf report and the Bill to the rigorous cost-benefit analysis that is needed. Without such an analysis, there is no way

forward for the Bill. There is no way forward for the necessary changes in culture—the emphasis on speed and efficiency, the practical, cheaper and simpler resolution of disputes, and the availability of early resolution to disputes that we all seek.

7.28 pm

Mr. Streeter: This has been an important debate on an important Bill, and every hon. Member who has spoken has made a valuable contribution. I should like to deal quickly with some of the important points that were raised.

I can assure the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) that we will be the Government who introduce these reforms over the next few years. That is why we are taking great care to get them right and to resource them properly.

On the increase in fees, which was raised by several Opposition Members, I wish to make four concise points. First, people on legal aid will continue to have their court fees paid for by the Legal Aid Board. Secondly, those on income support will of course have the benefit of a minimal fee. Thirdly, as we all know—there are quite a few practising barristers in the Chamber tonight—court fees are a tiny fraction of lawyers' hourly rates.

Fourthly, unless the Labour party can commit itself to reversing the increase in civil court fees in the unlikely event of its forming a Government, it must accept that it is open to the charge of hypocrisy and a total lack of credibility. Reversing these increases—which have already been introduced, with effect from 15 January—will cost the taxpayer £50 million. Unless the hon. Member for Brent, South can say that Labour, in the unlikely event of its forming the next Government, would reverse that increase, he had better keep his counsel on that subject.

I can reassure the House that there will be sufficient resourcing for these important reforms. The current budget for computers in the county court service is in the region of £4 million. The budget for 1997-98 is about £5.5 million. We shall ensure that the best possible use is made of modern technology.

The current training budget for the Judicial Studies Board is £2.6 million. It is planned to increase to £3 million in 1997-98. In addition, conference facilities costing more than £500,000 are in the process of being refurbished to enable much more streamlined, up-to-date training to take place. Those are the major costs of the reforms, and they have been specifically provided for.

There will be sufficient staffing, and staff will be adequately trained. The budget will be adequate for that, and no doubt we can return to these matters in Committee. As the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) said, it is expected that there will be significant medium and long-term savings as the reforms are implemented over the years.

We are actively considering piloting. The rules will enable us to take the power to do that. As a Government, we believe in piloting, which we are using in the case of many of our legal aid reforms.

Personal injury law was mentioned. Lord Woolf is considering that issue, which was also raised by the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers.

Of course we will take the view of the consumer into account. Provision has been made on both the rule committee and the Civil Justice Council for the voice of the consumer to be heard.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) made an important speech. I thank him for his welcome for the reforms and for his helpful comments. True to his personal style, he made a very analytical assessment of the Bill and raised several detailed and important points. I hope that it will be in order if I write to give him the answers to those important points. He may be fortunate enough to serve on the Committee that will scrutinise the Bill and to make some of these points again.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Swansea, East, who rightly paid a warm tribute to Lord Woolf and agreed that it was important that the Bill was passed in this Parliament. He also made an important mention of alternative dispute resolution. I thoroughly agree that the importance of ADR has yet to be fully recognised. I thank him for his warm support for our reforms.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) made a helpful and important speech. He exposed Labour's new idea of a windbag tax, which could raise an awful lot of money from one or two Opposition Members. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend for his warm support for these justified reforms.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) spoke in support of the reforms, drawing on his many years of experience at the Bar. He accurately described people's concerns about going to law and the costs risk to litigate small amounts. I am grateful for his kind comments about Lord Woolf. He expressed his anxiety about the number of Welsh boundary disputes, and I can confirm that the English rugby team will cross the Welsh line often at Cardiff Arms park in a few weeks' time. He recognised the important role played by county courts, especially in rural areas.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) made an important contribution. She is right to say that this issue is not only for lawyers, but for everyone, because it concerns justice; but she is not right to say that we have reviewed these reforms in isolation. We regard them as part of a twin-track approach with our legal aid reforms. Lord Woolf paid tribute to the way in which we have taken both sets of reforms forward together.

I am afraid that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North fell into the trap of claiming that there was not enough money, that the increase in court fees was wrong and that our reforms on legal aid were penny-pinching. Unless the Labour party can say that it would put more money in—in the unlikely event of winning the next general election—it has no credibility in raising such points.

Finally, the hon. Member for Brent, South raised new points in his extended winding-up speech. I will respond to him on the subject of district judges in due course. He is right that reading time has been made available for judges in our reforms. We have 18 months to get the detail right. Our commitment is to do so.

The Bill wages war on delay, excessive cost and bureaucracy. It will make access to justice quicker, simpler and cheaper. It will take the British justice system into the 21st century, and I commend it to the House.

[Mr. Streeter]

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

CIVIL PROCEDURE BILL [*LORDS*] [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Civil Procedure Bill [Lords], it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any administrative expenses incurred by the Lord Chancellor in consequence of the Act, and

(b) any sums required by the Lord Chancellor for reimbursing expenses of members of the Civil Justice Council or the Civil Procedure Rule Committee.—*[Mr. Streeter.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Professions Supplementary to Medicine

That the draft Professions Supplementary to Medicine (Prosthetists and Orthotists Board) Order of Council 1997, which was laid before this House on 13th January, be approved.

Urban Development

That the Sheffield Development Corporation (Area and Constitution) Order 1997, dated 6th January 1997, a copy of which was laid before this House on 14th January, be approved.

Value Added Tax

That the Value Added Tax (Registered Social Landlords) (No. 2) Order 1997 (S.I., 1997, No. 51), dated 14th January 1997, a copy of which was laid before this House on 15th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Coe.]*

Question agreed to.

Mining Subsidence (North Yorkshire)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Coe.]*

7.35 pm

Mr. Michael Alison (Selby): I am glad to have the opportunity to raise on the Adjournment an issue which is causing anxiety and detriment to constituents of mine in the Selby district of North Yorkshire. The issue relates to the costs and possibilities of insurance cover for houses and householders whose property is affected by coal mining subsidence. The Selby district is particularly susceptible to the difficulties that I shall outline, because our local complex of mine workings is one of the largest and most modern in Britain, if not in Europe, extracting vast quantities of coal day and night under a huge local coalfield area, extending to scores of square miles.

More widely, coal mining subsidence, for all the recent diversification of our energy base, continues to be a huge and costly problem. At the end of October 1994, a Department of Trade and Industry press notice stated that British coal had settled 7,594 claims for subsidence that year, about one third of them in Yorkshire, at a cost of nearly £40 million.

That press notice, incidentally, was issued in the context of the introduction and appointment by the Government of an independent subsidence adviser, specifically to help protect the rights of those affected by coal mining subsidence. That initiative was as desirable as it was commendable, and the office of the subsidence adviser is now firmly established in Nottingham.

It is against that background that I want to draw the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister to a problem which the subsidence adviser has precisely pinpointed. Following a trawl which his office has made of several insurance companies, he wrote on 15 March 1995 to a firm of surveyors in Yorkshire who have been professionally retained by some of my constituents:

"The insurance companies themselves have confirmed that they are more than willing to effect new insurance cover to properties in known coal mining areas provided that the property in question has no history of subsidence damage. None of the companies I have spoken to will effect new cover on a property with a history of subsidence damage, whatever the cause of the subsidence."

The refusal of new cover that the subsidence adviser pinpointed is the experience of a number of my constituents in the Selby district and more widely in North Yorkshire, who have approached many insurance companies about household insurance cover. The refusal of new cover is the tip of an iceberg of financial and other detriment, which goes far wider than the narrow problems of structural damage or defects that the Coal Mining Subsidence Act 1991 was designed to tackle.

I remind my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State that, in an area of active coal mining such as the Selby coalfield, a period of suspended animation, so to speak, may apply between a phase of underground working, resulting in structural damage to property, and the Coal Authority's willingness to repair that property. Sometimes the repair work must wait for up to three years—even longer, in some cases—to make sure that the subsidence has settled and is complete, and thus to avoid abortive reinstatement.

That is the background against which some of the worst problems arise for those seeking insurance cover. The three essential problems that they face relate, first, to the fact that they cannot take advantage of the many offers of cheaper insurance. That applies especially to householders whose insurance was, until recently, controlled by mortgage companies.

Secondly, there are the problems of those who are trying to buy or sell property in coal-mining areas, arising, for example, from demands by insurance companies for full and costly structural surveys before cover is offered. Thirdly, where insurance cover is to be continued in a sale, there are instances of very large premium increases, which can often abort a sale.

Let me tell my hon. Friend the result of trawls by constituents of mine, and others in Yorkshire, in their efforts to shop around for insurance cover. Churchill Insurance, Zurich Municipal, Ecclesiastical Insurance, Cornhill Direct, Prudential, General Accident, Avon Insurance, Norwich Union and Commercial Union have all stated in one way or another, categorically or more cautiously, that they would not be able to offer new insurance cover in the typical circumstances likely to arise in the Yorkshire mining area.

General Accident, for example, wrote:

"However, if a property has suffered from subsidence damage for which repairs either have, or have not been carried out, proposers are advised to remain with their existing insurers. . . If the subsidence problem is on-going it is less likely that we will be able to accommodate the business."

Prudential wrote:

"Any building which is to be insured by Prudential must be in a good state of repair before it can be accepted. We would not be prepared to accept a building damaged by coal mining subsidence that had not been repaired as the property would be susceptible to damage from other causes."

Britannic Assurance wrote:

"We would not be willing to accept as new business a property which is currently showing signs of structural problems or is adjoining a property that has recently suffered such damage."

When, in late 1995, I wrote to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry about the problem, he actively entered the lists to see whether something could be done to improve matters. He constructively called a ministerial meeting with the relevant officers of the Association of British Insurers—ABI—and after that meeting, early in 1996, he wrote to me expressing the view that the essential difficulty was

"the information gap which can sometimes exist between insurance companies' head offices and local branches; and between insurance companies and brokers. Some brokers and local branches appear not to be sufficiently aware of the distinction between coal mining subsidence, where there is a statutory compensation scheme, and other types of subsidence where there is not.

Turning to the situation of your constituent, I would suggest that she tries to contact insurance companies' head offices rather than brokers. Should she experience difficulties with the first contact point in any particular company or companies, she should, as suggested previously, enlist the help of the ABI in getting her through to more senior staff."

My constituents followed the advice given by my hon. Friend, but I am sorry to say that it has not helped. Approaches to head offices proved as abortive as approaches to local agents. Indeed, one of my constituents had a letter from a senior officer of the ABI, who recommended that she approach a body which had links with the ABI and had been designated as a troubleshooter in the present context.

The body concerned had a most promising title: it was called the Subsidence Claims Advisory Bureau, and it referred in its prospectus to an insurance scheme known as Coal Sure Household Insurance, with a mouth-watering subtitle that read:

"At last a chance to obtain full Building Insurance cover on property that has previously suffered from mining subsidence."

My constituents thought, on receiving that advice from the ABI, which directed them to that specialist advisory bureau, that they had at last run their quarry to earth, as it were. They immediately got in touch with the firm of brokers, Messrs. G. W. Bishop Ltd., of Ashford, Kent, which was associated with the Coal Sure scheme. One can imagine their surprise and dismay, however, when they received a letter from Bishop Ltd. stating, in respect of properties that have suffered coal-mining subsidence:

"Cover for properties which have suffered from this type of damage is very difficult to obtain. In our experience, no company will offer subsidence cover for a property which has previously suffered any kind of movement."

Those exchanges clearly showed, and currently show, that departmental optimism in the Department of Trade and Industry, and sanguine and soothing advice from the ABI, have all foundered on the hard rock of resistance by the great mass of insurance companies to take on new household insurance business in active coal-mining areas.

Such immovable resistance led me to write to the subsidence adviser, Mr. Webb, at the end of last summer. I received from him a letter that included the following passage:

"From the general response which I have received from the ABI, it is clear that the specific reply given by Churchill to (your constituent) is in accordance with the criteria which are being applied by the whole insurance industry. Those criteria are:—

1) Companies are not prepared to insure subsidence damaged properties as new business; and,

2) existing insurers will continue cover on subsidence damaged property, and this extends to new owners where the property changes hands, provided that cover has not been allowed to lapse."

The subsidence adviser rightly went on to describe the situation as "far from satisfactory."

I hope that my hon. Friend will agree that the situation is far from satisfactory. My constituents in North Yorkshire—and possibly others elsewhere—are suffering real detriment from the current state of affairs. One of my constituents, for example, who is paying an annual premium of £427 on her property in Selby to Royal Insurance, had an offer from General Accident for identical cover for £263. The offer from General Accident was withdrawn immediately, however, when my constituent disclosed that her house was in an active coal-mining area, and had suffered subsidence damage.

I think that my hon. Friend will be as surprised as I am by the negative approach that the insurance industry has adopted towards subsidence problems, precisely because the Government have an excellent record in underwriting damage with public funds. There is no rationale in the insurance industry jibbing at providing underwriting cover for properties in coal mining areas,

[Mr. Michael Alison]

as the Coal Mining Subsidence Act 1991 provides effective statutory cover for dealing with subsidence claims and disburses millions of pounds a year—as I have already said—to take the heat and burden of compensation on to the broad shoulders of public finance and away from private insurance. Why, then, this irrational discrimination?

I hope that my hon. Friend will seek further remedies. I hope that, as result of this short debate, he will hold further discussions with the Association of British Insurers with a view to ending the discrimination that I have specified. One way forward might be for the Minister to encourage the insurance industry deliberately to exclude coal mining subsidence damage from policies, on the grounds that publicly financed compensation is already available. Lower premiums and more active policy writing could then result.

If all else fails, I hope that my hon. Friend will consider paying compensation, as part of statutory subsidence compensation, to householders who can demonstrate that they are suffering financial detriment through not being able to secure new and cheaper insurance cover. I hope that he will consider offering financial help in cases where the insurance industry will consider offering a quotation for new insurance cover only if a very costly full household structural survey is provided. I need not remind my hon. Friend that such surveys can cost many hundreds of pounds.

7.51 pm

The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John M. Taylor): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) on securing this debate. I welcome the opportunity it provides to discuss the issue of insurance cover for properties in areas exposed to the risk of coal mining subsidence damage. As he said, it is an issue that potentially affects large numbers of homes in his constituency and elsewhere.

I am aware that my right hon. Friend has had previous correspondence and discussions on this matter with my hon. Friend the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Energy. I am therefore aware of the difficulties faced by some of his constituents while trying to obtain insurance cover for their homes. My right hon. Friend drew attention to the extensive safeguards provided by the statutory coal mining subsidence regime.

The relevant legislation is the Coal Mining Subsidence Act 1991, as amended by the Coal Industry Act 1994. In essence, the Act requires coal mining companies in areas of current mining and the Coal Authority elsewhere to make good coal mining subsidence damage. Given that statutory regime, like my right hon. Friend I find it difficult to understand why insurers should be concerned about the possibility of receiving claims for coal mining subsidence damage when that damage would be made good by the coal mining company or the Coal Authority.

My right hon. Friend was kind enough to refer to my hon. Friend's initiative in meeting the Association of British Insurers, when he put that proposition to them. It was clear that there was widespread—if not universal—recognition, at least in the association and at insurers' head office level, that the regime was in place and that the cost of coal mining subsidence damage repairs would not fall on the insurer.

Nevertheless, the association offered—I believe it was a helpful suggestion—to hold a seminar for its members with the Coal Authority and with RJB Mining to make clear the full extent of the coal mining subsidence damage regime and its implications for insurers. That seminar was held in October last year and was well attended. I am sure that the insurance industry, certainly at head office level, is now much more fully aware of how unlikely it is that it would be called upon to meet coal mining subsidence damage claims. That appears to be useful progress.

Meanwhile, my right hon. Friend recently received a letter from the Association of British Insurers. He will know from the letter that the association accepts that some insurers had been reluctant to quote for risks in coal mining areas because they failed to understand the responsibilities of the mining companies and the Coal Authority. My right hon. Friend will have noted that, in order to improve the situation, the association has requested the chief executives of member companies to

"ensure consistent application of an informed underwriting policy of generally being prepared to insure such policies".

I turn now to the so-called "direct" insurance market. As my right hon. Friend is aware, those companies offer lower premiums. They are able to do that, essentially, by taking on only applications that give rise to no substantial underwriting complications, thereby enabling them to reduce their administration costs. Insurers are commercial undertakings. I am confident that my right hon. Friend will agree that, if some insurers decide that they shall seek to supply a particular segment of the market in that way, they are fully entitled to do so.

Much of the continuing confusion about the matter is due to a lack of understanding of company underwriting policy at branch level. While the head office of a particular company may be well informed of the risks and of how customers should be advised, staff at branch level often remain uninformed. A similar situation can arise with independent brokers, where companies have not kept them up to date with any changes to their underwriting policies.

The Association of British Insurers has been positive in contacting its members to ask that each company ensures that its underwriting practices are consistent across its regional offices. The association highlighted the need for companies to put in place procedures for referring customers from direct writing arms of their business to other parts of the company that can handle that specialised business.

I understand that steps are being taken to compile an information pack to ensure that all direct insurers give consistent advice about why they have to refuse some applicants, and that they pass applicants on to "non-direct" parts of the business, which will consider more complex applications. A pack is also being

considered that would explain to customers the limits of different types of insurance, and point them towards the kind that is most appropriate for them.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will agree that some progress has been made by the Association of British Insurers and the insurance industry. However, it is quite clear that some work remains to be done. The association will be seeking information from its members on what action companies have taken, and it will report that progress to my hon. Friend the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Energy.

I also give my right hon. Friend this assurance: when *Hansard* has completed its task, my hon. Friend the Energy Minister will ensure that the director general of the Association of British Insurers receives the details of this debate, and he will ask the director general for his comments about the issues that have been raised. Naturally, my hon. Friend will then pass on those comments to my right hon. Friend.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 31 January 1997

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.34 am

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I am delighted to have the opportunity to promote the Bill, which will give the courts throughout the United Kingdom jurisdiction over acts of conspiracy and incitement in this country which relate to acts intended to take place abroad. I am most grateful for the support that I have had from hon. Members on both sides.

I have a particular concern with terrorism. It is a sad fact that nowadays, it is an international business and is no respecter of national boundaries. Indeed, terrorist activity in one country is sometimes financed and organised by an unfriendly Government of another. Terrorism is capable of touching the lives of all of us, whether in Northern Ireland or in the quiet Sussex lane where my predecessor, Ian Gow, was murdered by the IRA. Like other hon. Members, I thought long and hard before deciding on the subject for my Bill. The House will not be surprised to hear that a major factor in my decision was the assassination of my predecessor as Member of Parliament for Eastbourne.

I think that we would all agree that if people use this country as a base for committing crime abroad, we cannot allow that to go unchecked. There is currently a significant gap in our law, which means that those who plan the commission of offences or seek to encourage others to commit offences, where those offences are intended to take place in other countries, can do so in the United Kingdom without risk of prosecution here. I believe that that is a serious loophole, which must be closed. My Bill is intended to do just that.

The Bill will help to control the activities of foreign extremists who use this country as a base to plan or encourage serious offences abroad. It will also enable action to be taken against international organised crime, such as drug trafficking and fraud, as well as against organised football hooliganism. Those are the sorts of activity that have given rise to particular concern, but which can fall outside the scope of the existing law. I hope that the Bill will rectify that situation.

The aims and objectives of the Bill were foreshadowed by a report by the international maritime fraud research sub-committee of the Society of Conservative Lawyers in 1985. I am pleased to say that my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway), who is in his place, was chairman of that committee. The committee spoke of its concern at the use being made of the London market to further the commission of crimes abroad. Given my hon. Friend's background in shipping, which I share, it is hardly surprising that the committee was particularly concerned with potential maritime insurance frauds being planned in this country.

The report made the point that English common law rules are basically territorial and that in the case of conspiracy, jurisdiction would apply only if the contemplated crime was indictable in England. Reference was made to the case of Treacy *v.* the Director of Public Prosecutions in 1971, when Lord Diplock stated that the basis of the rule was international comity. That leans against the English courts punishing those who do something in another country that has no harmful consequences in this country. In the case of Board of Trade *v.* Owen in 1957, Lord Tucker took the view that it was the function of the English courts to aid in the preservation of the Queen's peace within the realm.

The report makes much of the comments of the trial judge, Mr. Justice Donovan, who was overruled in the Owen case. He said:

"remembering that it is the agreement which constitutes the crime, whether the unlawful object is effected or not, I cannot on principle see how the conspiracy constituted by such an agreement becomes untriable here simply because the crime or tort has been committed abroad . . .

It would be of no benefit to this country if it became the sanctuary for conspirators provided only that they concluded their unlawful plots abroad."

They were wise words indeed.

The Society of Conservative Lawyers made the point that it was important to protect the integrity and good reputation of the City of London. I agree with that wholeheartedly, but there is an even wider issue—whether Britain should be able to be used at all as a safe haven for those planning criminal acts abroad.

The report concluded:

"It is our opinion that . . . consideration should be given to at least amending the English law relating to conspiracy so that conspiracy in England to commit a crime relating to maritime fraud in a convention country will be triable in England if the acts constituting the crime amount to a crime in England and the country where it has been agreed those acts shall be performed."

My Bill takes up that challenge and goes further.

Last year, my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) introduced a Bill to extend the jurisdiction of the courts over acts of conspiracy and incitement here in respect of sexual offences against children abroad. I congratulate my hon. Friend on his success with that important Bill, which I am pleased to say, subsequently became the Sexual Offences (Conspiracy and Incitement) Act 1996.

The Act responded to widespread concern about the sickening acts of those who travel abroad for the purpose of sexually abusing children in other countries—a problem known as sex tourism. It addresses that despicable practice by making it possible to take action against those who organise sex tours or encourage others to travel abroad to exploit children sexually. For example, it catches tour operators organising travel abroad for paedophiles for the purpose of engaging in sexual acts against children, and groups of private individuals who might together plan a trip for that purpose—for example, a paedophile ring—or who might incite each other to travel for that purpose.

[Mr. Nigel Waterson]

I am delighted that our law now provides for the prosecution of such people. Because of the serious and obnoxious nature of the offences concerned, it was clearly important to ensure that our courts had jurisdiction over those who, in the United Kingdom, conspire or incite others to commit such offences.

Sadly, however, sexual offences against children are not the only offences committed abroad that may be planned or encouraged by people in Britain. I have already mentioned a few examples. I propose that we should go further, by taking the same approach in respect of other crimes.

Lest anyone believes that my Bill is of academic interest only, let me give a concrete example. Hon. Members will recall the recent trial at the Old Bailey of those responsible for bombing the Israeli embassy in London. One of the defences put forward by learned counsel was that the defendants were indeed planning to cause explosions—however, not in Britain, but abroad. The time has come to end such legalistic nonsense. If my Bill becomes law, it will be significantly less likely that defendants will claim that as a defence.

My Bill, therefore, does for all criminal offences what the existing Act does in respect of child sex offences and it follows the same broad principles in its formulation. The Bill will subsume the provisions of the 1996 Act and repeal it.

It is a significant step to extend the approach taken in the Sexual Offences (Conspiracy and Incitement) Act to all other offences. That is why the implications of doing so were fully investigated by the interdepartmental review of extra-territorial jurisdiction, which reported last year.

Among other issues, the report considered various options to extend the law of conspiracy and incitement. It pointed out:

"If an Act of conspiracy or incitement which takes place here, relates to an act which is committed, or planned to be committed outside this country, then, notwithstanding that conspiracy and incitement themselves are criminal offences, UK courts would not have jurisdiction unless the substantive acts were, exceptionally, ones for which extra-territorial jurisdiction already existed."

The committee referred to sexual offences against children abroad, foreign nationals fomenting politically motivated violence in their own countries and football hooligans planning acts of violence at venues abroad. As the report concludes:

"This has a negative and unhelpful impact on our bilateral relations with many of the countries concerned."

Having considered whether it was possible either to take no action or simply to extend the law in relation to specified offences, the committee rejected those options. It concluded that the simplest and most effective way forward was to extend the scope of incitement and conspiracy generally. Otherwise, as the committee pointed out, it would be possible to find that although the activities of particular individuals were objectionable, there was no jurisdiction over the substantive offence that they were planning or encouraging. The committee also drew particular attention to the principle of dual criminality, to which I shall refer in a moment.

The committee considered a number of possible objections to its proposed course, but rejected them all. It felt that none of them was sufficient to outweigh the advantages of extending the law on conspiracy and incitement.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary announced last July that the Government had accepted that conclusion. My Bill will implement the recommendations of that very thorough review.

It would be quite wrong for me to introduce my Bill without making some reference to the inquiry into legislation against terrorism carried out by Lord Lloyd of Berwick and published last October. While the report covers a wide range of issues related to terrorism, it has a section dealing with those who commit terrorist acts overseas. Chapter 12 talks about any country—such as the United Kingdom—which has substantial expatriate communities from trouble spots around the world being potentially implicated in international terrorism. It refers to

"safe havens for terrorists on the run"

and states:

"Britain is no exception, having been accused of harbouring Algerian, Indian, Palestinian and Turkish terrorists, and no doubt others besides. The UK has a responsibility not to allow its territory to be used as a base for violent activity against a foreign government, and the Government's record and pronouncements show that it takes this duty very seriously."

I am sure that the whole House will agree with that sentiment.

Lord Lloyd's report also refers to the Owen case. The facts involve an allegation that the defendants were involved in a conspiracy in London to defraud a Government department in Germany. The conviction was quashed by the Court of Appeal on the grounds that we have already discussed and the decision was affirmed in the House of Lords. The principle applied was that offences committed abroad do not disturb the Queen's peace. Hon. Members may find that a somewhat quaint approach in the modern world of rapid travel and communications.

Lord Lloyd had no difficulty with reversing the legal position by legislation—which is in essence the aim of my Bill.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I am listening to my hon. Friend's speech with great interest. He is introducing a very good measure. Will he refer to how other countries deal with the same problem? Does similar legislation already exist in France, Germany or the United States?

Mr. Waterson: I am sorry to disappoint my hon. Friend, but I shall not be dealing with those aspects in my speech—otherwise it would probably take up most of the morning. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will touch on them. Other countries approach the problems in different ways or in similar ways to my Bill. However, it is absolutely clear that if terrorists co-operate internationally, Governments should do the same. As I have already said, it is an international problem. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support today.

Lord Lloyd proposed that the legal position could be reversed by legislation. He quoted with approval the views of Lord Griffiths, who in the case of Somchai *v.* Government of the USA in 1991 stated:

"in this century crime has ceased to be largely local in origin and effect. Crime is now established on an international scale, and the common law must face this new reality."

It is perhaps even more curious that in the case of R. *v.* Sanson in 1991, the Court of Appeal held that a conspiracy abroad to commit a crime here was triable here even though there was no overt act in this country. Can there therefore be any sensible reason why the reverse should not apply in English law?

Before I describe the Bill's provisions in more detail, it is important to clarify some of the underlying principles on which the measure is based. As we have seen, the jurisdiction of UK courts is based on the principle of territoriality: our courts normally have jurisdiction only over offences that occur in this country.

Our law provides that it is also an offence to conspire to commit or incite others to commit an offence. Specific statutory provision for that is made in section 1 of the Criminal Law Act 1977. Under that provision, the courts have jurisdiction to prosecute a person for conspiracy or incitement only if the contemplated substantive offence, whether carried out or not, is itself an offence that could be prosecuted in the UK. Clearly, in circumstances where the substantive offence is or would have been completed in the UK, and therefore is prosecutable here, our courts have the jurisdiction to prosecute for any conspiracy or incitement to commit that offence.

There are also a few statutory exceptions to the general principle of territoriality, where UK courts have been given specific power to prosecute people for offences committed in other countries or otherwise outside UK territory. In other words, there are a number of offences in respect of which our courts can exercise extra-territorial jurisdiction. To give a few examples, we have such jurisdiction over offences of murder, piracy, treason and breaches of certain international conventions, such as the chemical weapons convention, and in respect of attacks on persons protected by international conventions.

As I said, if courts have jurisdiction over the substantive offence, it follows that they would also be able to prosecute for conspiracy or incitement to commit that offence. Therefore, in respect of offences over which the UK has adopted extra-territorial jurisdiction, our courts are already able to deal with conspiracies or incitement to commit those offences, even where the substantive offence is or would be completed abroad.

We have seen that there is only a limited range of offences in respect of which the UK will take extra-territorial jurisdiction, but for the vast majority of crimes under our law, if the completed act is to take place overseas, our courts are generally powerless to act against conspiracies or incitements that occur in this country. That is so, although conspiracy and incitement are in themselves offences. I believe that it is right for Parliament to debate measures that seek to prevent people such as foreign extremists and football hooligans from using this country to further criminal activities overseas. That is the aim of the Bill.

Clause 1 inserts a new section 1A in the Criminal Law Act 1977. That sets out the various conditions that would need to be satisfied for a charge of conspiracy to commit offences outside the UK in relation to England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Conspiracy is the act of two or more people agreeing together to pursue a course of action that amounts to a criminal offence. The clause would make it an offence in England, Wales or Northern Ireland to conspire to pursue a course of conduct that would amount to an offence where it was intended that the conduct would take place in a country or territory outside the UK. The fact that the conspiracy must lead to an act or event taking place outside the UK is the primary condition that must be met. That is, of course, what the Bill is all about. If the act or event contemplated takes place in this country, the conspiracy is already an offence.

Another important requirement that must be satisfied before the provision would apply is that the substantive act must constitute an offence both under the law of England and Wales or of Northern Ireland and under the law of the country in which it was committed or planned to be committed. That application of the principle of dual criminality is a vital safeguard. We in Parliament rightly consider that it is our function to pass laws that apply in the territory of the UK. We would take great exception if the law-making body of another country attempted to pass laws that would apply here. Equally, therefore, we must not attempt to export our laws overseas. The dual criminality test avoids that trap. It will ensure that, even if a person conspires in the UK to commit an act that is an offence in the country where it would be committed, unless that act is also an offence under the law of the relevant UK jurisdiction where the conspiracy takes place, no offence will have been committed under the Bill.

Similarly, the Bill will not penalise those in the UK who plan to carry out an act that is perfectly lawful in the place where it would be committed, even if to do so in this country would amount to an offence. The Bill provides that the criminality test is satisfied unless the defence shows grounds that it is not, in which case it is a matter for the judge to decide. The final condition is that some part of the conspiracy, but not necessarily all of the conduct that constitutes that offence, must take place in England, Wales or Northern Ireland.

Clause 2 makes it an offence in England, Wales or Northern Ireland to incite another person to commit an offence outside the territory of the UK. Incitement is the act of encouraging others to do something. Conditions are set out in clause 2 that must be satisfied before incitement would amount to an offence under the Bill. The conditions are similar to those that I described a moment ago in relation to conspiracy, including the requirement for dual criminality.

Clause 3 contains the Scottish provisions. They are framed slightly differently from those applying in the other UK jurisdictions because, of course, of the differences in Scots law. The Bill's effect is, however, essentially the same in all three jurisdictions.

The maximum penalty for the offences of conspiracy and incitement created by the Bill is the same as those for the substantive offence that is being planned or encouraged. Thus, conspiracy to rape, for example, would carry a maximum penalty of life imprisonment, as that is the maximum penalty available for the offence of rape under UK law.

As a consequence of introducing a measure that applies across the board to all criminal offences, it is hardly surprising that a number of legislative provisions will have to be amended or repealed to take account of my Bill. For example, where legislation might already refer to conspiracy or incitement to commit particular acts outside UK jurisdiction, such references will obviously be superseded by the Bill's general provisions. Clause 4 therefore makes provision for the necessary amendments and repeals by giving effect to the two schedules to the

[Mr. Waterson]

Bill. Schedule 1 contains a list of changes to the statutes which, consequential on the Bill's provisions, require amendment, and schedule 2 contains the details of provisions that will be repealed. Clause 5 makes the necessary provisions for commencement and extent.

I hope that I have given a fair and accurate description of the Bill's aims, principles and contents. In a sense, it is designed to have a limited and narrow effect on UK law. I have been at pains since first considering the matter to ensure that there is strong protection in the Bill for the legitimate civil rights of foreign nationals who find themselves in our country because, for whatever reason, they are at odds with the regime in their native land. This country has always prided itself on its liberal approach to political refugees, whatever their views. Nor is my Bill aimed at any particular individual group or organisation.

I sometimes think of Karl Marx, sitting peacefully in the reading room of the British museum—this is very old Labour—writing "Das Kapital". I do not think that he would have come under my Bill's provisions if it had been enacted in his day, although I cannot help reflecting on how much suffering and misery the world would have been spared had his activities been discouraged. Although the Bill will significantly widen the scope of our courts' jurisdiction in respect of conspiracy and incitement, I envisage that there will be only a few prosecutions under its provisions. In no way would that be a poor reflection on the Bill's success—quite the opposite. My Bill should act as a deterrent and send a strong message to those who live here in safety and who might be tempted to abuse our hospitality.

I am sure that those who currently use this country as a base for planning or encouraging criminal activity abroad are well aware of how far they are able to go while remaining within the law. My Bill will make life much more difficult for them and, if it is successful in curbing their activities, it will have done its job. I commend the Bill to the House.

9.59 am

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): I congratulate the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on his good fortune and on introducing a Bill that will deal, as he said, with the international scourge of world terrorism and other offenders who besmirch the name of this country, such as those who call themselves football supporters and commit substantive offences abroad. The hon. Gentleman's Bill carries on a tradition of development of our statute law and our common law, and it has received the endorsement of an intergovernmental working party and the inquiry into legislation against terrorism chaired by Lord Lloyd of Berwick.

My first reaction to the Bill was that it was like peace, motherhood and apple pie. Who could oppose such a worthy measure? I then read the list of sponsors, and noticed that they were all drawn from the Conservative party. That raised the question why, if the Bill were wholly non-partisan and non-controversial, the hon. Member for Eastbourne had not endeavoured to obtain wider backing. That was a little signal which perhaps made me look more carefully at it.

Mr. Waterson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way so that I may clarify the position. I asked some Opposition Members to become sponsors and they took the reasonable view that they wanted to see a draft of the Bill before committing themselves. I have some support from the hon. Gentleman's colleagues and I expressed my thanks to them in my speech.

Mr. Anderson: I accept that explanation, but the lack of Opposition sponsors still raises some questions. I do not oppose the Bill as such, but I intend to respond to the hon. Gentleman's invitation to debate the issue of international terrorism and to raise questions that trouble me. I hope that those questions will also trouble others who consider the Bill and have to tackle this increasing problem in today's world.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): I may be at risk of making a party point—although I merely follow the hon. Gentleman's lead when he made a party distinction about the sponsors of the Bill—but it seems to me that any reluctance to sponsor a Bill designed to crack down on terrorism is entirely consistent with the views of some of the IRA sympathisers on the Opposition Benches and the Opposition's regular opposition to the prevention of terrorism Acts.

Mr. Anderson: That was a wholly disgraceful intervention. My party has acted in a bipartisan way on Northern Ireland, as have the Liberal Democrats. If the hon. Gentleman wants to enter the election season already by calling us weak on terrorism, he may do so, but he is demeaning the House and himself.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): That was a petty, nasty and objectionable intervention from the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin), and it was out of kilter with the Prime Minister's remarks only yesterday, when he referred to the consensual support that he has received from the Opposition on Northern Ireland. My hon. Friend is right to say that the hon. Gentleman's intervention is not worthy of comment: it was contemptible.

Mr. Anderson: It was also out of spirit with the reasonable speech made by the hon. Member for Eastbourne, and I am sure that he would repudiate it in the Corridors. The hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) has obviously been busy reading that well-known American book, "How to influence people without making friends", in preparation for the election.

Mr. Peter Butler (Milton Keynes, North-East): To assist the hon. Gentleman in making friends, may I ask him to glance down the list of sponsors, which includes my name, and concede that they are of high quality even if they are all Conservatives?

Mr. Anderson: Having served with the hon. Gentleman on the Home Affairs Committee, I have no doubt about his deep interest in the subject and I am sure that his contribution will be wholly reasonable. Given that

we are in an election season and jibes are being traded across the Floor, this is not perhaps the best time to consider matters of such importance reasonably and dispassionately. I probably agree with the hon. Member for Eastbourne and his Bill. All I am seeking to do is to suggest that it might contain some dangers. I hope that the hon. Gentleman, in the reasonable spirit in which he introduced the Bill, will consider those aspects that trouble me.

Perhaps during an election season, human rights become a naughty thought. I believe that the Bill might have dangerous implications for human rights, although I recognise of course that it seeks to deal with a real problem, caused in part by the mobility of international terrorists and the way in which many seek to abuse our long traditions of hospitality. Lord Lloyd, in his report, quoted Lord Griffiths:

"in this century crime has ceased to be largely local in origin and effect. Crime is now established on an international scale, and the common law must face this new reality."

We as legislators must face that fact.

We must also consider the political sensitivities of some of our ethnic minorities, who feel that their countrymen are being oppressed. One thinks of the Kashmiris and others. Those political sensitivities add a new dimension to our consideration of the Bill. How should we respond? The problems are illustrated in the newspapers. *The Observer* on 10 March 1996 quoted Hamas as saying:

"we use London as a base for terrorism and source of funds".

A further example is Dr. al-Masari, who shelters under this country's protection and appeared to sympathise with his countrymen who blew up the United States installation in Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): I do not wish to make a party point, but the case of Dr. al-Masari is an important example. I shall refer to it shortly, if I catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that Dr. al-Masari's comments should not only fall within the legislation, but deprive him of any right to asylum in this country?

Mr. Anderson: That may be one effect of the moves that have just been agreed at the United Nations—I am not sure whether the new UN agreement is retrospective. I certainly share the hon. Gentleman's concern about the activities of Dr. al-Masari and would need to consider carefully whether, because of his conduct, he deserves to be here. We may come to a different conclusion when we study the relevant facts.

Swansea is affected, as is shown by an article in *The Sunday Times* of 11 June 1993, headed:

"World Trade Center bombing suspect 'stole' identity of Swansea student."

That shows that international crime knows no frontiers; our law has to be adapted to respond.

I recognise the pressures on the Government from a number of countries—for example, the anger in France at the way Algerian terrorists who carry out atrocities in Paris and elsewhere have found safe refuge in this country. Another example was the pressure on the Prime Minister at the summit meeting with Arab heads of state recently in Sharm el Sheikh. I share that anger and understand that there is legitimate concern, and I accept that there should be a debate on how best to tackle the problem.

Clause 1 relates to conspiracy, and clause 2 to incitement. Under the Bill, various hurdles or conditions have to be satisfied before a prosecution can be mounted in this country. For example, the fourth condition, in proposed new section 1A(5), is that

"a party to the agreement, or a party's agent, did anything in England and Wales in relation to the agreement before its formation".

I would need to consider carefully the nature of agency in the criminal law and the case law on the subject. It might be difficult to tie the words of an agent and the full authority of an agent to someone in this country. In the case of rape, although not, I concede, in the case of conspiracy, the case law on "participation" is long. It shows how the test of "participation" must be satisfied, for example in the case of Clarkson, and in others.

Proposed new section 1A(11) states:

"Any act done by means of a message (however communicated) is to be treated for the purposes of the fourth condition as done in England and Wales".

On the face of it, a "message" of support for those intending to undertake some criminal action in a third country could be treated as a satisfying condition. I wonder whether that goes too far. There is a similar provision about a "message" in clause 2, which relates to incitement. Obviously we can look more carefully at the ambit of the Bill in Committee.

In paragraph 12.38 of his report, having considered the various options of extradition and so forth to meet the genuine concern about the harbouring of terrorists, Lord Lloyd states:

"There have also been statutory moves in the same direction"—

the direction of extra-territoriality—

"see Criminal Law Act 1993, not yet in force, and the Sexual Offences (Conspiracy and Incitement) Act 1996, which gives UK courts jurisdiction in respect of persons conspiring to commit relevant offences abroad. So it would not be a great step to provide by legislation that a conspiracy here to commit a crime abroad should also be triable here, at any rate in the field of terrorism where international co-operation is so vital."

The Bill, of course, goes much further than terrorism. I also wonder whether one can follow the analogy of the 1996 Act and its extra-territorial provisions, which are also being considered in connection with the Sex Offenders Bill. The analogy on extra-territoriality between sex tourism Bills and this Bill is not as clear as Lord Lloyd would have us wish. In passing, Lord Lloyd is part of the security establishment and when someone has been over long in that field, a certain professional deformation can occur.

All right-thinking people in this country accept that people who commit offences against children or destroy the innocence of young children abroad should be brought within the scope of our law. There is no dispute about that. I am confident that no such consensus exists in respect of some other offences. It is often said that one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter. As Members of the legislature today, we may be becoming involved with the sort of debates that they had in the 16th century, when one side talked of the powers that be being ordained of God—the hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) can correct me about that—and of

[Mr. Anderson]

the concept of the divine right of kings and others said that because a Government are established they must be accorded respect; another side, such as the 16th century author of "Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos", said that an individual had a right to revolt against a tyrannical Government.

There are many dictatorships and tyrannical Governments in this world. Are we to say that someone who has fled to this country from that tyranny is estopped thereby from seeking to overthrow by word or action that tyrannical Government? Let us think of this country's traditions and of people who are now considered as great patriots in their own countries. Kossuth, the Hungarian patriot, who was in London after the 1848 revolution, conspired against his Government.

I shall give a more up-to-date example. Nelson Mandela was a leading member of the African National Congress and, in the 1950s, sought by all means possible to moderate and influence the stance on racial discrimination of South Africa's white Government—after the change to the National Government in 1948, the regime was increasingly repressive. From its formation, the African National Congress had a tradition of non-violent opposition to the Government. Then, we had Sharpeville and a number of other incidents. After Sharpeville, Nelson Mandela—now President Mandela—made a magnificent speech at the Rivonia trial, demonstrating the long tradition of non-violence. The only way that appeared open to people such as Nelson Mandela was to involve themselves in acts of terrorism, directed not against individual citizens but against pylons and other such installations.

Had Nelson Mandela escaped to this country, he would have been caught by the provisions in the Bill if he had communed with members of the Umkhunte Ya Sizwe, or MK, the military arm of the ANC, who were blowing up pylons in desperation, having tried unsuccessfully again and again to change their repressive Government by peaceful means. South Africa was considered a friendly country. The case of Nelson Mandela, who is now rightly eulogised and who was forced into extremely limited acts of terrorism, gives cause for concern about the extensive nature of the provisions.

We could consider various tyrannies that exist today, whether it be Burma, where Aung San Suu Kyi is opposing the Government, or other terrorist states from which citizens, oppressed by their tyrannical Governments, may have fled to the United Kingdom where they would be subject to prosecution under the Bill if they sent messages of support to those who committed very minor acts of terrorism.

Mr. Waterson: I apologise for intervening a second time in the hon. Gentleman's thoughtful contribution. He will understand if I do not follow him down the line of considering individual cases such as that of President Mandela. Will he reflect on the safeguards that the offence would have to be an offence in this country as well as in another country and that, even if someone were prosecuted and convicted of a minor act of terrorism, the sentence applied in this country would probably not be as swingeing as the one that was applied in the case of President Mandela?

Mr. Anderson: To return to the analogy of President Mandela, blowing up an electricity pylon would be an offence here as well as in South Africa, and the sentence that a judge would impose would not be to say to the young Nelson Mandela, "Well, we understand you, it's the sort of thing that I would do in your place, because South Africa is a repressive regime and, after all, you tried to act in a peaceful way and you've been forced into this terrorism." It would probably, in fact, be a five to 10-year sentence.

Lord Lloyd said:

"it would not be a great step to provide by legislation that a conspiracy here to commit a crime abroad should also be triable here,"

but it is not as simple as that. I hope that the Nelson Mandela analogy—I could give far more up-to-date examples involving tyrannical regimes—shows that it is not enough to say that the extra-territoriality barrier has been breached and that because we believe, as must all right-thinking people, that sex tourists should be prosecuted here, it must follow, as night follows day, that we must agree with the extension of that principle to the areas suggested by the hon. Member for Eastbourne, although I stress that I share the public anger at the activities of those who abuse our hospitality.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope): I follow the hon. Gentleman's line of thought, but the Bill makes it perfectly clear that, whatever the merits or demerits of an individual case, we do not want this country to continue to allow anybody, for any reason, to plan or plot what he called a little bit of terrorism; it makes no difference whether it is a little bit or a lot of terrorism: we do not want people here planning any terrorism whatever.

Mr. Anderson: I hope that I did not use the phrase, "a little bit of terrorism". I said that, whereas sex tourism is absolute and one can agree on that, terrorism is a loaded word. As I said, one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter, so we are dealing with a world of greys rather than absolutes. That is why I used the analogy of Nelson Mandela.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Anderson: No. With all due respect, the hon. Gentleman's first contribution was such that I am reluctant to yield to him.

I agree with the Minister that there is a real problem. There is genuine anger, and the Prime Minister and other Ministers are subject to proper pressure from other countries.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): The hon. Gentleman is a distinguished barrister, so perhaps he can tell us whether a possible combination could be that the legislation would embody the absolute condemnation of the use of our territory for such purposes—unequivocally and regardless of background factors—but that, in the

course of the prosecution and defence, the factors that he mentions, including to some extent the political background, would come out and could be adduced in mitigation.

Mr. Anderson: I am not sure how much a judge would be able or want to vary sentence on such mitigation factors, because that would be to exercise a political judgment on which countries are or are not desirable. A judge would be reluctant to be involved in such judgments.

Mr. Michael: My hon. Friend is getting into an interesting area, and the contribution of the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) is helpful, because those factors would clearly have to be taken into account if they were available to the court. We must also consider the balance between what the Bill—essentially a Government-written Bill—says, and the way in which it is to be used. Perhaps the Minister will say something about that.

Mr. Anderson: I agree with the Minister that there is a real problem. The hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) and I are senior officers of the all-party group on France and we understand the deep anxiety of the French Government that Algerian terrorists who carry out atrocities on French soil can find sanctuary here. Mr. Pasqua, who is not the most liberal of French politicians, was recently quoted as being highly critical of the British attitude in that respect.

I would have no problem with prosecuting an Algerian, for example, who conspired to commit an offence in France or incited others to do so, because France is a free country with free assembly, access to newspapers, and elections, and is friendly to us. Those who commit terrorist atrocities in France should certainly not find sanctuary here.

Mr. Kirkhope: I want to correct a misapprehension that could arise from the hon. Gentleman's remarks. We have received considerable praise from the French operational agencies as a result of our co-operation and assistance in dealing with the Algerian extremist threat. I want that to be clear and on the record.

Mr. Anderson: I have no doubt that that is true. I was saying that there was a constituency in France articulated by Mr. Pasqua, the former Interior Affairs Minister, which was highly critical of the alleged readiness of the British Government to harbour terrorists. I am sure that at operational level the position is mightily different from that which he has set out, perhaps for his own political reasons.

There is no problem in respect of France, but there is a question mark over whether we would have a problem in respect of countries which had been designated by, for example, the United States as terrorist countries—those which foment terrorism abroad and force people whom we would recognise as freedom fighters to leave and come to this country. The Minister cannot resile from that problem. If we want to try someone who is prepared to conspire or incite others to commit acts against terrorist countries, where do we draw the line? Should we have a white list, as the Government do in respect of the asylum legislation, so that if a terrorist act was contemplated or planned here against certain countries we would not prosecute? The problem would then be the grey areas.

For example, the Algerian Government are now subject to the most awful killings by Islamic extremists. Every day, we read about more members of the establishment and ordinary citizens of Algeria who have been killed, yet the authorities stopped the election which FIS—the Islamic party—was likely to have won. That in part triggered the present unrest. On which side of the line would we place Algeria in terms of its fundamental freedoms? At least the current law, under which we have no extra-territorial jurisdiction, provides the Government with a shield against those who press for prosecution here.

There may be a number of other means of tackling the real problem of terrorists using Britain as a base. Although Lord Lloyd came down in favour of a Bill of this nature in his report, he also considered some of the other matters.

Mr. Butler: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. It is more a moral than a legal quandary, but he rightly translates it into legal terms. To put it the other way round, is he saying that there are circumstances in which, for example, the murder of innocent civilians and citizens in countries abroad is justified, and that there should be no law against the people who planned those murders from this country, or if there is a law it should not be pursued? If that is a proper interpretation of his remarks, I find it difficult to agree with him.

Mr. Anderson: It is not, with respect, a proper interpretation of my remarks. I am thinking aloud and saying that certain acts which could be construed as terrorist acts fall far short of murdering innocent citizens. I mentioned Mr. Mandela and the blowing up of electricity pylons, which could have been caught under the terms of the Bill. We should be aware of what could happen and the wide terms in which the Bill is drafted.

Mr. Kirkhope: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman again. We are in danger, are we not, of becoming a little too selective. My hon. Friend's Bill refers to matters which the United Kingdom regards as crimes. Whether it is merely blowing up a pylon or murdering someone, in United Kingdom law that is not an acceptable act. If it is planned in the United Kingdom to take place elsewhere, that is not acceptable. When we drafted the Bill, we were in difficulties deciding whether simply to extend the power to specific offences, but my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) is right to have decided to ask the House to approve the power in a general sense for those crimes which are United Kingdom crimes. The dual criminality rule is the protection.

Mr. Anderson: The dual criminality rule would cover the electricity pylons. My concern is that the generality of the Bill gives a tang of the divine right of kings; the suggestion that a Government, however tyrannical, however they came to power and however they override their opponents, must be protected against any acts which may be the desperate acts of individuals. I confess that I do not see how we can achieve legislatively the drawing of a line between those countries and other countries. The nature of the Bill effectively endorses the powers that be throughout the world.

Mr. Kirkhope: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman again. We are a democracy. We are very

[Mr. Kirkhope]

happy to allow people to come here and to express a different view from our own about what is happening in their home country. We allow them free speech and will continue to protect their rights to criticise and make adverse comments about the regime or Government in their home country. What we are saying and what my hon. Friend makes clear in his Bill, is that we are not prepared to harbour people who are prepared to break our laws by inciting others or conspiring to commit terrorist acts in their home country. That is a simple point. We want free speech and we want people to comment, but we believe that that is sufficient. We do not see why we should be the base for planning or plotting terrorism or anything else criminal.

Mr. Anderson: I hear what the Minister says. I hope that he concedes that there is a real problem in restricting or confining those whom we believe to be working together against tyrannical regimes. That could be the effect of the Bill, and it would be wholly counter to our traditions. In the 19th century we harboured those who were regarded by their own countries as troublemakers or terrorists.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): The hon. Gentleman gave the example of Nelson Mandela. I have often discussed the matter with my lifelong friend Trevor Huddleston. The anti-apartheid movement which Trevor founded was non-violent. I believe that the movement ended apartheid in South Africa. I cannot develop the argument because I do not have the time, but it was not a violent movement. Trevor Huddleston, a deeply Christian man, as the hon. Gentleman will know, hated apartheid. He talked of it with great hate, but there was still no violence in the movement, which Nelson Mandela embraced wholeheartedly.

Mr. Anderson: The anti-apartheid movement, of which I was proud to be a part, fully supported the liberation movements, the African National Congress and the Pan African Congress, which as a result of the unwillingness of that oppressive regime to listen to them were forced reluctantly along the road to limited violence, which could be construed as terrorism and could have been brought within the ambit of the Bill. That is the message that I should like to leave the House with. The points that I have made have to be raised as part of a wider debate so that a reasonable consensus can be achieved to combat terrorism without undermining our tradition of dissent.

Therefore, it is with a certain amount of caution that I commend the hon. Member for Eastbourne on introducing the Bill. I understand the motives behind it. I understand the international pressures on the Prime Minister. I understand the anger of our people at those who abuse our hospitality. I believe that there are a number of ways in which that problem could be tackled. I may well come to the view, with reluctance, that the Bill is a way which has to be made available, but it brings with it certain implications and responsibilities which I hope will be fully considered.

10.38 am

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): The hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) has made a thoughtful contribution to the debate, which everyone welcomes; but I have to say that those of us who do not belong to professions that are paid by the hour cannot help noticing that, after 40 minutes, he is not quite sure what the answer is. I suppose that that is because these are difficult issues.

The hon. Gentleman's response to the intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North–East (Mr. Butler) was important. Although the hon. Gentleman had made it clear that he was opposed to sex tourism in any form—that was an absolute—it was difficult to understand whether he felt there were any absolutes in respect of terrorism. My hon. Friend teased out some commitment from the hon. Gentleman, in that it appeared that terrorism that involved loss of life was something else that he regarded as an absolute. For many of us, the onus for justifying any form of terrorism rests wholly on the perpetrator—it is a fairly safe assumption that terrorist activity is wrong and even acts against property need considerable justification before we can say that there is any serious defence.

At the end of the hon. Gentleman's speech, it was clear that he had no solution to that difficulty, which he explored at some length. We recognise that there is a difficulty, but I do not think that his arguments were sufficiently convincing—I do not think that he thought so either—to oppose the Bill.

Mr. Michael: The hon. Gentleman is making a thoughtful response to the questions raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), but is not the difficulty that the answer to those questions do not lie in the Bill, which, in a sense, is straightforward? The answers lie, first, in the context of the Bill's use—how the Government will use it—and, secondly, in the international community and how it provides protections for people's liberties throughout the world. It is not surprising that the Bill itself does not provide all the answers to my hon. Friend's thoughtfully posed questions.

Mr. Yeo: I agree—to a great extent, we have to hope that common sense will prevail, although that might be a rash assumption when so often it fails to do so. Perhaps there would be circumstances in which prosecutions that could be brought under the Bill would not be brought, because it was clear that there was no need to do so.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on winning a high place in the ballot—something that has eluded me for 14 years—and on his choice of Bill. He made an excellent and comprehensive speech. I was interested to learn about the Bill's provenance—I had not previously been aware of the existence of the international maritime fraud research sub-committee of the Society of Conservative Lawyers, but its endeavours have clearly not been in vain. I am only sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) is not present, because, having been the secretary—

Mr. Waterson: The chairman.

Mr. Yeo: Sorry—the chairman of that body and although he lost his original seat shortly after the report referred to was written, his career has clearly prospered on that very solid foundation.

I had not been not aware of this gap in our legislative framework and I hope that the Bill enjoys a speedy passage on to the statute book. When introducing the Bill, my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne made it clear that no new principle is involved in the legislation. What we are doing is extending powers that have already been taken in relation to some offences to cover a much wider range of offences. Our courts already have jurisdiction over some offences that have been committed abroad and the Bill would extend that to cover conspiracy and incitement that had taken place in this country.

It is possible to welcome the Bill while regretting the necessity for it. As communications have improved and the world become smaller, so criminal activity of various sorts has become international. It is now more common for crimes to be planned in one country and carried out in another on a regular and organised basis.

Britain now has an enviable reputation as a haven for business. Our tax regime, company law and industrial relations are all extremely sympathetic.

Mr. Butler: And we do not have the social chapter.

Mr. Yeo: As my hon. Friend says from a sedentary position, our opt-out from the social chapter is another factor that draws international business to this country. It remains unknown whether that reputation would survive in the unlikely event of a change of Government, or, indeed, whether the proposals by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher)—which are so severely at odds with those of the shadow Chancellor—might not call all that into question very quickly. We do not want Britain to acquire a reputation for being a sympathetic environment for terrorists or international criminals of any kind.

I was interested in the intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson), who has been unable to remain in his place. When he replies to the debate, I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to tell us whether similar legislation exists in other countries when we might be on the receiving end of terrorist activity, especially in Northern Ireland, planned in those countries. If such legislation does not exist, having got it on to our statute book, will the Government be pressing other Governments to introduce similar legislation in their countries? If we take these steps, it would be reasonable to expect similar steps to be taken by countries with which we have close relations and where we believe there may be terrorist activity being planned that is subsequently perpetrated within the United Kingdom.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne is such an eloquent exponent of that case that in view of the substantial majorities in the House that we have had in the past two and a half days, I wonder whether the Whips might be agreeable to his embarking on an overseas tour to promote this legislation in other countries. It would be a valuable use of his time—

Mr. Butler: He should be accompanied by his supporters.

Mr. Yeo: Of course. My hon. Friend has a safe seat and I am sure that he could utilise the few weeks between now and 1 May very usefully on a world tour. Once again, where Britain leads, the rest of the world might follow. It might be trespassing on dangerous ground to ask my hon. Friend the Minister whether other European Union countries have similar legislation, but I am sure that several hon. Members would be interested in the answer.

By passing the Bill, the House would be sending a clear message to anyone who is thinking of coming to this country in order to plan criminal activity that is to be committed in another country. Like the hon. Members who have already spoken, I fear that our generous, relaxed and hospitable attitude towards visitors is abused from time to time. The extraordinary growth in the number of people who are seeking asylum here, which some of us think is somewhat suspicious—perhaps some of them are really economic migrants masquerading under another set of clothes—results in their being here for long periods while their cases are being determined. I hope that some of them will take note of this legislation, if it is passed.

I was glad to hear the assurance of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne that it is not intended that this measure should in any way curb the freedom of speech that everyone who comes to this country enjoys, which means that they can express opinions that may be unwelcome to us. The position of political dissidents to express their views will not be in any way affected by the Bill. We have a long and honourable tradition as a safe haven for political refugees; that must be protected and long may it continue.

Having said that, I must admit that I have limited patience with people who come to this country in order to exploit our freedoms and abuse our hospitality, even if they are not actually inciting criminal activity abroad. I do not think that we need to be particularly apologetic for expressing some impatience, irritation and criticism, when people come to this country and use it as a launch pad for making verbal attacks on our good friends in other countries. That seems to me to be another way of abusing hospitality, although it would not be covered by the Bill. Many people in this country share that reaction, and we should not be embarrassed about admitting that we share it. If a stranger visits my house, I do not necessarily want to hear him insult my friends even if he dislikes them.

Mr. Butler: I want to raise a matter which may be dealt with in the reply to the debate. If the comments to which my hon. Friend just referred amounted to incitement to racial hatred—for example, if they were comments based on a tribal difference between the ruling tribe and other tribes in another country—presumably, if the dual criminality test were passed, people could be prosecuted for them in this country when the Bill became law.

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. I am not sure what the law is in Finland, but if there were a similar measure in Finland, a prosecution might possibly be brought against the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) for incitement to racial hatred in relation to remarks made a little while ago about Finnish nurses. My hon. Friend has raised a very interesting point, which he may want to explore in detail when he makes his contribution.

Mr. Butler: I do not think so.

Mr. Yeo: We look forward to Opposition support for the Bill. I believe that we can now expect the Opposition's

[Mr. Yeo]

support for almost any measure to do with law and order or crime. The word has gone forth from Islington that there is no principle, however deeply cherished it may have been in the past, however loudly and frequently—

Mr. Michael: If the hon. Gentleman wants to lengthen his speech with knockabout, may I remind him that many issues that the Government now support were first proposed by the Opposition and voted down by the Government? That is the fact on law and order.

On extra-territoriality, I remind the hon. Gentleman of the debate in Committee and on the Floor of the House during the passage of the Sexual Offences (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill, when we were urging the Government to go further regarding conspiracy to do things abroad, for example in relation to child sex abuse.

Mr. Yeo: That intervention bears out my point that there is no freedom, however deeply cherished in the past, no principle, however loudly trumpeted in an election address—perhaps by the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) in 1983 or 1987—that cannot now be abandoned in pursuit of votes.

Mr. Michael: Will the hon. Gentleman clarify that point? I know this is knockabout, but it sounds as though the hon. Gentleman said something which I believe he would not intend. He surely does not regard it as a freedom to be able to abuse children abroad.

Mr. Yeo: Of course I did not say that, and I certainly did not wish to imply it.

Mr. Donald Anderson: Think before you speak.

Mr. Yeo: I believe that hon. Members will find that the record is not capable of that interpretation, but if it is, I unreservedly withdraw it.

However, as the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) wishes to emphasise that point, I remind the House that some positions that have been taken frequently and vociferously by the right hon. Member for Sedgefield and many of his colleagues, not only on the European Union or industrial relations but on a much wider range of issues, are now absolutely reversed in their present attitudes.

The right hon. Member for Sedgefield reminds me of a mirror image of President Kennedy. He is ready to announce that there is no freedom he will protect, no frontier he will defend if such freedom or frontier stands between him and electoral victory. Most at risk are the freedoms that have historically been enjoyed by Labour Members of Parliament. When it comes to tyranny—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. This has to be related to the Bill.

Mr. Yeo: I am grateful for that reminder. What I had in mind—*[Interruption.]* Exactly. What I had in mind was the possibility that Labour Members of Parliament, fleeing from the tyranny which they now face from their leadership, might wish to travel abroad and plot a coup against the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Michael: The hon. Gentleman should contrast the weakness and ineffectiveness of the present Prime Minister and the strength of the Leader of the Opposition, who has the wholehearted support of the parliamentary Labour party, something that the Prime Minister does not enjoy from the Conservative party. However, that is not a matter for today's debate, is it?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I think, as a tennis player, that is one set all.

Mr. Yeo: I am grateful for that adjudication. I will say only that of course the whole House knows that the Prime Minister has the unanimous and wholehearted support of all Conservative Members. *[Laughter.]* His only opponent unfortunately seemed to meet his demise last night, at the hands of the Reigate Conservative Association.

At any rate, the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne was published in good time to allow the Opposition to determine their reaction to it, even though he was unable to get a sponsor. That contrasted with what happened when the Government took a decision, which took the Opposition by surprise, on the royal yacht, when we unfortunately had to wait until *The Sun* published an opinion poll before we knew whether the Opposition—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If there are any more allusions of that nature in the hon. Gentleman's speech, I should be grateful if he would not deliver them this morning.

Mr. Yeo: I am most grateful for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Let me just say that I welcome the support that we have from the Opposition. It would be nice to know the Liberal position. One might ask, "Where are they today?" We may soon be asking, "Where are they tomorrow?" judging by the latest opinion poll results in the newspapers.

I shall draw my remarks to a conclusion, much to your relief, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am delighted that there is so much interest in the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne clearly has the attention of a great many Conservative Members and I look forward to the passage of the Bill, which I warmly commend to the House.

10.55 am

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): I join those who have voiced thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson). I want to comment on the dispassionate way in which he has talked us through the Bill, which is of great interest to all hon. Members present. If the public, who regard our proceedings as two 15-minute slots on Thursday and Tuesday afternoons and something of a bear garden, were to take closer interest in thoughtful debates of this nature, the image of Parliament would be much improved. Earlier this week, Madam Speaker encouraged such an improvement.

The Bill is a brave attempt to put right an anomaly in the law of this country, and when I studied the background I was astonished that it had not been put right before. I understand that it covers the entire United Kingdom without exception, but I was slightly thrown by the ifs and buts in clause 5, which deals with commencement and extent. I hope that my interpretation, that the Bill applies equally to the entire United Kingdom and will do so from the moment that it comes into force, is correct.

Crime is international today, as many a television or film script has illustrated, but until this Bill the laws of the United Kingdom were blind to what took place overseas, even if it were planned here, apart from the Sexual Offences (Conspiracy and Incitement) Act 1996, which paved the way.

It is a pity that the reform planned in the Bill must be hung on the obscure concept of conspiracy—a concept which conjures up images of people in black pointed hats sitting around a cauldron, with varying degrees of gunpowder at the ready, as they twiddle their large moustaches. However, if that obscure concept must be the way and if it achieves a correct result, we should not quibble over the odd way of providing a new offence.

The leading case of the Board of Trade *v.* Owen, which my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne mentioned in his opening remarks, was decided in 1957, when I was a law student. The case involved a conviction for conspiracy to defraud, but the victim was in Germany. The Legal Committee of the other place said that, with very few exceptions, the law of this country was concerned only with preserving the Queen's peace—an old and legalistic term under the common law. It concluded that even cordial relations with another, friendly, country could not extend the Queen's peace, and in that case it could not extend it to Germany. It therefore followed that the conspiracy to commit an offence abroad was not indictable here because it was not triable here. There was a small move later, in the case of R. *v.* Sanson in 1991, when the court held that if the crime was committed here, indictment would lie here if the conspiracy took place abroad.

That legalistic common law nonsense has been largely with us until now. There was a breakthrough in the Sexual Offences (Conspiracy and Incitement) Act 1996. I disagree with the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), who wondered whether it was a close enough analogy. I think that it is. It showed how the law could be changed—it has not yet been challenged—and how it could overcome limits otherwise imposed by the concept of the Queen's peace.

We should remember what happened in the years before the introduction of the 1996 Act. People were enraged by the abuse, especially sexual abuse, of children. Those who commit such offences are rightly shunned by other people, especially other convicted prisoners in our prisons. Until last year, there was a huge gap, but it has now been plugged. The sexual exploitation of children in other countries—by a minority of individuals who go to that country for that purpose—is now indictable.

Of course, there are bound to be difficulties with the 1996 Act. Introducing legislation that could be difficult to enforce in this country is not something that we, as legislators, undertake lightly. We do not undertake a prospective possibility of conviction with enormous enthusiasm, but sometimes something has to be done. There are problems of proof, of obtaining evidence from victims, of getting witnesses into this country and of extraditing alleged offenders from some other countries. There is also the concept of dual criminality, and that, too, is a safeguard.

I believe that the 1996 Act has shown the way. It now covers the offences that we then wished to cover. In my view, there is no ground for doubting that this Bill will do the same.

Mr. Donald Anderson: The hon. Gentleman rightly said that sexual exploitation is wrong and is deemed to be wrong by everyone. There is no moral dispute about that. However, we are in a different world when it comes to the word "terrorism" because it is a loaded word that can be interpreted differently by different people.

Mr. Alexander: I was about to come to that point. It is where I disagree with the hon. Gentleman, for whom I have a great deal of respect. He made a thoughtful and useful contribution to the debate. I, like my hon. Friend the Minister—who responded to the hon. Gentleman's points earlier—firmly believe that it is not the Government's right or duty to take a view on what is happening in another country.

Let us suppose that we had been debating this matter in the early 1980s. The Mandela example is not really appropriate because by then he was in prison. Nevertheless, let us suppose that we had taken as an example someone who was committing or was proposing to commit offences in South Africa at that time. It would have been quite wrong for the House to say,"Well, it is a repressive regime. Well, that person is only agreeing to take down a few telephone lines or blow up the odd train—it is a repressive regime, so the law should not apply." The Government should not take a view on the correctness of human rights issues in another country when deciding whether someone can be prosecuted in this country for doing something criminal in that other country.

Mr. Michael: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. He is a lawyer, so he may be able to help us. As I understand it, the distinction that he draws is not drawn in the Bill—indeed, I do not see how it could be. He said that judgments should not be made on acts of violence abroad, but what of the situation when communication is made with people involved in acts in other countries, and who may be politically involved? We can think of all sorts of examples, such as the period covering the establishment of the state of Israel, where the act in this country of communicating with people who might be involved in politics, but not themselves in violence, might technically come under the Bill. Does not that require a context to the Bill to ensure, as I am sure the Minister and everyone else wants, that it is used for the purposes for which it is intended, not those that go beyond that intention?

Mr. Alexander: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. However, my understanding of the Bill is that the act of communicating is not, of itself, an offence. The act of organising criminality in another country by communication is an offence—but merely communicating is not, because it would not be an offence in this country—

Mr. Dykes: Will my hon. Friend reconsider the first part of his remarks, as we could get into difficult territory with interpretations? I appreciate that he was referring to the specific and precise application of the new law. However, we must bear it in mind that under the

[Mr. Dykes]

leadership of the United States, of other countries and of the United Nations programme, we do make judgments about countries that commit human rights abuses and international law is then brought into play, potentially or actually. It is not easy to say that this country should not take a view on the internal political behaviour of regimes in particular countries.

Mr. Alexander: I accept what my hon. Friend says. The interventions in my speech show why it is so important to ensure that we do not try to decide whether a country is good or bad before deciding whether something that is the subject of a conspiracy in this country is prosecutable. We should not go down that road.

Mr. Kirkhope: Perhaps I could help my hon. Friend on the question about a message or a communication, an issue that has been raised by several hon. Members this morning. There is no problem with a message, unless by sending it the sender is inciting others elsewhere to commit a criminal offence. In that case a message, of whatever sort—whether a postal communication or an e-mail, as is becoming much more common—would, with sufficient evidence being available, be enough to come within the ambit of the Bill.

Mr. Donald Anderson: Does the Minister also mean a message of support?

Mr. Kirkhope: We have no problem with messages of support, provided that they are not incitements. The word "incitement" is clearly defined in the Bill. Nevertheless, I think that the nature of a message is an irrelevance.

Mr. Alexander: I shall return to my argument, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Michael: I am sorry to intervene again, but it is an important point. The Minister's intervention was very helpful. If I understood him correctly, the Minister said that the message was irrelevant. As my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) said, a message of support for political activity could be interpreted as a message of support for closer association. There is an element of interpretation, and the House must be clear about its intentions.

Mr. Alexander: I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will answer for himself when he replies to the debate. A message of support as such would not be a criminal offence in the United Kingdom. A message of support, encouragement and incitement to criminal activity in another country would be a criminal offence.

That is one of the problems that we will encounter in organising the Bill and in arranging prosecutions. I said a few moments ago that there will be problems of proof, and it is right that we should discuss them during the debate. They should be discussed in more detail in Committee.

I want to speak briefly about the middle east, as I take a close interest in middle eastern matters. Most law-abiding countries in the middle east are concerned about the ease with which terrorists from those countries can come to this country and advocate violence and terrorism at home. I am told that that is not a fringe activity, but that there are pockets, mainly in the London area, where hundreds of people, otherwise lawfully in the UK, are plotting and openly advocating the violent overthrow of the Governments in their own countries. I do not mean calls for change in their Governments, or their use of the UK as a base from which to bombard nationals at home with anti-Government propaganda. That should be relevant to whether asylum is grantable or not, but we are not considering asylum now.

In addition to what I have described, the same people are involved in money laundering, drug trafficking and criminal activities in their own countries. The Bill will be helpful in stamping out the dissemination of literature urging assassination in their home countries.

We read in *The Times* in October 1995 that pamphlets were then circulating in London mosques advocating the shooting of westerners in Algeria, the kidnapping and murder of Government officials in that country and the hijacking of Algerian planes. It goes without saying that Governments of countries affected in that way are deeply worried about the pockets of terrorism in our own backyard. The Bill will help in that respect.

If one travels to Tunis, one will hear the same, although the threats from some of those dissidents are not quite so bloodthirsty. It is a matter not of asylum, but of the law currently being powerless to round up people who conspire to urge criminal activities in their home countries.

We have a tradition of tolerance in Britain from which I do not resile, but we should not have a tradition of tolerance towards those who preach violence and violent overthrow in their own countries. Other countries are less squeamish, but up to now we have been a soft touch. The Bill should help in rooting out and prosecuting such people. There is increasing anger on the part of countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia and Saudi Arabia at the powerlessness of UK law.

I stress that I am not speaking of anti-Government propaganda. Much of the material is considerably more than that. In the well-known case of Dr. al-Masari, when the United States soldiers were killed just over a year ago in a bomb attack, he sent a message to his followers in Saudi Arabia that US soldiers were a legitimate target. If he had sent a message to anyone in this country that British soldiers in the UK were a legitimate target, he would have been booted out long ago.

I take heart from the answer to a parliamentary question on the subject that was given by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), who stated in response to that question about the activities of Islamic extremists based in London:

> "We are concerned at the unwelcome presence of foreign extremists in the United Kingdom who abuse our traditional freedoms. We are in close contact with a number of foreign Governments who share our concern. Any evidence of violations of UK law will be passed to the police for action."—[*Official Report*, 6 December 1995; Vol. 268, c. 252.]

The Bill will enable that to be done. Britain will no longer be a safe haven for such people. The Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 helped towards that last year. The Bill is timely. We must nip those activities in the bud and make them criminal offences. We must not quibble about

such legal niceties as whether they are committed within the Queen's peace. Chauvinism and a drawbridge mentality should have no place in our laws in the latter half of the 20th century. The agreement to commit a crime is an offence in the United Kingdom, even if the offence is not ultimately committed. The same must now apply to crimes that may or may not be committed abroad.

One of my hon. Friends said a moment ago that the world is a small place. The reform is long overdue. There will be difficulties of proof, and physical difficulties in getting people to the UK to stand trial or give evidence, but that is no ground for not tackling the problem vigorously. My hon. Friend's Bill is a firm attempt to do that. I hope that the House will give it a fair wind and let it pass this stage.

11.16 am

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I am delighted to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander). I was interested in his response to the interesting speech by the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson).

If one looks up the definition of terrorism in the "Oxford English Dictionary", one is left in no doubt about the implications of violence underlying that word. I have never been able to accept that terrorism can be justified on high moral grounds because it is aimed at eradicating an evil. The hon. Gentleman's argument came dangerously close to that.

Mr. Donald Anderson: Let me offer another analogy. I came across a quotation recently from a leader of the French resistance, which was bombing trains bringing supplies to the Nazis in occupied France during the second world war. He proudly said, "We are terrorists." The activities of the resistance were offences in occupied France; some regimes are so tyrannical that the definition of terrorism is not straightforward. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that it is more difficult than the definition of sex exploitation.

Mr. Greenway: I agree, but the hon. Gentleman describes a war in which the resistance was involved. There are those in Britain who argue that civil disobedience is right if one regards the law as unfair. We saw that this week. Some people think that civil disobedience is morally justified if they consider a law unfair on subjective grounds. The poll tax rioters caused enormous harm to innocent people and to the police who were seeking to maintain proper law and order. I witnessed their actions at first hand when I walked past the riots while pursuing parliamentary business. The sheer lawlessness and violence could not be justified. Therefore, I do not accept the argument advanced by the hon. Member for Swansea, East. I do not believe that the anti-apartheid movement—and people such as Rev. Sithole, Trevor Huddleston and Nelson Mandela—advocated that sort of terrorist violence. The hon. Gentleman's argument cannot be sustained.

I must meet soon with some constituents, so I apologise to the House if I am unable to remain for the entire debate. I speak this morning as a non-lawyer—the only one to participate in the debate so far. I think that non-lawyers are qualified to evaluate and comment upon the legal process. While we respect our learned Friends, ordinary people may not understand the things that they say and the way in which they interpret and contest the law. If all people—of above and below average intelligence—do not understand it, the law is an ass and it cannot be an effective weapon. Like school rules, the laws of the nation must be understood and accepted by the people if all are to believe in a sense of fairness, which creates national stability. I view the measure in that context, and I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), in his absence, on introducing the Bill, which I am honoured to sponsor.

My hon. Friend referred to his parliamentary predecessor, the late Ian Gow—who was a friend to many of us—who had motivated him to do something about terrorism and its causes, for which Ian Gow was assassinated at the young age of 52 or 53. That is a strong incentive for action in itself. There have been many cases like Ian Gow's throughout the United Kingdom, particularly in Northern Ireland. I was particularly interested in my hon. Friend's passing reference to the Bill's potential effects on football hooligans and drug pushers. I love, and take an interest in, sport, and I believe that football hooligans have done much damage to the game and to our country. The damage caused by drug pushers is beyond description.

Our law has already been improved to deal with paedophiles and sexual offenders who commit offences against children abroad—for example, in Thailand. The Sexual Offences (Conspiracy and Incitement) Act 1996, which was championed by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), deals also with tour operators. A recent BBC television programme explored that horrendous problem. It brought the problem into our living rooms, and portrayed the total horror and nastiness of those who promote sex tourism. Such people allowed boys and girls aged 10 and younger to be strapped to beds and sexually exploited by citizens from this and other countries. We are glad that the problem is being addressed by that recent Act of Parliament, which will be underwritten by the legislation that we are discussing today.

The Government attempt to save children from abuse of all kinds, and spend large sums through local authorities and the police, and through the provision of psychological services in education. We have nailed our colours firmly to the mast over the centuries through the teaching of Christianity and other great world religions that forbid the violation of children. When I reflect upon the fact that we spend so much money on our children—and rightly so—it is proper that we should prosecute the offences that are committed by our citizens abroad.

I need not remind hon. Members of the enormous drugs problem. The trade in illicit drugs is the third largest in the world, and is worth billions of pounds every year. British citizens who smuggle drugs in their suitcases or who arrange for quantities of drugs to be imported for their own personal gain must have contacts overseas. They must make many visits to the parts of the world that produce soft and hard drugs in order to arrange for their importation, and they must be known to the police. The Bill is welcome as it could deal with such people—who believe that they are not breaking any laws in this country because they are committing the offences abroad—and allow them to be punished at least as severely as drug pushers within our shores.

[Mr. Greenway]

My hon. Friend the Member for Newark described people who stay abroad and arrange drug deals. I used to discuss that problem with my great friend, Professor Francis Camps, the famous and brilliant Home Office pathologist. Twenty years ago, he claimed that the drugs problem in this country could be halved if those who took long holidays or who spent several years abroad in order to arrange drug deals could be caught. However, the long arm of the law just could not reach them. Professor Camps would tell his audiences—whether at the university of London, where he was a professor; at the Home Office, where he was senior pathologist; or at debating and dining clubs—that the use of soft drugs such as marijuana always leads to hard drugs such as cocaine, and that hard drugs lead inevitably to violent death, usually within seven years. It is as serious as that. My hon. Friend the member for Eastbourne can surely feel pleased that his Bill will help to address that problem. It is a desperately serious matter, and one that is growing more serious by the day. Yet we hear pop artists advocating in a light-hearted way the use of amphetamines. We must take careful account of the sheer stupidity—it is almost wickedness, but perhaps that is not the intention—that lies behind the way in which the use of drugs can be advocated, however soft or hard.

Perhaps football hooligans can be compared with that funny old gang of cricket supporters that follows the England team. The members of the gang are sometimes picked up by cameras. They seem to have no work to do and are thus able to follow the team. They are always good hearted in their support and not violent. Their worst behaviour is to run on to the ground to try to shake a batsman's hand in a friendly sort of way.

That behaviour has to be contrasted with that of football hooligans, whom we have seen over the years doing great damage to the name of our country. They have done great damage also to the game of soccer. I am glad that the Bill will deal with that. Happily, we have largely overcome football hooliganism in this country.

As the House will know, I have been involved with schools for 23 years. I can remember talking to boys and girls out of school about football matches. They may have been to watch Millwall or whatever. I would ask how the match went and they would say, "We lost the game, sir, but we won the fight." That has been the attitude of many so-called supporters when our footballers have gone to Norway, Holland and even to distant countries such as America. The "supporters" have travelled with them, allegedly to support the team, but in reality for violence. I do not understand it, and I never have. It is, however, something with which we must deal.

We can surely imagine the damage that is done to the morale of our team when overnight, before an important match—the European cup, the World cup, or whatever—thousands of British supporters run through a city, smashing their way through pubs and people's private property while sick with drink. We have seen them on television being loaded into police vans and carted away, thus bringing further disgrace to the name of the nation. They appear before the courts and have their disgraceful behaviour described.

That behaviour does our country no good and no good is done for soccer. It does not help our team to succeed. I congratulate my hon. Friend on producing a Bill that will give proper powers to police and to all concerned to put a stop to hooliganism in the name of supporting soccer. Those involved have no intention of giving real support to teams from this country. They care only about going abroad for a fight. The Bill, when enacted, will have the long-term effect of helping our teams.

The way in which "football supporters" behave when they are violent, and even when they are not, has a great effect upon the young. They watch a team on the field and if that team behaves well, the influence is enormously for the good. If the supporters behave badly and become hooligans, our children are influenced for the worst, and seriously so. Anything that can put a stop to football hooliganism is to be welcomed.

The Bill is warmly to be welcomed for the reasons that I have outlined and I have great pleasure in supporting it.

11.35 am

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): Terrorism is a scourge in the last part of the 20th century. It has caused misery and tragedy throughout the globe. Thousands of people have been killed, maimed or horribly injured as a result of the activities of terrorists. So many grieving mothers and distraught widows show that assertion to be correct. One of the worst aspects of terrorism is that the victims are normally entirely innocent. Children, tourists and shoppers, for example, are caught by the turmoil of violence that is exercised by people with whom they probably have nothing in common; they have no knowledge of and no involvement with such people.

It is incumbent on us to give no quarter to terrorism, nor to the financiers, planners and advocates of terrorism. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on his Bill, which will take us another step in the right direction. It is not a minor measure. Indeed, in my view, it is a Bill of some significance. I congratulate my hon. Friend on his mastery of the subject and on bringing the measure before the House.

Pressure on us to act has come from a number of quarters, including the international community. The Bill will ensure greater international co-operation in the efforts that are made against terrorism.

It is perhaps ironic that while the world took too long to come together internationally to deal with the problems of worldwide terrorism, and while the United Kingdom was a leader in advocating that international action should be taken, the UK faced criticisms from some countries that we were slow to act against terrorism. That was because it was felt that we were not taking a firm enough line. There have been criticisms from countries as diverse as France, Algeria, Egypt and the United States over the past couple of years. It is felt that we have allowed others to use third parties in our country as a base for the prosecution of terrorist acts elsewhere.

I am glad that the Government responded quickly to those concerns, both by their leading role in the G7 Cairo summit on terrorism and in pursuing action through the United Nations to make a firm declaration on terrorism, which alters the implications of the UN conventions on asylum seekers and refugees and allows us to take action that perhaps would have been impossible before under treaty. The Bill is another important and welcome step in tackling the problem of terrorists using other countries to pursue their violence elsewhere in the world.

Activities that can be carried out in countries such as the United Kingdom have been referred to in the press. I shall quote from an article that appeared in *The Observer* in March 1996. It stated that followers of Hamas, and especially one of the leaders of an organisation called al-Muhajiroun, claimed that there were

"secret organisations to tap funds and recruit fighters for 'international brigades' . . . already well established in Britain, and one of his party's principal aims was to garner further support."

That gives us an idea of what is happening in this country.

The Times in October 1995 referred to pamphlets in Arabic that were circulating in London mosques, which apparently said:

"Hold a stone, trigger a bomb, plant a mine, hijack a plane, do not ask how . . . Do something to prove that on your shoulders there stands a head, not a piece of cheese. The times of kidnapping are not over yet, do something."

That is the sort of incitement and encouragement put out by organisations and ruthless extremists that use Britain as a base for their terrorist activities.

Mr. Donald Anderson: I do not think that such a pamphlet, although very wrong, would come within the ambit of the Bill, because no substantive offence would have been committed in an overseas country. It is a general exhortation.

Mr. Merchant: I do not want to descend to the specific, but I do not think that the hon. Gentleman is precisely correct. I can envisage circumstances in which such statements may be held to be an incitement, especially if they were sent to organisations abroad that are linked to acts of terrorism. But I was not advancing that argument; I was merely trying to show the groups that existed in this country at that time and what their motivations were, because that is a problem that should be pursued.

We know of organisations in the world that have a fairly sophisticated international tentacle of sub-organisations. I do not want to be specific, but I refer, for example, to some of the well-known extremist middle east groups that attract a great deal of publicity. Some of those groups are the Nazi organisations of the modern age. They bear a remarkable similarity to the Nazis: they are violently anti-Semitic, both in word and deed, they worship violence, and they are highly nationalistic and extremist in word and deed. Their activities in this country should be eradicated as part of a worldwide attempt to prevent the growth of that type of extremism and the acts that it engenders.

It is not just international concern that informs the Bill and the thinking behind it. There is also genuine and deep concern in this country among our constituents. I have received a number of letters in the past few years that have expressed outrage that foreign extremists are allowed to enter Britain and use this country as a base for continuing their extremist activity. I have sympathy with the people who express those concerns. Many go further and suggest that, although we have always been a haven for people who are fleeing persecution—they may feel that we have already done our fair share of dealing with that problem worldwide, but do not object to Britain continuing to harbour those people—a condition of coming into Britain should be that they should not engage in the political activity that led them to get into difficulties in the first place. I am not pursuing that line, but I merely suggest that some people take a rigorous view of the political activities of foreign nationals in Britain.

I think that most people agree that the risks posed to our citizens by the advocacy of violence of such people are real and tangible. My constituency is near London, and many of my constituents travel to the centre of the capital to go to work. They are exposed to terrorist activity in London. It is interesting that of the 35 incidents of terrorist activity in this country in the past 10 years, 33 were in London. I am referring to third-party terrorists—not Irish terrorism or terrorism aimed against Britain or the British Government or involving a British political element, but Arab terrorists, terrorism against other Arabs, or anti-Government elements connected with Turkey who take violent action against a Turkish presence here, such as Turkish Airlines. That shows the particular risk to which Londoners are exposed.

Such activities can be prosecuted under existing law, but the new Bill is relevant, because the presence of people in this country who conspire and incite must attract direct violence. Whoever they are conspiring against will be sorely tempted to take the terrorist war to their planning headquarters, which may happen to be in Britain. Reprisal action may be taken against them by some other force outside this country, thus generating extra violence here.

There will also be a temptation for the planners and inciters, rather than to carry out a complex terrorist operation in some other country, to do it against that country's assets or representatives in this country. It may be easier for them to organise that. Once they have a planning base here, they will be tempted to carry out violence here. It seems much more sensible to nip that problem in the bud, and to deter, prevent and, if necessary, take action against them at an earlier stage, before it ever comes to that. That is a very real way in which our citizens can be drawn in, and it is a secondary, although important, reason for taking firm action.

Why are those people here in the first place? That question is examined in some detail in the most impressive report produced by Lord Lloyd, "Inquiry Into Legislation Against Terrorism": I refer particularly to chapter 12. It deals with supporters of terrorism overseas, and it is significant that the main conclusion of that part of the report is that such a Bill should be introduced. It is good that my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne has reflected so accurately what Lord Lloyd recommended in his detailed report.

The report deals with two other aspects of the problem. They are worth considering for a moment, because they lie alongside the Bill. The first is the concept of exclusion: the ability of the Home Secretary under present law to prevent a person entering Britain if his presence is not conducive to the public good. That is an important legal right that should be firmly maintained and used whenever necessary. I strongly oppose those who argue against that right. I am glad that Lord Lloyd says quite clearly that he feels that there is no need to change that right, by which I take it that he means that there is no need to water it down, as some have argued over the years.

Allied with that point is a similar legal mechanism involving deportation whereby my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary can, for similar reasons, deport a foreign national. It can be argued that in certain

[Mr. Merchant]

circumstances, that is the best course of action. If, for example, the information gained about the person concerned is sensitive in an intelligence sense and it would not be in the interests of the country to pursue the matter through the courts of law—where there might be long exposure of the reasons for deportation and the sources of information—it is preferable for the Home Secretary to exercise his right and for the person concerned to be deported.

Nevertheless, there are two problems with both exclusion and deportation. One is the human rights argument that as exclusion and deportation are an Executive process and there are no appeals, it is impossible for any third party or the person concerned to be assured that there is a genuine reason for the exclusion or deportation. That point gives me no problems because I have confidence in my right hon. and learned Friend. I believe that he would exercise his right only when it was necessary, but I can understand why some people might have doubts about that. However, I believe that deportation and exclusion should not be pursued unless there is no obvious alternative.

The second problem is more severe, and is related to treaties and international law. Lord Lloyd mentions the fact that our obligations under certain treaties may make it difficult to sustain deportation or exclusion in every case. I regret that and I dislike the trend of international treaties seeking effectively to alter laws passed by Parliament, with good reason, over the years. Nevertheless, we must accept the reality of that problem.

I am especially concerned about the European Court of Human Rights. If I understand Lord Lloyd correctly, it may even be possible for a person who has been excluded or deported then to return to Britain and immediately to claim asylum, with the rights of an asylum claimant that he can pursue through the rather tortuous process we have at present. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can tell me whether it is possible for a person who has been excluded or deported to get round the exclusion or deportation in that way. If that is the case, it concerns me greatly and I hope that some means will be found within our law to sort out that apparent anomaly.

The Bill fills gaps that need to be filled. Although it is important to use the existing mechanisms, the Bill is necessary; it is not a piece of legislation that is unnecessary because there are alternative means of dealing with the problem. I hope that I have established that a problem exists and that the existing law cannot deal sufficiently quickly with it. The Bill will do so and I welcome it for that reason.

Mr. Dykes: Presumably my hon. Friend was not suggesting—I am sure that he will correct my wrong impression—that the European convention on human rights would encourage the perpetration of conspiratorial acts in this country. As he is aware, there is a growing body of opinion in this country, covering people of all parties and none, in favour of incorporating the convention into United Kingdom domestic law in whatever appropriate form can be achieved.

Mr. Merchant: In a sense, I was insinuating that the convention could encourage the perpetration of conspiratorial acts, although I accept that that is not the intention of the European Commission of Human Rights—at least I assume it is not. To answer my hon. Friend, I shall quote from the "Inquiry Into Legislation Against Terrorism". Paragraph 12.15 says:

"In the Commission's view this"—

in other words, the certain right to asylum—

"represents an absolute guarantee of protection which may not be removed even if the alien represents a threat to the host country's national security."

That means our national security, let alone that of other countries. The paragraph continues:

"member states may not derogate from their obligations . . . If there is evidence that a person is involved in terrorism, the Commission argues, he should be prosecuted under the criminal laws of the host country."

In other words, if an asylum seeker comes here, his right as an asylum seeker is absolute and the only way, according to that interpretation, in which action can be taken is via our own laws. That is a powerful reason why the Bill is necessary.

I have so far referred to terrorism, and combating it must be the main purpose of the Bill. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) rightly said, the Bill's scope is wider than that and it can deal with other crime. I have in mind particularly international drugs-related crime, fraud and football hooliganism.

Mr. Kirkhope: My hon. Friend referred, quite rightly, to the protection that might be offered to refugees. I am sure that he is aware of the United Nations declaration that was adopted on 17 December last. It made it clear that those who engaged in terrorist acts, including the planning, funding or inciting of them, were acting contrary to the principles of the United Nations and would, therefore, forgo the protection that would normally be available to those seeking refugee status.

Mr. Merchant: Yes, I was aware of that declaration. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend and his colleagues for their assiduity in pursuing the issue. It was a British-led initiative that led to the change in the United Nations definition. To what extent that new definition will lie alongside the interpretation of the European Commission of Human Rights remains to be seen. That is one of the reasons why I raised that dichotomy.

As I started to say, many other crimes will be swept into the compass of the Bill, and rightly so. There are crimes that need to be dealt with on an international basis and the Bill will enable us to do our part in that. That is a substantial change in our jurisdiction and makes the Bill far more than just a minor measure.

Last year, I spoke at various stages during the passage of the Sexual Offences (Conspiracy and Incitement) Act 1996. There were considerable arguments in the House about jurisdiction and to what extent it was fair and right for us to alter our concept of jurisdiction by extending it—as the Bill does. I am glad that so far, that question has not been raised today. It seems that the House has come round to accepting almost universally that there is a need to extend our jurisdiction.

I very much welcome the Bill; it will be a firm drive against terrorism and other international crimes. I wish it a hasty passage to the statute book and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne on promoting it.

11.58 am

Mr. Peter Butler (Milton Keynes, North–East): I shall start with the point on which my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) concluded, and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on his skill in securing fourth place in the ballot and invite him at a suitable private occasion to explain to me how he did it. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway), who has now returned to the Chamber, on his perspicacity in drawing up his report on the international treatment of maritime fraud. It is always a pleasure to congratulate a member of the Conservative Whips Office on every possible occasion and I do so, if possible, even more strongly than my colleagues have done.

We have to consider whether the mischief that the Bill seeks to address is sufficient to justify—as the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) pointed out—a restrictionon what otherwise might be considered morally acceptable behaviour in certain limited circumstances. We have always to check any proposal for new criminal law against the mischief test and decide whether the mischief is sufficiently serious to justify the inevitable restriction on individual liberties. As is evidenced by my signature on the original Bill, and my presence in the Chamber today, I believe that in this case the mischief is extreme and more than sufficient to justify the proposed restrictions.

I shall not deal with sexual offences, as they have already been addressed separately and exhaustively, but I should like to mention two other matters. The first is organised crime. The hon. Member for Swansea, East and I served—under the chairmanship of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence), who is in his place—on the Home Affairs Committee that conducted an inquiry into organised crime. We were all shaken to have our impression that it was a serious matter not just confirmed but expanded. It is a terribly serious problem to which the law enforcement agencies in countries around the world—both friendly and unfriendly in political terms—have yet to find a solution. Anything that brings us a step closer to a solution must pass the mischief test.

The second issue to which the Bill will most usefully be applied is terrorism, which has been much discussed this morning. It would be naive to ask whether terrorism exists; the real question is whether it is served by activity in Britain that does not fall foul of our criminal law, but would do after the passage of the Bill. Again, the answer is yes, but the matter is worth considering.

Several reports have already been mentioned, and I shall refer to them again. For example, on 25 October 1995, an article in *The Times* ran:

"Pamphlets circulating in London mosques are calling for the shooting of Westerners in Algeria, the kidnapping and murder of government officials, the hijacking of planes and the sabotage of peace talks to end the civil war . . . The pamphlets in Arabic are outspoken in inciting violence and assassination. 'Hold a stone, trigger a bomb, plant a mine, hijack a plane, do not ask how . . . Do something to prove that on your shoulders there stands a head, not a piece of cheese. The times of kidnapping are not over yet, do something.'"

One may find the idiomatic English somewhat strange, but the message is appalling in its clarity.

The article continued:

"For the past two years newspapers have been distributed in mosques and among Britain's Muslim community boasting about the number of Westerners killed and of the ambushes and actions against Algerian military forces . . .

The Algerian Government claims that because Britain's asylum laws do not proscribe political activity as long as it does not break British law"—

that goes straight to the point—

"dissident exiles are flocking to London to take advantage of the good communications and large number of Arab newspapers published here . . . Britain has become a centre for subversion, and diplomats are urging Britain to prosecute anyone plotting terrorism and assassination."

One could not have a clearer exposition of the background to the measure, but I would not wish it to be thought that the problem involved only one country.

I refer to a report in *The Guardian*—unusual for me—in November 1995, which refers to Egypt. It states:

"Jihad leaders living in Britain had helped instruct 36 militants who are now under arrest. These suspects allegedly planned suicide attacks on Ministers, politicians, policemen and journalists, and received instruction from other senior figures living in Switzerland and Austria."

The article named the two in Britain. One has already been granted political asylum. It continues:

"These men used codenames, disguises and forged documents to facilitate their life abroad".

Hon. Members have referred to the problems in Algeria, and attacks planned by people living in Britain, being carried out in France by Algerians directed, encouraged and incited by people living in Britain.

We have heard that, in *Hansard* on 6 December 1995, at column *252*, the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), gave a commitment to look into the matter and do something about it. I shall return to that in a moment.

A report in *The Sunday Telegraph* on 17 March 1996 stated:

"The Government will come under renewed pressure from Israel this week to act against Islamic fanatics who use Britain as a base to plan and support terrorist attacks."

It referred to the speech by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the summit of peacemakers in Egypt in which he

"called on world leaders to crack down on dissidents who 'abuse the hospitality and protection' of their adopted countries."

The Sunday Telegraph goes on to comment:

"The Prime Minister no doubt had in mind Dr. Mohammed al-Masari, the relatively benign"—

I emphasise the paper's view of "relatively benign"—

"Saudi dissident who upset the Riyadh authorities by sending a stream of faxes from London calling for the peaceful overthrow of Saudi Arabia's ruling family."

I shall return to that particular gentleman in a moment.

A magazine published in London says:

"This is your time, the time for heroism and to merit dying a martyr's death. This is the time for holy war and martyrdom. You must take your place of honour in martyrdom and not among the weak regime of Yasser Arafat."

Most of us recall Mr. Yasser Arafat as the progenitor—indeed the inventor—of much of what we now consider international terrorism.

[Mr. Peter Butler]

In March, *The Observer* reported that the London-based leader of a group whose name translates as "The Emigrants" told the paper

"that it was the sacred duty of all Muslims to back the jihad against Israel and other 'occupied territories', such as the Indian state of Kashmir.

He said secret organisations to tap funds and recruit fighters for 'international brigades' were already well established in Britain, and one of his party's principal aims was to garner further support."

Such articles are simply a cross-section of a vast body of available public reports of the sort of problem that is the main and very proper target of the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne touched on the legal problems. He referred to Treacy *v.* Director of Public Prosecutions and Lord Diplock saying that the basis of the general rule was international comity, which leans against English courts punishing those who did something in another country that has no harmful consequences in England.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne also referred to Board of Trade *v.* Owen, as have others, where it was thought that Lord Tucker had left a door slightly open. Another test would be that the performance of the conspiracy in the country abroad would produce a public mischief in this country or injure a person here by causing him damage—albeit the damage was abroad. Unfortunately, the Court of Appeal slammed that door very firmly shut, leaving us for about 15 years with a significant problem. In exemplary fashion, the Bill seeks to solve that legal difficulty.

The Government approach to the matter has been frustrated by other legal decisions, and by an attitude on the rights of asylum seekers which often runs contrary to the rights of citizens and the right to safety of citizens in other countries around the world. The main principle applied in such cases is whether to extradite or prosecute here. It has normally been accepted that extradition to the country where the offence was carried out, subject to various safeguards, is the first choice.

Difficulties arise when we consider the principles that are applied before extradition is granted. There are many, but I shall refer to the four main ones. First, there is dual criminality, of which we have heard much in this debate: the offence must be an offence in this country and in the country to which the party is to be extradited. Secondly, there is the speciality law: we would extradite only for prosecution for the specific offence on which extradition papers were drawn and on which extradition was granted. Thirdly, there is the sentence test: the offence must attract a sentence of 12 months' imprisonment or more in both this country and the country to which the extradition is taking place. That is a minimal principle that is not included in the Bill.

Fourthly, and the principle that has caused most difficulty, is the political offence exemption. It has become a major problem due to its interpretation, which has held that unlawful killing—indeed, terrorist acts short of that—can be exempt such that the person charged with carrying them out shall not be extradited if they were deemed to be politically motivated. Apparently, that can be so even where the act could, would or has resulted in indiscriminate unlawful killing from, for example, the planting of bombs and other such activities. In my view, that legal interpretation of the political offence exemption is outrageous, wrong and should have been reversed some years ago. It is an instance of the difficulties that Governments of whatever colour have occasionally—sometimes consistently—had with the judges.

Mr. Donald Anderson: I am reminded of the problems in the American courts with the definition of political offence and its application to members of the IRA.

Mr. Butler: As always, the hon. Gentleman's contribution is exactly to the point. Earlier, he set out the moral quandary and suggested that we might consider absorbing it into the criminal law. He asked how we might feel if that moral quandary was imported into the law in other countries which then refused to do anything about murders and killings in Northern Ireland. I invite him to consider the point he has just made in his intervention in connection with his earlier remarks.

There are other legal problems. Unwillingly, but necessarily, I return to the subject of Dr. al-Masari. The attempts to stop his entry into Dominica were an interesting run through the judicial attitude to the Home Secretary's attempts to keep this country and other friendly states safe from terrorism. On the third day of Dr. al-Masari's appeal against deportation, a Mr. John O'Connor, a former Scotland Yard flying squad commander and now a security consultant, gave what is described as evidence. He said that he had visited the island to compile a security assessment and that

"It was clear to me that fears were running high and there was a very volatile reaction to the notion that Professor Masari, in their words, was being 'dumped in their country' . . . every single person I spoke to—every taxi driver, every person I spoke to in the bars—was against Professor Masari coming."

That was accepted as evidence in the appeal proceedings and was reported in *The Independent* on 27 February 1996. By that time, *The Independent* had decided to run a campaign to ensure that Dr. al-Masari could remain in this country and undertake the sort of activities that I hope the Bill will shortly make illegal.

The Independent on Sunday, on 24 March, reported a statement by Mr. Nick Hardwick, the chief executive of the Refugee Council:

"The UK is anything but a soft touch for asylum seekers . . . They are welcomed not with a humanitarian response but with suspicion and a presumption of guilt."

He did not say that asylum seekers are also welcomed with full rights to social security payments and housing, and often leap over the more legitimate demands of our citizens. Leaving that point aside, he was wrong because statistics show that many people come to this country who are not asylum seekers in the proper meaning of the term. They apply for asylum because our laws have been—and, I regret to say, remain—too lax. Mr. Hardwick was also wrong about the presumption of guilt: suspicion is surely well justified by the minuscule percentage who turn out to be genuine asylum seekers.

The Independent continued its campaign in its report on 6 March 1996 about what it was now calling the "arms for bananas" deal. It reported the adjudication following the so-called evidence of the security consultant who had talked to people in taxis and bars:

"Judge David Pearl, the chief immigration adjudicator sitting at the Immigration Appellate Authority in north London, accused ministers of an unprecedented attempt 'to circumvent for diplomatic

and trade reasons' its obligations under the 1951 United Nations Convention on Refugees. And he questioned whether its actions were 'within the humanitarian spirit with which the convention and asylum legislation should be interpreted'."

In my view, expressions such as "humanitarian spirit" should also be applied to innocent civilians in this country and abroad who become the victims of the terrorism incited by people who falsely claim asylum in this country. In case anyone missed that edition, *The Independent* repeated most of that nonsense on 18 April.

The hon. Member for Swansea, East asked whether support meant incitement—was Dr. al-Masari's conduct support or incitement? It is a narrow line to draw. Many of us know cases, for example under section 5 of the Public Order Act 1936, in which it has been held that simply remaining in the area watching amounts to inciting and encouraging a breach of the peace. It is a narrow line, but it is clear that if we go as far as congratulating someone on a murder, we might be deemed to be suggesting that it was a good thing and that the struggle should continue in that way.

In September last year, immigration judges refused to carry out the law when they did not expel people to France and Belgium—people who had landed here as false asylum seekers on some extremely spurious grounds. There has been a legal problem, both in the extent of the law and in its being carried out.

I congratulate the Government on their sensible and consistent approach to the matter. They started publicly in the middle of last year, by seeking a change through the United Nations. The P8—G7 plus Russia, I think—ministerial meeting on terrorism in Paris on 30 July last year came out with the following statement:

"governments should seek additional means to address the subject of refugees and asylum seekers who plan, fund or commit terrorist acts."

In July, *The Times* was slightly cynical about how long that would take, saying that it

"could easily become mired in UN committees; it could take years to reach the required consensus."

The Times referred to the 1951 United Nations General Assembly as being "more coherent" than it is currently—a comment that I have heard applied to the leaders in that newspaper. In fact, it happened more quickly than *The Times* gave the Government credit for—it is sometimes a little grudging in its support for the Government. On 18 December, the declaration on terrorism spelt it out unequivocally that acts of terrorism and the financing, planning and incitement of those acts are contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations. That means that, when considering whether asylum has to be granted, in accordance with UN rulings and guidance, we are now able to say no—I hope we will say it clearly in future—on the ground that people are coming here with the intention of continuing to plot, inspire or incite terrorism. We can now clearly say that that is outwith the UN requirements on refugee status.

I wished to say many other things on this matter, but the debate has gone on for a considerable time. I wanted to refer in more detail to the steering committee report. One aspect has not been raised—the criteria to be applied in deciding whether to extend jurisdiction extra-territorially. Paragraph 2.21 of the report states:

"it is suggested that consideration should be given to taking extra-territorial jurisdiction"—

which is what we are doing today—

"only where at least one of the following tests was satisfied".

The first condition is

"where the offence is serious (this might be defined, in respect of existing offences, by reference to the length of sentence".

The second is

"where, by virtue of the nature of the offence, the witnesses and evidence necessary for the prosecution are likely to be available in UK territory, even though the offence was committed outside the jurisdiction".

The third is

"where there is international consensus that certain conduct is reprehensible and that concerted action is needed involving the taking of extra-territorial jurisdiction".

The fourth is

"where the vulnerability of the victim makes it particularly important to be able to tackle instances of the offence".

The fifth is

"where it appears to be in the interests of the standing and reputation of the UK in the international community".

The final condition is

"where there is a danger that offences would otherwise not be justiciable".

The Bill meets at least three, if not four, of those six criteria, and that makes it an excellent answer to my opening question about whether it is justified by the mischief with which it seeks to deal.

I have concerns about one detail of the Bill, but as we are not in Committee I shall not go through it line by line. New section 1A(3) provides:

"The second condition is that that act or other event constitutes an offence under the law in force in that country or territory."

It seems to me that in every instance it should be for the prosecution to establish that it is indeed an offence in the other country, so the dual criminality test is applied, but under subsection (8) of that new section,

"the second condition is taken to be satisfied unless"

the defence raises the point.

The problem is that when the defence raises the point, it must give its reason for doubting, but the enormous disparity of resources available to prosecution and defence, which is always the case in this country and elsewhere, suggests that it should be for the prosecution to prove, as it would if it were seeking extradition, that the offence is an offence in both jurisdictions.

With that sole reservation, which I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne will take into account, I again congratulate him on introducing the Bill. It is one of those measures that, when one sees it, one wonders why it was not done years ago, and that is as good a test as any for giving it support.

12.20 pm

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): This has been a busy law and order week, and this is the fifth time that I have burdened the House with my thoughts; for that, I humbly apologise. Hon. Members might be relieved to recall their lucky escape, in that we did not reach my Question 5 to the Prime Minister on Thursday, because of PET—pre-election tension.

Now that the week is coming to an end, perhaps I might be permitted to say that international crime exists on such an enormous scale that it justifies this extension of our jurisdiction beyond its traditional boundaries. Without

[Sir Ivan Lawrence]

such an extension, the evil of international terrorism and large-scale international serious crime will not be sufficiently countered.

That is why we have already extended our jurisdiction over sex tourism and the organised destruction of children's lives, with the Sex Offenders Bill on Monday, and why my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) has introduced this very important Bill, following the review of extra-territorial jurisdiction by the Government in July last year. I congratulate my hon. Friend on his good fortune and on choosing this Bill among a number of others that were available, and the Government on backing it to the hilt. I am especially grateful for the opportunity to be one of its sponsors.

The terrifying extension of international crime also explains why we are giving new and statutory powers to the National Criminal Intelligence Service, NCIS, which we set up and which has achieved notable successes; why we have given statutory position to a national crime squad; why we are doing what we can to strengthen Europol, Interpol and all the other international crime-busting organisations that can help to counter terrorism, drug trafficking, European Community fraud, international economic crime, sex tourism, football hooliganism, illegal immigration, currency counterfeiting and trade in nuclear materials, all of which are features of modern international crime; and why the United Kingdom has taken the lead in the councils of the world—a lead that I can assure the House is welcomed by our European, Commonwealth and international partners.

Those matters were addressed by the Home Affairs Select Committee, which I have the privilege of chairing and to which my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North–East (Mr. Butler) has referred. We began our inquiry in 1993 and reported in 1995. Our report "Organised Crime" received a positive response from the Government early in January 1996. Terrorism apart, the view which was widely expressed to us was that organised crime was on the increase across Europe and that while there might have been some successes against the Mafia in Italy, plenty of other areas of organised crime were expanding. Particular mention was made of the effect of the fall of the iron curtain and the break-up of the Soviet Union. One senior Italian official spoke of the former Soviet Union as a breeding ground and a highway for organised crime. We await with interest the reports which in due course we will no doubt receive from my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, who visited Russia in the past week.

In our report we were fortunately able to conclude that the level of organised crime in the United Kingdom might be slightly less than elsewhere and, in particular, that there is no evidence of penetration by criminal organisations of Government itself, but our conclusion was that organised crime was nevertheless substantial and probably growing. So we said at the end of our report that the growing activity of organised crime called for an active response by all sectors of Government and law enforcement agencies if it was to be kept at bay. We said that the situation was not yet so serious in this country that essential elements of the criminal justice system needed to be overturned, but that if it should become apparent that serious and organised crime continued to grow and to threaten the fabric of British society, additional measures such as we proposed in the report might no longer be sufficient and that in such circumstances, Parliament would have to introduce stronger measures. In a sense, the extra-territorial legislation in the Bill is a response to the guide which the Select Committee gave last year.

The time has come for us to take the action in the Bill—so much so that, except in one regard, it is difficult to see what objections there could be to the Bill. No one can be charged unless the substantive crime alleged is also a crime in Britain. So we do not by this measure extend the limits of what we in this country accept as criminal behaviour. No one wants Britain to be used as a base for the commission of crimes in other states or for giving hospitality to asylum seekers or anyone else who abuses that hospitality. The Bill will deter such activity.

But the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) did raise an interesting issue. He was unhappy about terrorism, which he said could cover freedom fighters such as President Nelson Mandela. I do not have the hon. Gentleman's difficulty. People of all parties in Britain are against the use of violence for political ends in any situation other than when war has been declared. There may have been people here who were sympathetic to the use of violence to challenge apartheid. There may have been people who would not have expected prosecution for sending letters of support, but none of that would have been a crime under the Bill, which requires positive acts of incitement to the commission of a crime or conspiracy, which also means more than sympathy.

We have to draw a line beyond which in a civilised society it is simply not permitted to go and the Bill draws that line. It is difficult to think of any crime other than terrorism to which the hon. Gentleman's objection could apply. It could hardly apply to sex tourism, drug trafficking, international fraud or most of the other crimes that I have mentioned, none of which would be likely to invoke such an acute question of public policy.

But I must be frank and say that it is conceivable that there may be those who, for example, export weapons or help to arrange supplies for those who oppose the Governments of vile regimes abroad. Those supplies and weapons could be used in a way that could, arguably, be defined as terrorism or acts in a conspiracy. As has already been pointed out, we have international obligations to maintain human rights and to set ourselves against inhumane regimes, so there could be a problem of deciding where the boundary lies, where it should be drawn and how far we may take action to back our words and thoughts. That could be a political matter.

In such circumstances, where there could be a public interest conflict of whether or not to prosecute, we have a means of dealing with it within our system by requiring the approval before the prosecution is launched of the Attorney-General, who is a political as well as a legal figure and who can be held to account in this House. That is a very important matter.

Mr. Michael: I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman for giving way, because he has come to the kernel of getting the balance right. Unless I have misread the Bill, the protection to which he refers is not in the Bill and would not necessarily apply to the powers provided by the Bill.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I knew exactly why the hon. Gentleman wished to intervene, but I let him do so out of

courtesy. My next sentence was to have been and is that, as the Bill passes though its stages in Parliament, perhaps some thought might usefully be given to requiring the approval of the Attorney-General before any prosecution is brought under this legislation. Speaking personally, I am less than sympathetic to the point made by the hon. Member for Swansea, East, but I have to concede that there is an arguable matter. Both it and my proposal might usefully be considered further by those who are older and wiser than me as the Bill progresses.

Mr. Donald Anderson: I am glad that the hon. and learned Gentleman acknowledges the problem and that he has tried honestly to put forward a solution in the form of the additional hurdle of the Attorney-General's agreement. The problem with that is this: as we know, the Attorney-General has a quasi-independent position vis-à-vis the Government and that degree of independence would not be perceived by other jurisdictions. The effect would be that someone perceived as being a member of our Government would be giving a judgment on the nature of a Government overseas. In the case of some tyrannical regimes, we would be happy about that; but there are other regimes in the middle. However, it may be that, in response to this problem, either the Attorney-General or some other means, such as a code of conduct, might be found to at least seek to protect those whom the hon. and learned Gentleman and I probably agree should be protected from the excessive ambit of this Bill.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: That was too complicated for me to follow precisely. I do not think that there is a problem. If there is a matter of public policy, the Cabinet would consider the matter and then, no doubt, the Attorney-General's mind could be brought to bear. He would decide whether a prosecution was appropriate and would be prepared to defend that decision in this House, which is the strength of that system.

Mr. Kirkhope: I am listening carefully to my hon. and learned Friend. He is making an important point, but I should mention that, as things currently stand, the consent of the Attorney-General is provided for in statute only in extremely limited circumstances—mostly having to do with offences under the Official Secrets Act. The problem is that introducing a consent provision for the Attorney-General in this legislation, where prosecution could be in regard to any sort of criminal offence, would be a difficult move.

As I said to the hon. Member for Swansea, East, (Mr. Anderson) the Government believe that terrorist acts are unacceptable in all circumstances, so it would be difficult for a situation to arise where the Attorney-General—or, in view of our discussion just now, anyone else—could decide that specific circumstances made prosecution inappropriate.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, but the Attorney-General could always decide these difficult issues. He is often presented with a question of public policy. The law may be clear, but the next question is, does public policy require that the processes of the law be instigated?

Difficulty is not a reason not to proceed. There are always difficulties, and in any case where there are particular difficulties, where the Attorney-General has power he must resolve those difficulties. The existence of a difficulty is not a reason not to do something which requires a final arbiter as to the public policy of instigating prosecution.

I return to the example that sprang to mind. There was some activity in this country to help the rebels against the regime in Afghanistan. There are probably countless other examples of situations where human rights infringements in other countries so obviously call for international action that we might be provoked into doing things that are only arguably criminal. In those circumstances, mentioned by the hon. Member for Swansea, East, a question of public policy might arise; and traditionally, in our system, the arbiter of public policy in matters of prosecution has been the Attorney-General.

As I have said, I do not go as far as the hon. Member for Swansea, East and do not share his views on terrorism, but I realise that on law and order I am a hard right winger and that there are other views. As the Bill passes through Parliament those other views should be aired by those who are older, wiser and perhaps more liberal in their attitudes to such things than I am.

Mr. Butler: If my hon. and learned Friend is a hard right winger, I am a centre main fuselage in this matter.

I privately asked my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) why the issue of the Attorney-General's consent was not mentioned in the Bill. One can envisage the type of prosecution in which the Attorney-General's early involvement might prevent appalling mistakes and prevent obviously inappropriate cases being brought to court. I support the suggestion regarding the Attorney-General's involvement. There are far more people in the House older and wiser than me than there are people older and wiser than my hon. and learned Friend.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I shall not take the matter further lest any enthusiasm that I might show tempts those above me to appoint me to the Standing Committee. I shall be happy to readdress the matter, when I have read what everyone says, on Report or when the Bill returns from the other place, which, as we all know, is the repository of much wisdom.

The Government would be remiss if they did not take every step to counter and reduce internationally operating organised crime; that alone justifies the Bill. If there should be the slightest doubt about the burden that the Bill places upon us, a moment's thought would resolve it: for the Bill's primary effect would be, not to provoke a flurry of prosecutions, but to cut off an avenue of international criminal activity by deterring such activity. The Bill accordingly has my wholehearted support.

12.39 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on introducing the Bill. Ian Gow was not only a colleague of mine, he was a close friend. The Bill is a fitting memorial to him. I remember having dinner with him just a few days before he was assassinated. It was an appalling moment when we heard of his death. I am delighted that his successor has introduced this Bill, to which he spoke so ably.

[Mr. Edward Leigh]

There are two aspects to my speech, which I hope will not take too long. First, we could argue that the Bill is exceptionally wide, giving extra-territorial jurisdiction on virtually any criminal act anywhere in the world. The remarks by the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) are pertinent to that. I intend to raise some concerns with my hon. Friend the Minister, which I am sure he will address.

Secondly, the Bill is about the fight against international terrorism. We all support that fight. I want to explore that theme for a few moments. This country has a justifiable reputation for sheltering people who suffer from autocratic and repressive regimes. Centuries ago, we sheltered the French Huguenots. We sheltered refugees from Nazi Germany. During recent years, we even sheltered refugees from the former South African Government.

Being a country whose citizens have an instinct for free speech, it has always been the case that some of those who come here hold very strong views and continue to oppose the regime from which they fled. However, the trouble is that there is a very narrow line between opinion and incitement. For example, the giving of a person's honest opinion, which will reach an audience in a foreign country—although there may be difficulties in that—may, as a consequence, cause some form of political activity there. That political activity may start as a peaceful expression of views, but may then lead to street demonstrations, which become violent and get out of hand, which then leads to the violent overthrow of an autocratic regime that does not allow any normal expression of political oppression. There could be that sort of activity in this country.

There is another form of activity, which is the direct conspiracy or incitement that leads to terrorism or revolution in another country. We could all unite behind the proposition that we should not harbour that sort of terrorist. However, it is a narrow and difficult line, and we are now proposing to give the courts the difficult job of interpreting that. It is made all the more difficult because political traditions in other countries are so very different from those in this country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne will say that the Bill would ban only conspiracy or incitement leading to terrorism. However, we are, in a Second Reading debate, entitled to ask how the courts will deal with the reality. The line is narrow. One man's free speech is seen by another man as formenting terrorism. In considering the proposals and striking at terrorism, we must all bear it in mind that the Bill should not be able to be used as a vehicle by a foreign country that does not like the views being expressed in Britain. We cannot allow our tradition of free speech to be subverted by commercial considerations.

Let us consider for a moment the case of Saudi Arabia. It is a vital trading partner for Britain. It is a friendly power in an unfriendly area of the world. However, Saudi Arabia is also an autocratic regime which cracks down on any form of dissent. The case of Dr, al-Masari is instructive. No one would support Dr. al-Masari if he were inciting terrorism in Saudi Arabia. He would, presumably, deny that. We must support him if he is merely an inconvenience to our relationship with a foreign power. Therein lies our tradition of free speech.

Terrorism has no ready or easy definition. We may instinctively spot it, but we cannot define it. As an editorial in *The Times* put it on 12 July 1996, terrorism

"can no more be defined than a terrier can define a rat, but it is instinctively known and detested by all democracies."

The editorial concluded by saying that

"there can be no shelter for advocates of terrorism either within Britain or overseas."

So say all of us to those sentiments expressed by *The Times*.

The target of the Bill must be that ill-defined but easily recognisable creature—terrorism—and not legitimate free speech. Terrorism is a scourge and a modern-day evil. Many people believe that their politics are right and that those of their opponents are wrong. In the House that is known as democracy. There are others who are so arrogant about being right that they believe that any action, however dreadful, is justifiable to bring about what they seek. As night follows day, such people see violence for political ends as right. Perhaps their consciences sometimes prick them, but they often dress up their activities in quasi-military-speak or, even worse, in religious terms, as martyrdom for the cause.

All sensible people and all responsible Governments know that the modern scourge of terrorism must be put to an end. The basic duty of a Government is to defend citizens, whether from a mugger or from a terrorist. Terrorists must be left in no doubt that wherever they hide, whether they are plotting another outrage against the innocent or lying low after some act of carnage, they will be sought out and brought to justice.

In that battle, we all welcome the United Nations' adoption of the United Kingdom's initiative to stop terrorists finding refuge in member countries. The UN declaration on terrorism spells it out unequivocally that acts of terrorism, the financing and planning of such acts and incitement to commit them are contrary to the purposes and principles of the UN. That means that the UN convention on refugees will not apply to those involved in terrorism. That is but one step forward in the fight against terrorism. We need further responses to those concerns.

From newspaper cuttings that I have received from the Library, it is clear that France, India, Egypt, Algeria and Israel have in recent years laid charges at our door. Last year, as we have heard, the Government were embarrassed by the call by Saudi exiles for the overthrow of the Saudi royal family.

France and Algeria have complained that extremist Muslims who seek the overthrow of the Algerian Government and who bomb and kill in France have refuges in London. Similar complaints have been made by Egypt and Israel in relation to Hamas supporters, and by the Indian authorities about Sikh extremists.

Both for the international standing of Britain and in the fight against terrorism, action must be taken in this country to deal with such people. We support that, but in considering the Bill I am left wondering—perhaps the Committee can deal with the point—what difference the Bill will make. Will it achieve the laudable ends on which we are all agreed?

It is already an offence under the prevention of terrorism Act to solicit funds for terrorist activities outside this country, but proving that is another matter. It is

difficult to prove in a court of law not only that there is a direct link between the money raised and terrorist activities, but that those raising the money were aware of the use to which it would be put.

The Bill would touch not on that specific succour for terrorism, but on such matters as inciting terrorism, equipping terrorists and planning terrorist acts. That still leaves an evidential problem.

To bring about a successful prosecution under the Bill, it will have to be shown that an offence has been committed in this country and under the law of the country to which it relates. We will need to collect evidence and information from the UK and from abroad. I do not want to be unduly negative towards my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne, but obtaining sufficient evidence to convince a jury beyond reasonable doubt could prove extremely difficult.

Added to that is the fact that there are wide variations in law between different states. We cannot ignore the considerable practical difficulties involved in bringing a prosecution under the Bill. British police have no authority to gather evidence abroad. Witnesses in criminal trials are required to give oral evidence in order to facilitate the defence in conducting cross-examinations, but there are no powers to compel witnesses from abroad to attend court in this country. How distant may a conspiracy be in space or time from the final act? Juries might well take a jaundiced view of a case where the final act of terrorism is very distant from the initial conspiracy in this country.

That does not take account of possible defences—for example, the assertion that a defendant's actions were taken in defence of fellow citizens who were suffering under a brutal dictator. What about the Nelson Mandela defence that the hon. Member for Swansea, East described so ably? My hon. Friend the Minister was very firm with the hon. Gentleman. He said that the Government cannot give succour to anyone, even if a person is only blowing up telegraph poles. However, it may not be as simple as that. Nelson Mandela may have incited people to acts that would constitute a grey area in terms of criminal activity in both this country and the then South Africa.

I have sought to outline what I perceive to be very real difficulties with the legislation. The size of the problems prompts one to ask whether any successful prosecutions are likely to be brought by virtue of the Bill.

Mr. Donald Anderson: The war crimes legislation.

Mr. Leigh: That is my next point. We face similar questions regarding the War Crimes Act 1991, which gave British courts jurisdiction to try people for certain crimes committed abroad before they were citizens of the United Kingdom. In all honesty, it cannot be said that there have been any notable or successful prosecutions under the Act. We all know about the dramatic collapse of the recent—and the only—case brought under the Act. The Government were warned again and again during the Bill's passage through this and the other place. However, for laudable reasons—including the appalling nature of the crimes committed long ago—they felt compelled to act. I understand that, but the fact remains that no successful prosecutions have been brought under the Act—despite a considerable outlay of public funds. We do not want my hon. Friend's Bill to go the same way.

Even if a conviction were gained under the Bill, it would be as a consequence of a public trial. Such a trial would doubtless be lengthy and involve a huge amount of publicity, and would serve as a totally protected public platform for putting across the defendant's beliefs. Assuming successful convictions were obtained—which I think would be difficult in any event; it might be worse if people were found innocent following a long, public trial during which they had used our courts as a vehicle for their political views—British embassies around the world might be picketed, if not attacked, by supporters of those who were convicted. They would claim that innocent men—not paedophiles or criminals—had been incarcerated in British prisons and that their only crime was a desire to publicise injustice.

In that sense, the Bill is very different from the legislation regarding paedophiles that was introduced last year. Paedophiles have no sympathy from any quarter in any civilised country. Those who oppose the Algerian Government—for better or for worse—have enormous support in Algeria and throughout the Arab world. We do not sympathise with them—they are appalling, violent people—but they claim that their democratic rights have been overthrown. They say that they won the election and the results were overturned—I think that I have made my point.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will address some justified questions when he replies to the debate. Where did the Bill come from? Who asked for it? Is it a viable measure or is it a sop to friendly countries to stop them complaining? Will there be prosecutions under the Bill? How will the difficulties of bringing prosecutions be overcome? Does he have particular people or groups in mind for prosecution, and are they, at this moment, conspiring to commit terrorism in this country? There is evidence that they are so conspiring and that there are not the required powers under existing common law or legislation to deal with such groups.

What other options were considered? Why were other options discounted? In countries such as France and Germany, organisations with suspected links are proscribed. Equally, foreigners seeking residence in those countries are banned from taking part in political activities. Were these measures considered? After all, they would be effective. There would be no evidential problems and there would not be the consequence of giving people publicity in courts.

Do we want to go down the German route? Germany's historic record on civic rights has not been unblemished. There is concern about German persecution of scientologists merely for their views. I am not sure that proscription and the banning of organisations because their views are found dangerous are within our historic traditions. I am not arguing, therefore, that the proscription and banning route is the right one. The Minister should deal with the point when he replies.

Was consideration given to amending the Suppression of Terrorism Act 1978? Under that Act, offences are triable in the United Kingdom if they have been committed in a designated country. It is possible, therefore, to prosecute someone in a UK court who commits a terrorist offence in another country, provided that that country has been so designated. Currently the designated countries are European, together with India and the United States. Would it be simpler—I put the question to the Minister—to add conspiracy and

[Mr. Leigh]

incitement to the 1978 Act and to extend the designated list rather than to enact the Bill? Or would we be faced with the same evidential and procedural problems?

In conclusion, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne. We all want to unite behind the prospect of defeating terrorism. At the same time, there have been too many instances in recent years when we have united behind a laudable aim, but in enacting legislation have placed too great a burden on the courts, which is not consistent with their traditions. As a result, our law has been brought into disrepute. The purpose behind the Bill is to deal with a real problem. We must ask some searching questions of my hon. Friend the Minister and he must assure us that the Bill is the right route.

12.56 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): I do not wish to detain the House long because there has been an extensive and most interesting debate. The contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) was no exception. He dissected many of the legal uncertainties that we may be opening up for ourselves.

The sad background to the Bill is one that did not exist 50 years ago, in the sense that international terrorism has become a new industry. The transportability of individuals and their heinous acts is something with which the law must be able to contend. I remember the shock that we all felt when the Israeli Olympic team was murdered in the early 1970s. The Palestine Liberation Organisation developed the technique of hijacking international airliners. Those events made us realise that we were moving into a new era of transportable, mobile terrorism, which has since been extended to such matters as football hooliganism, as my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) referred to it.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on introducing a Bill that reflects a laudable aim. But let us be honest. The Bill is before the House because we have found the legal situation surrounding who may come to our country and stay in it increasingly confused, and increasingly complicated by perhaps over-sensitive views on human rights.

I want to place on record an important precept that we should hang on to as we discuss this matter. It must be within the powers of the Government of any sovereign state to decide who its citizens are—in our case, Her Majesty's subjects—who is accorded full political rights, who may not enter that sovereign state and who may enter on conditions but, on breach of those conditions, may be required to leave. It is surely a mark of a sovereign state that it is able to define its borders, its citizens, who has rights under its jurisdiction and who has fewer rights.

Mr. Donald Anderson: Like many other sovereign states, this country has signed a number of international obligations that limit our national sovereignty.

Mr. Jenkin: That is an important point, but I do not think that, when sovereign states entered into those obligations, they expected jurisprudential interpretation to be manipulated in the way that it has been. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister complained that we had to reimburse the IRA's legal costs after the "Death on the Rock" trial. Even the hon. Gentleman may agree that some of the obligations that we freely entered into have been given a rather too liberal interpretation. Those obligations must be able to be second-guessed by the sovereign authorities within the sovereign nations. If Parliament wants to renegotiate those obligations, it is its sovereign right to choose to do so.

We are dealing with the phenomenon of international terrorism, which knows no national boundaries. The hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) may say that problems that do not recognise national boundaries must be dealt with by legal regimes that transcend national boundaries. The important point about the Bill is that—as with the Sex Offenders Bill—it deals with international offences on a sovereign-state-by-sovereign-state basis, using their national laws.

There are limitations to that proposition. Civilised nations, such as the member countries of the European Union, the United States of America and the established and most of the new democracies, tend to apply those provisions where practicable. However, many nations, such as Libya, which is well known for sponsoring terrorism around the world, have no intention of applying such sanctions. Even if we were able to impose international sanctions on Libya under international law—that is probably possible—unless we are prepared to use force to enforce them, international law has no meaning for an uncivilised dictatorship.

My hon. Friend the Minister dealt robustly with the important point made by the hon. Member for Swansea, East about the Mandela defence. I listened carefully to the exchanges and, like my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle, I think that the hon. Gentleman has a point. A decision about the quality of an individual's actions is a subjective judgment: I think that the hon. Gentleman would agree with that. Whether that judgment can be left to the courts or whether it is an overtly political judgment that can be dealt with only by political authorities—ultimately Ministers—is the question at the heart of the controversy.

My contention is simple. If anyone here is launching offensive operations against another sovereign state, that sovereign state can legitimately say to us, "If you are not stopping it, you must be in favour of it." We may have felt the same on occasions. To allow that issue to become blurred by the courts and all the considerations that they might bring in, including our international obligations, would be a mistake.

I like the Bill's simplicity and universality. I seek one assurance from my hon. Friend the Minister. If it is a matter of Government policy to have a different attitude towards a particular individual and his activities with regard to another sovereign state, there should be some opportunity for Ministers to stay a prosecution. In a situation such as the one described by the hon. Member for Swansea, East, that would be important. I look forward to my hon. Friend the Minister's reply.

1.6 pm

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): I congratulate the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on his success in promoting the Bill. It is understandable that he seeks to tackle violence and

terrorism in view of the assassination of his predecessor, Ian Gow, and I join others in congratulating him on his choice of topic. That assassination reminds us that we are dealing with life and death as well as life and liberty when we legislate; both, of course, are important.

The hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) was right to say that the best effect of the Bill will be deterrence; that, rather than the number of prosecutions, will be the real test of its success. He and, particularly, my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) have reminded us that we need to take care that powers given by the House are not open to misuse. My hon. Friend suggested that the oversight of the Attorney-General might be written into the Bill. Certainly, we need clarity of purpose on the use of the wide powers that will be given by the Bill.

The hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) said that the powers given were exceptionally wide. Indeed, they are not limited to violent crime, never mind terrorism. We need, therefore, to balance the breadth of the powers to prosecute which, I am sure from the Minister's interventions, is his intention. We need to clarify that point; that will be the Committee's duty during its scrutiny of the Bill. I hope that it will be possible for us to unite in ensuring that we get the balance right. After all, even the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) acknowledged the importance of ensuring that there are appropriate restraints.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne rightly emphasised the pursuit of those who become involved in terrorism, violence and other serious anti-social activities such as hooliganism. That is why we support the powers in the Bill.

Two other issues have led the House to give fresh consideration to extending the jurisdiction of our courts to some acts committed abroad. One is war crimes, which have been mentioned this morning. The hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle expressed concern about the difficulty of obtaining convictions after so many years. I have three illustrations of how important it is not to close the door and how right the House was to legislate as it did. The first involves recent events in Bosnia and many other countries, which have shocked people in Britain and made us realise that atrocities are not a thing of the past, but still happen today.

The second is a matter that has been in the news this week—holocaust denial. Some have tried to say that the deaths of millions of Jews in the second world war never took place. That brings home to us the need to remember the past, which is in the lifetime of some of us in the Chamber—albeit only just—and to ensure that the horrors of what happened in Europe during that period are not forgotten.

The third relates to events in Somalia before the war became a matter of public discussion and even before there was a war. I became aware of it because I worked in a community with a large Somali population. It appeared that there was a hidden war involving violence and brutality towards men, women and children in the former British Somalia under President Siad Barré.

Many British citizens who had fought in the war, serving in the Royal Navy and the Merchant Navy, were agonised by the deaths of members of their families and tribes, yet the international community and the British Government at the time failed them by not preventing the continuation of those tragedies. The hidden war in the north then spread into Mogadishu and into the range of the camera lenses and the whole country collapsed. That drew a veil over the terrors being perpetrated by the Somali Government against people in the north, who were closely associated with so many British citizens.

Many people in Britain were communicating with members of their families who were fighting with the Somali National Movement during that hidden conflict. Should we describe them as terrorists? I am sure that the Government do not intend to catch people who are in domestic contact with their families.

I hope that the Minister will be able to reassure us that the powers in the Bill will be used with the discretion that hon. Members on both sides of the House seek. It is easily said, but more difficult to achieve, but the Bill must hit the right target without having unintended consequences. There must also be international mechanisms to deal with the problems of human rights abuse in many countries.

It is important that the powers in the Bill are used vigorously, but with discretion. They should be used vigorously against those who are evil and plan violence and terrorism, but with discretion to avoid hounding those who do not support or plan violence, but who communicate with people who may be involved in a struggle against an oppressive or even violent regime. For example, Steve Biko was beaten to death as an opponent of the South African regime and many considered him to be a terrorist. In the past few days, however, those who brought about his death admitted that they had been wrong and that he had not been a terrorist but had sought democracy in his country.

Those important considerations should not distract us from the priorities that the hon. Member for Eastbourne set out at the start of the debate. The Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill provides a general extension rather than addressing specific offences. I understand that it will make prosecution easier and it will make it more difficult to stop prosecutions on technicalities, but that makes it all the more important to make sure that we get the balance right. The Minister's response here and in Committee will be important because of those crucial issues. Had this private Member's Bill been a Government Bill, much more context would have been provided—perhaps through the White Paper procedure, which seems to have gone by the board a little lately—to allow fuller debate before the House considered the Bill.

As it is, I am pleased with the way in which the Minister has tried to answer some of the questions that have been raised. However, he has a heavy obligation to satisfy us with the sort of information that should be provided for a private Member's Bill that should have been a Government Bill—I am sure that the hon. Member for Eastbourne will understand. That does not take away credit from him for introducing it. It makes it clear that the onus is on the Government to put everything in place, to ensure that the legislation is effective and hits the right target.

The principle behind the Bill is not controversial, but as so often happens, the devil is in the detail. The Opposition said last year that they were prepared to go down the road of extra-territoriality in specific cases. My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East mentioned last year's debates on the Sexual Offences (Conspiracy and

[Mr. Alun Michael]

Incitement) Bill, which sought to constrain sex tourism, and on which the Government were not willing to go as far as we sought.

I am very pleased that such measures are consolidated not only in the Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill but in the Sex Offenders Bill, which the Minister and myself will be discussing in Committee next week. There is clearly a will across the Floor of the House to deal with child abuse and other sexual offences committed in this country and abroad. The need to extend jurisdiction in that way is respected.

I note that the hon. Member for Eastbourne quoted Lord Lloyd's report, which said:

"in this century crime has ceased to be largely local in origin and effect. Crime is now established on an international scale, and the common law must face this new reality."

I had hoped that we would be able to balance that comment slightly. There is an element of truth in it, in that there is much greater and faster communication, but most crime is still local in nature. Crimes such as drug trafficking reach the most local level in our communities.

I do not want to speak at length because my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) wants to move the Second Reading of her very important Bill in an attempt to protect witnesses and victims of crime. Victims are, of course, often witnesses and sometimes witnesses become victims as a result of not being protected. We should therefore remember the balance between international and local dimensions. The Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill seeks to tackle the international dimension, but ordinary people who are the victims of violent crime—or the long-term consequences of events at an international level—in their own area also require protection.

In his report, Lord Lloyd said:

"it would not be a great step to provide by legislation that a conspiracy here to commit a crime abroad should also be triable here, at any rate in the field of terrorism".

I agree with his words. It is because the Bill is not limited to terrorism or violence that we need to listen carefully to what the Minister says about the context and the methods by which the measures in the Bill will be used or not used.

The notes on clauses are less than illuminating, which is rather a recent trend. They say nothing of the Government's intention nor of the context in which the legislation will apply. I hope that the Minister will take the opportunity today and in Committee to put that right and respond to some of the points that have been made. There are clear intentions in the Home Office's statements on terrorism and in relation to the United Nations agreement and that between Britain and France on territory, which my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East mentioned, but they are not in the wording of the Bill. The context needs to be spelt out.

We certainly agree that the fight against organised crime and international terrorism is the primary target, but there are other offences that the Bill could cover. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East that the Sex Offenders Bill is less ambitious than this Bill in dealing with extra-territoriality. I hope that the Minister will respond favourably to amendments to the Sex Offenders Bill, because it has similarities to the Bill that we are discussing today.

It would be helpful if the Minister could say which offences—other than those of terrorism, violence, hooliganism, sex tourism and child abuse—the Government intend to pursue. I am sure that the Government have considered the matter and I hope that the Minister can clarify which offences will be considered borderline and which will not be pursued. Perhaps he can give an outline answer today and go into more detail in Committee.

We support the Bill, although I hope that the Government will set limits for it in the way that I suggested. Rights and responsibilities have to be balanced. The Bill provides wide discretion, which must be balanced by reasonable limits that are achieved through administrative mechanisms, if not actually set out in the Bill. That point was well made by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

The advent of satellite technology and the Internet have made even fast travel by Concorde seem a painfully slow form of communication. They make Lenin's transcontinental travel to join the revolution in Russia appear positively mediaeval. New solutions are needed for old problems. The speed and mobility of terrorism in our times make the Bill essential. That is why we shall support it, although we look forward to a response from Minister about the necessary conditions on the use of the powers granted.

1.21 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope): We have had an excellent debate on an important Bill. The speeches of my hon. Friends and other hon. Members have been models of eloquence. The Government are grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) for introducing the Bill, which will provide the courts, in each of the jurisdictions of the United Kingdom, with jurisdiction over acts of conspiracy or incitement committed in this country which relate to any substantive criminal act intended to be carried out abroad. The Government fully support the Bill.

I can confirm to my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander) that we intend to ensure that the provisions in the Bill, if approved by the House, will come into effect at the same time. Clause 5 may cause technical problems, but the delays would be only a matter of days. We envisage that the time of commencement will be largely consistent.

The Government are deeply concerned that some people in this country are instrumental in the commission of offences abroad. Foreign Governments may justifiably be surprised that people who have conspired to commit, or incited others to commit, offences in their countries can escape prosecution simply because their actions took place in the United Kingdom where no sanction currently exists to deal with them. There is no reason to suggest that such behaviour is widespread, but when it does occur it is right that we should try to curb it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) challenged me to give a reason for our support for the Bill. I say simply that the Bill rightly tries to prevent people from conspiring to commit criminal offences overseas knowing that they are immune from prosecution for that conspiracy. It is wrong that such a situation should be allowed to continue. I will tell the

House about the offences that are already covered by legislation, but the coverage is at best patchy and at worst is almost an encouragement to those who think they can use our country as a haven while they engage in conspiracy or incitement. We must attempt to stop that.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne explained, United Kingdom law already provides that it is an offence to conspire, or to incite others, to commit any offence when the commission of that offence occurs, or would have occurred, in this country. If a group of people are involved in a conspiracy to commit a serious offence, or a person here incites another to commit an offence, the fact that the offence in question was to be carried out abroad rather than in the United Kingdom should not prevent our police and criminal courts from dealing with he perpetrators.

As the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) said, the development of modern travel and communication has brought with it tremendous benefits—benefits that are enjoyed by everyone, including, unfortunately, the criminal element in society. In recent years, there has been a growth in cross-border crime and it is vital that our law keeps pace with the new and ingenious ways in which modern technology is utilised by the criminal.

When introducing legislation aimed at combating international crime, we should be careful to ensure that the UK does not simply export its laws to other countries. Foreign Governments are responsible for determining what actions should be prohibited within their territories and how such behaviour should be dealt with under their laws. It is important to strike the right balance between dealing effectively with cross-border crime and avoiding impinging on other countries' laws. The Government believe that the Bill achieves that aim. It will enhance the ability of our courts to deal with crimes with a foreign element, while taking account of the law in the countries where the intended offence is to be committed. I am referring to the inclusion in the Bill of the requirement for dual criminality, the importance of which my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne made clear.

The UK should deal with those who commit offences within our territory. That is the principle on which the jurisdiction of our courts is based. The interdepartmental review of extra-territorial jurisdiction, which reported last July and to which my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne referred, confirmed that that approach continues to be right for the United Kingdom. The proposals in the Bill are in no way inconsistent with that principle. After all, it attempts to deal with actions that take place in this country, even though the completed offence—if it is completed—would be committed outside our normal jurisdiction.

The implications of extending the scope to all offences were fully investigated by the review of extra-territorial jurisdiction, which considered whether it would be better to confine any extension of jurisdiction over conspiracy and incitement to those areas that have given rise to concern, as we have done with child sex offences. The review concluded, however, that the selective approach may not work in all instances, since it would be difficult to identify all the substantive offences that may need to be covered to deal with a problem. The review also concluded that extension to all offences was the simplest and most effective approach.

It is worth saying a few words about the background that gave rise to the review of extra-territorial jurisdiction. Generally, criminal jurisdiction in the UK is territorially based. That means that conduct that would constitute an offence must have some connection with United Kingdom territory. Offences committed abroad by British nationals, unless they fall within a particular statutory provision, cannot normally be prosecuted in the UK.

The reasons for the primacy of the territorial principle are clear and twofold. In the first place, the criminal law of this country sets out what we as a nation believe about the sort of society in which we want to live. The law defines the conduct that is or is not acceptable: it defines the parameters and establishes the standard. We, and we alone, can say what actions should be proscribed by the criminal law. No one can do that for us and nor, in the generality of cases, should we attempt to do it for anyone else.

The second reason is equally strong. Under our system of justice, criminal trials depend to a major degree on the ability of the court to hear and assess evidence and to test out the truth of allegations by the cross-examination of witnesses. The best place for that to happen is clearly in the country where the crime occurred. The territorial basis of the criminal law has been, and in our view always should be, paramount.

Nevertheless, that principle has had to be modified in recent years. The report of the review of extra-territorial jurisdiction contains an important and fascinating account of the many and diverse ways in which, for very good reasons, the territoriality principle has been modified in recent times to co-operate further with other countries in the continuing battle with frontierless crime.

There are many such crimes, and as society and technology develop, the development of international crime keeps pace. I can mention, for example, terrorism, hijacking, financial fraud, drug trafficking, fraud and forgery, art theft—indeed, there is a very long list. It is the responsibility of the House, however, to legislate at least at a matching pace.

I want to respond to a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo). He asked how widely such provisions were used by other nations. There are some examples, but I cannot give a complete list. I hope, however, that the example that we are setting here will be considered seriously by those countries that are not proceeding in the same way. It is a good example, and the hard work of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne will produce something of which we can be proud.

In Europe, many countries already take extensive extra-territorial jurisdiction. That gives them some measure of control over the activities abroad of their countrymen but, unlike the United Kingdom, many are not prepared to extradite their own citizens. The reason is frequently found to be in their constitutions.

In contrast, we are prepared to extradite our citizens, subject of course to the normal safeguards. We have extradition arrangements with more than 100 countries. Even so, we have found that the absence of jurisdiction over the commission abroad of serious offences by British citizens can and does give rise to difficulties in circumstances in which we have not been able to extradite the individual.

[Mr. Timothy Kirkhope]

As a result of those differences and of the difficulties that have arisen from time to time, there has been pressure to take wider jurisdiction, usually in areas where there is public and political concern. Specific instances may come to the mind of hon. Members, and those may well encompass certain crimes on board aircraft; the behaviour of football fans—let me correct that: they are not fans but hooligans—abroad; the activities of foreign extremists based in the UK who are seeking the overthrow of individuals or Governments abroad; and the vile activities of British tourists who sexually exploit young children abroad.

Other countries have taken appropriate steps. The United States has recently passed legislation on terrorism that is similar to that proposed in the Bill. I remind the House that terrorism is not in itself a crime; its components are. Causing explosions, murder and other activities associated with terrorism are the crimes; but I think that we all know what we mean when we talk about terrorism.

The counter-terrorism law signed by President Clinton on 24 April 1996 criminalises conspiracies to kill, murder or maim persons outside the United States so long as at least one of the conspirators involved in a terrorist conspiracy overseas commits an act in furtherance of that conspiracy in the United States. The statute includes attacks on property overseas, including buildings owned by a Government with whom the United States is at peace or any building used for religious, education or cultural purposes, and any railroad, canal, bridge, airfield or other public conveyance or structure.

We have also taken action in respect of some of the examples that I have given. The Government supported an amendment to the Civil Aviation Act 1982 to extend the jurisdiction of the UK courts over offences committed on board foreign-registered aircraft that were outside UK airspace but were arriving in this country. It was a nonsense that the police at Heathrow could arrest an offender on a British Airways flight, but not on an American Airlines flight. I am pleased to say that that is now being put right.

The Government also gave their support to the Sexual Offences (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill, to which several hon. Members have referred, introduced last Session by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) to deal with conspiracy and incitement to commit sexual offences against children abroad. That was an important step in the fight against child sex tourism and I am pleased that it found its way on to the statute book. It was a major step forward. It certainly meant that if any British travel agent was tempted to get involved in that disgusting trade, and discussed it with any potential customer here, he would be committing an offence.

The Bill that we are discussing today does not have extra-territorial effect. If the conspiracy as well as the intended offence take place abroad, the conspirators do not fall foul of the provisions of the Bill. Having said that, I reiterate the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne that not all aspects of conspiracy or incitement need to occur in the United Kingdom for the Bill to apply. Provided that a sufficient element takes place here, the provisions can bite.

The Government recognise that there are areas in which the absence of jurisdiction over conspiracy and incitement has caused difficulties, including the activities of foreign extremists in the United Kingdom who plan or encourage criminal acts in their own country, and football hooligans who plan violence at venues abroad. Such activities have a negative and unhelpful impact on bilateral relations with many of the countries involved. There is also a more general concern that we should not allow the United Kingdom to be regarded as a safe place in which criminals can plan their future activities.

The example of the problem of football hooliganism is important. Problems mainly arise when England plays abroad in both so-called friendly matches and competitive World cup and European championship matches. The main hooligan leaders from clubs around the United Kingdom have a form of communication network. They are in regular contact with each other and, on occasions, contact their hooligan counterparts abroad to arrange confrontations. Most of the planning is done among themselves and with their counterparts sometimes weeks before the match takes place. Until now, that in itself has not constituted an offence; under the Bill it will become an offence. If the police can obtain evidence, the ringleaders could be charged before they even set out for the match.

If hooligans get to a match and cause trouble, the preferred course of action is that any English hooligan who is arrested is properly dealt with under that country's judicial system. Unfortunately, although understandably, that is not how other countries always want to deal with matters. Time after time, English supporters arrested abroad have simply been detained and deported. The hooligan leaders know that, and often get away—I was going to say scot free—without being dealt with in a proper manner. If the crimes had occurred in the United Kingdom, they would undoubtedly have resulted in a court appearance.

Similarly, when domestic clubs play abroad in European competitions, planned confrontations take place. The difference is that the hooligans are local to that particular club and not from around the United Kingdom as with a national team match. That makes it easier to plan disorder, as the hooligans often socialise together away from the football scene.

I remind the House of the notable examples from the not-too-distant past. The Republic of Ireland versus England match in 1995 immediately springs to mind. In a match two years before that, between England and Holland in 1993, intelligence was received that English hooligans had travelled with the intention of attacking Dutch supporters. In the two days leading up to the game, Dutch nationals were subjected to attacks in Amsterdam, where many English hooligans had based themselves. They set fire to the stadium at the close of the game. Much of the disorder was planned in the United Kingdom in the weeks before the match and contact was made with the hooligans' Dutch counterparts. I pay tribute to the work of the National Criminal Intelligence Service football unit, which was formed in 1989 with a brief to collate, analyse and disseminate intelligence on serious and persistent football hooligans travelling throughout the United Kingdom and abroad.

When our teams play abroad, it is normal practice for United Kingdom police officers to attend and assist the host force in identifying known troublemakers. They are

normally football intelligence officers from around the United Kingdom who have a working knowledge of active hooligan groups. I commend the work they do, which is extremely helpful in tackling this scourge.

If we were to take no action, what sort of message would that send, not only to our friends abroad, but to the public at home and, indeed, the criminals who were conspiring to commit crimes abroad or inciting others to do so on their behalf? We would be saying that we accept that we, the United Kingdom, cannot prevent people from using our country as a headquarters—indeed as a safe haven—from which they can with impunity make their plans and organise the carrying out of criminal acts anywhere in the world, unless we have already taken jurisdiction over the specific substantive offence. That would be a weak-kneed, passive and entirely negative position—the position of an ineffective and a morally corrupt country and neither of those terms can be allowed to apply to the United Kingdom. We must not give such ammunition to others to use against us.

An alternative to the approach taken in the Bill would be to extend the scope of the law on conspiracy and incitement only in those areas which had given rise to concern, as we have done with child sex offences. I know that several of my hon. Friends raised that question. That was one of the options considered by the interdepartmental review, but it concluded that the selective approach may not work in all instances. It would be difficult to identify all the offences that may need to be covered, and it is more difficult, for example, to determine what offences might need to be specified to deal with football hooligans. The Football Spectators Act 1989 enables magistrates in England and Wales to make orders against those convicted of football hooliganism offences in Norway, the Republic of Ireland, Scotland, Sweden and Italy, but bilateral agreements are necessary to achieve that. In addition, the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 introduced legislation referring to football grounds, which is important in dealing with hooliganism.

However, if it were proposed to extend the law only in relation to any activities that have at any time in the past given particular cause for concern, such an extension would be so wide as to leave it difficult to justify not taking jurisdiction over conspiracy and incitement to commit any offence abroad. That might be an acceptable option if we were to take jurisdiction generally over criminal acts committed abroad, because then people could be prosecuted for the substantive act and/or the conspiracy and incitement offences, because jurisdiction for that automatically follows. However, that would be a significant move away from the territorial basis of our common law heritage. Having carefully considered the implications of each of the options available, the review reached the conclusion that the simplest and most effective approach would be to extend the scope of incitement and conspiracy generally.

I want to make it clear that political opposition to foreign regimes will be unaffected by the Bill. Hon. and hon. and learned Members have discussed how far we should go in these matters. We will not, with this Bill, prevent critics of a regime from criticising the actions of a foreign Government, even if to do so is an offence in the overseas country in question. The requirement for dual criminality would mean that, for the legislation to apply, the offence would also have to be an offence here in the United Kingdom.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) mentioned the possibility of a matter of public policy determining an issue, and I intervened in his speech to respond to that point. In addition, I do not think that we should ignore the requirement on the Crown Prosecution Service to take account of the public interest in deciding whether to prosecute. As my hon. and learned Friend knows—better than I do—the Director of Public Prosecutions also gives guidance to Crown prosecutors on discontinuance of proceedings.

Mr. Donald Anderson: The problem is that the Crown Prosecution Service might not have access to the best political advice. The Minister has already said that the United States has an anti-terrorism law, but it is inconceivable that that law would be invoked against, for example, people in the United States who conspired against the regime of Saddam Hussein in respect of what might be deemed terrorist acts. What is the constraint in this country in respect of such matters and who will exercise it? Will it be the Crown Prosecution Service or will it be the Attorney-General? There must be some other hurdle to surmount in respect of so-called terrorist offences.

Mr. Kirkhope: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman and I differ in this regard; I believe that he goes too far. I have tried to make my position clear. It is not that I feel that we should determine matters in the political manner that he suggests. We are talking about the public interest, which I know my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton is aware of.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Does my hon. Friend concede that public interest as far as the Crown Prosecution Service is concerned has much more limited scope than public interest as far as the Attorney-General, with the advice of the rest of the Government, is concerned?

Mr. Kirkhope: Yes. I believe I said that we were discussing two different things. In fact, the public interest is a stay on proceedings where appropriate, but it is not the same as what the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) suggests, which goes much too far in applying political and subjective considerations. It is not up to us in this country to take such decisions in relation to crimes that have been committed here. We want legislation that will take effect against people who are committing crimes or inciting or conspiring to commit crimes in other countries, so we do not believe that the political considerations that the hon. Member for Swansea, East mentioned should properly be taken into account.

Mr. Michael: I understand the point that the Minister makes, and it is obvious that his priority is what hon. Members on both sides of the House would want it to be, but the problem is that there is unease about the way in which the Crown Prosecution Service interprets the public interest. Hon. Members on both sides of the House, and the public, are anxious that a mechanism is in place to ensure that the measure is used as intended.

Mr. Kirkhope: I probably cannot develop this exchange further to hon. Members' satisfaction, but it is important that I consider the matter carefully between now and Committee.

Mr. Leigh: This is a terribly important point. A value judgment is always involved. For example, it would be an

[Mr. Leigh]

offence in this country to organise a march that would be banned by the police because it would almost certainly degenerate into violence. Supposing this Bill had become law previously, what would have happened if someone had organised from this country a political protest in the Soviet Union, where all political protest on the streets was banned? My hon. Friend would say that of course we would not want to prosecute that sort of thing in this country—but a value judgment is involved. Is the Crown Prosecution Service equipped to make that judgment?

Mr. Kirkhope: The ultimate protection is dual criminality. The offence must be a crime in this country. We are a very free society and allow people to do all types of things short of behaviour that contravenes our criminal code. It is proper that we should apply that type of consideration when we consider whether prosecutions should proceed. I do not want to detain the House too long, but I appreciate that a valid point is being made. I shall consider the matter and we may have a word about it in Committee.

Several legislative measures are already taken against terrorism. The Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1996 creates the so-called Diplock courts for the trial of certain offences by judges alone. It makes it an offence to direct at any level the activities of an organisation concerned in the commission of acts of terrorism.

Section 2(1) of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 makes it an offence to belong to a proscribed organisation listed in schedule 1 to the Act. The Act does not deal, however, with non-Irish terrorism.

The Suppression of Terrorism Act 1978 enables a wider range of specified terrorism-related offences to be tried in the United Kingdom, but only if they are committed in the country that has been designated under that Act. Other Acts bear on acts of terrorism. The Explosive Substances Act 1883 creates offences relating to the possession and use of explosives. The Tokyo Convention Act 1967 deals with the question of jurisdiction over aircraft in flight and the powers of the aircraft commander.

The Civil Aviation Act 1982 establishes jurisdiction over offences committed on British-controlled aircraft anywhere in the world.

The Aviation Security Act 1982 has largely superseded the Tokyo Convention Act 1967. It has created the offences of hijacking, destroying, damaging or endangering the safety of civil aircraft. The Act gives UK courts jurisdiction in respect of air piracy wherever the crime is committed and provides for extradition for such crimes.

There are many other pieces of legislation in place. The Channel Tunnel Security Order 1995 creates the offence of hijacking the channel tunnel train—I am tempted to say if one can catch it—and other related offences.

Lord Lloyd, in his report on counter-terrorism legislation, said that the most significant additional measure which the Government could take would be to amend the law of conspiracy so as to facilitate the prosecution of those who conspire here to commit terrorist acts abroad. The Bill would widen the range of cases in which people against whom there is evidence of support for violence and terrorism in their countries of origin, or elsewhere abroad, can be prosecuted.

I mentioned criticisms made against the UK. Those criticisms are largely unfounded. Often, they relate to activity that does not contravene UK law, such as political propaganda and fund raising. Allegations of terrorist activity are often made without evidence on the basis of which we could take action. Where evidence of terrorist activity is made available or uncovered, we can and do take action. We have drawn attention to my hon. Friend's Bill in our response to those who criticise us as evidence of our determination to stamp out the evil of terrorism at every opportunity. The UK is not and never will be a safe haven for terrorists.

The hon. Member for Swansea, East said that he hoped that the powers would be used with the right touch. I am sure that that is right. I am sure that the proposals are sensible. The Government warmly welcome my hon. Friend's Bill. We wish it well during the remainder of its passage through the House and in another place.

1.51 pm

Mr. Waterson: I shall be brief in replying to the debate. I agree entirely with my hon. Friend the Minister that it has been an excellent debate, marked by reasoned and constructive contributions from both sides of the House. I know that a number of colleagues would have liked to have been here today. In particular, I received a letter from the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner), who would have liked to have been a sponsor had he been able to meet the procedure criteria.

The hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) made a typically thoughtful speech. He raised a number of issues, to which he will no doubt wish to return in Committee. If we believe that it is right to pursue sex tourism through the approach taken in the Bill, surely it is even more right to pursue terrorism also.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) made the point about similar legislation in other countries. I hope that he, like other hon. Members, will have been reassured by the civil rights protection built into the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander) gave, as we might expect, a helpful legal analysis. He rightly reminded us that, as is usual in this country, the burden of proof will remain that of beyond reasonable doubt.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), another sponsor of the Bill, made an eloquent plea about terrorism. He also spoke eloquently about the problems of drug trafficking and football hooliganism.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) spoke eloquently about the horror of terrorism. He spoke of London, in particular, as the place where many of his constituents work and the danger of attracting counter-violence to the capital.

My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. Butler) brought to bear on the problem his considerable experience as a criminal lawyer. I am pleased to have him as a sponsor. He raised specific drafting points, especially in relation to the second condition set out in clause 1. Again, they are matters to which we can usefully return in Committee.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) made an extremely valuable contribution born of his considerable expertise and

experience in relevant matters. He spoke, rightly, about the need for a civilised society to draw a line demarcating the sort of behaviour that is acceptable. He was one of several hon. Members who raised the possible involvement of the Attorney-General in these matters. We should reflect on that in Committee.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) for his kind remarks about my predecessor, Ian Gow. He also raised some evidential and procedural matters. My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) spoke of a possible mechanism to allow Ministers to intervene in prosecutions.

I thank the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) for his constructive speech and for indicating in advance his intention to offer cross-party support for my Bill.

I cannot comment on the attitude of the Liberal Democrats, as they have chosen not to grace us with their presence today.

I am most grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for his penetrating analysis of the clear need for my Bill and for pointing out that similar measures apply in other countries.

Finally, I express my thanks for the silent but supportive presence of my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) who, in his prescient report of 12 years ago, in many ways foreshadowed this Bill, which I hope will attract support from both sides of the House and receive its Second Reading.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Witness Protection Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

1.59 pm

Mrs. Irene Adams (Paisley, North): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I am grateful to hon. Members from all parts of the House who are sponsors of the Bill. It is a simple one-clause measure that would afford some anonymity to witnesses in major criminal trials, especially drug-related trials. It may be small, but it would bring major improvements for witnesses who are brave enough to come forward in such trials.

I commend Strathclyde police, who have tried hard to introduce measures on witness protection, but legislation is needed to help the police in that task. There are regulations that could be changed, but a change in legislation is required.

The greatest difficulty that the police have experienced in criminal and drug-related trials is in encouraging witnesses to come forward and to continue until the case comes to trial. The Bill would assist the police in bringing witnesses forward.

Questions have been raised about the restrictions that the Bill would impose on the press. I do not believe that it would restrict the press, but the press would have to take responsibility for what it prints. It does not apply to the national press or to television or radio generally, and I have found no case in which they were involved. The Bill applies particularly to small local newspapers which often print the names of witnesses before trials, as well as during and after trials. That is done mainly out of naivety, I think. I was asked whether the local press would be able to interview an old lady who had been beaten up and left in a bad way. Of course a newspaper could interview her, but if she were to be a witness at a later date, reporters would be asked not to identify her. That is a small price to pay for enabling witnesses to feel that they have some protection.

We sometimes do not realise the extent of witness intimidation. During the past two years I have raised questions in the House about a security company that operates in my constituency and which may be involved in criminal activities. As a result of my inquiries, my life and the lives of my children were threatened. That is not a very nice occurrence. However, threats against Members of Parliament make newspaper and television headlines. Hon. Members are used to seeing their names in print—that is often our ambition—but it is not always so for the general public. Threats against those who live in deprived areas on peripheral housing estates are unlikely to make the headlines. Such people are simply left to their own devices.

It is intimidating for witnesses to come forward in the first place, so we must ensure that they do not suffer further intimidation after the event. Witnesses often withdraw before a case comes to trial. The House has a responsibility to protect those witnesses who are brave enough to give evidence. Witnesses have many fears: they are afraid of coming forward initially and they may not want to see their names in print. Sadly, a witness who lives in a less salubrious area may labelled a "grass". The Bill would allow witnesses to come forward, safe in the knowledge that their identities would remain secret within their communities.

Witnesses who are identified publicly often face intimidation. They may be told to keep their mouths shut, threats may be levelled against them, or they may be bribed to keep silent. The intimidation of witnesses may continue in court, as they—particularly the young—are often frightened by the court and its procedures. Many frightened witnesses from recent trials in my constituency have come to my office. One woman had a child who was a witness in a major murder trial in Glasgow. The family had been threatened and intimidated for two years, and their 10-year-old had become the main witness in the trial, which subsequently saw five people convicted.

The family had moved house three times and have only just found a permanent home. During that time, the child's father was beaten so badly that he lost an eye. The family eventually split up, and they feel that their lives have been wrecked because they did the right thing. They were public-spirited citizens who stood up to be counted when the chips were down. They do not seek any reward for their actions, but we should have been able to give them a guarantee that their living standards would not be diminished. We cannot ask people to put their lives on hold—and risk ending up in a worse position—in order to do the right thing. That family did not flinch from their duty: they are still convinced that they did the right thing. However, they have paid a terrible penalty. We should not be asking that of a family. It is our duty to give the members of that family all the support that they need.

Concerns have been expressed about the right of the defence to interview witnesses for the prosecution. I would not, of course, wish to deny the defence that right. It will be a poor day when someone is accused and he does not know who his accuser is. Through the Bill, however, I am attempting to keep the list of witnesses who might be interviewed by the defence very tight. Only those who need to know who the witnesses are should be able to have that knowledge.

I have spoken of a security firm in my constituency, which was subsequently investigated by the police. There is a continuing police investigation. The firm has folded with £500,000-worth of debts. The firm had been set up by the public purse through a Scottish Office-led partnership. There was, of course, a vast sum of public money involved. I understand that a report will be sent to the Crown Office and that there will be further criminal inquiries.

Leading on from those matters, there was a murder in my constituency last year in which a young man called Mark Rennie—who was 24 years of age—was shot down in the street in broad daylight. Mark Rennie's crime was owing a local money lender £40. Mark was a drug addict who was probably involved in minor supplying. He was not a major criminal. Instead, he was an unfortunate young man who had become caught up in the seedy world of drug abuse. To keep his habit going, he had to borrow £40. Of course, he failed to pay back the £40. We know that £40 to a money lender is not actually £40 and can become many thousands of pounds of debt owed.

As I have said, Mark Rennie was gunned down in broad daylight. That was a warning to others in the community and not a punishment. Subsequently, three people were brought to trial for murder and for conspiring to murder. It was only because the people who witnessed the killing had had enough in the community and were brave enough

to come forward that those who murdered Mark Rennie were dealt with. One Stuart Gillespie, who was accused of his murder, is now serving 25 years in prison.

During that trial my office saw at least a dozen people who were witnesses in the case. On two occasions, I had to have two of the witnesses taken into police custody. They were so frightened of what was happening to them that they were scared even to move out of my constituency office. They had been threatened with violence and their families had been threatened. In two separate cases, they had been told that either their mothers or their children would be shot if they did not desist in coming forward as witnesses.

A number of witnesses had to be removed from their communities and they are now in other places in the United Kingdom. Even I do not know where they are. It is a poor day when people who come forward to do the right thing have their lives wrecked and uprooted rather than those who carried out the crime in the first place. It is our job to ensure that that does not happen.

Despite what I have described, the witnesses refused to be intimidated despite all the threats against them. Attempts were made to bribe some of them up to the tune of £10,000. They came forward. Subsequently, Stuart Gillespie was convicted of the murder. I might add that that happened while he was wearing a security company jacket from the security company FCB, about which I first raised questions in the House two and a half years ago.

That trial would have failed without the assistance of the police, especially Tom Caldwell, commander of K division, Strathclyde police, and Chief Inspector Ronnie Beattie, who led the investigation into that crime. It almost failed when a number of witnesses saw their names in the local newspaper. I stress that the newspaper printed those names out of naivety, and not in an attempt to disrupt the trial. That put the investigations back by six weeks. Some witnesses were frightened off, but thankfully the majority were not, and the police got the result that they so richly deserved. Strathclyde police have been a tower of strength, especially the two officers to whom I referred, who gave assistance well beyond the call of duty. Without that, the trial would not have had such an outcome.

Even after such a trial and after people have been sent to prison where they belong, witnesses continue to be intimidated and continue to receive threats; all because their names were brought into the public domain. If their names had been left with the prosecution and the defence, the police would have known where to begin to look for the people who were responsible for that intimidation. If their names were not in the public domain, the people responsible would not have been able to say, "Anyone could have done it, because their names were printed in newspapers."

I am not happy about restricting the press, but if that is the only way to afford some protection to people who come forward at such trials, so be it. I believe that that is a small price to pay. The House must set an example, and encourage witnesses to come forward in major criminal trials, especially in drug-related trials which involve huge amounts of cash, so that people are able to pay others to intimidate or bribe witnesses. Otherwise, the witnesses the police need to tackle these vast problems will not come forward.

2.11 pm

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): I shall be extremely brief. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) for her work on witness protection, and for her obvious commitment to that concept. However, I am afraid that I strongly disagree with her Bill, because I do not believe that it is the best way to achieve what she rightly wants to achieve.

I disagree with the Bill for two reasons. First, the main problem with witness intimidation comes before a witness or victim enters the court room. In the majority of cases, the hon. Lady's Bill will not achieve its purpose. Secondly, the Bill would mean a major reduction in the press's freedom to report trials. It does not refer only to serious trials, but refers to all criminal trials. It provides a blanket ban with no possibility of exemption: it covers all witnesses and victims. As a result, newspapers would give up covering criminal cases almost entirely. They would have nothing to write about, and would not carry pictures of victims or witnesses, which is often beneficial.

This is a draconian step. Any small advantage that the Bill may bring for witness protection would be well outweighed by the restriction that it would place on the openness of justice, and on the free reporting of trials, which has a deterrent effect and is an important principle in criminal justice. I am in favour of witness protection, but I do not believe that this is the way to achieve it. Other important avenues should be pursued instead.

2.13 pm

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): I, too, will be brief because I hope that the Bill can make progress. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams), who spoke tellingly today because she spoke from experience—both her experience of dealing with individuals and the experience of her constituents. She may have been tempted to introduce a Bill on the regulation of the private security industry in view of one of the points she made. Such cases are the reason why we have said for a long time that there is a need for regulation of that industry and of those who run it, not just those who are employed in it. My hon. Friend made her remarks effectively.

I was disconcerted to hear earlier today that it is likely that the Home Office will not allow the Bill to proceed into Committee. When the Bill was published, the Home Office said that it would consider it, so the Minister of State should ensure that it receives proper scrutiny in Committee. If there are concerns such as those expressed by the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant), efforts should be made to try to get the balance right by amending the Bill. I hope that the Minister will say that he is willing to do that, although we have seen no signs that that will happen. The Opposition are very willing to enter into discussions to see how we can make progress on the matter.

The protection and support of victims is extremely important. Victim Support has become increasingly thoughtful, positive and creative in suggesting ways in which the needs of victims can be met. I use the term "victims" deliberately. Often the victim is a witness and in the circumstances that my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North has mentioned, witnesses become victims too. Victim Support has argued that point, as has the royal commission on criminal justice chaired by Lord Runciman.

[Mr. Alun Michael]

The commission made strong recommendations about the way in which victims should be "protected from intimidation". It said that everything possible should be done to ensure that

"in all other ways they are given the support and encouragement that many will need when undergoing the daunting and sometimes distressing experience of appearing in court."

As my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North has stressed, the problem is not just the appearance in court, but everything that surrounds it.

"Witnesses may find the publicity, or threat of it, surrounding their appearance in the witness box a powerful disincentive to giving evidence."

Those were the remarks made by Lord Runciman and his colleagues on the royal commission.

That disincentive is a great danger and led my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) to publish "A quiet life". It contains suggestions, including a new community safety order, to address a problem that occurs not only in the extreme circumstances that my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North, mentioned but, all too often, on housing estates where people's confidence in the protection they can receive has gone.

If people become worried about the protection that they will receive, there can be rapid and devastating effects on the community. If people feel that they will be unsafe if they contact the police and if they feel that they cannot have confidence in the criminal justice system to protect them, it is not only their individual cases, but the process of protecting the peace, and the liberty and safety of every member of the community that are undermined. That is why the Bill is so important and my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North is right to promote it.

It is rather sad that the Government's victims charter, which makes some progress on the matter, has, under the title "Fear of Attack", very little that helps. It acknowledges the problem, but offers no real assurance or suggestions except that people should tell the police. The police need a context in which to operate and they need to be sure that they can have witnesses who feel confident about coming forward and giving evidence in court.

There may well be a need for safeguards. Evidence that might have been available if the names of victims and witnesses had been known in advance may become available only after the event. Those are problems that should be addressed in Committee rather than on Second Reading in an effort to kill off a Bill that addresses such an important issue.

The Minister should simply allow the Bill into Committee and bend his efforts to co-operating in improving the Bill in any way that it needs, through discussion with my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North. As I have said, I undertake to help that process.

It would be disgraceful for the Bill to be talked out today. There are few enough opportunities in this Session—which must be short even if the Government stagger on until May—to tackle problems that affect ordinary people. The Bill seeks to tackle a problem that affects ordinary individuals and communities and the House should give it a Second Reading.

2.20 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): I thank the hon. Member for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) for introducing the Bill. The Government recognise and have great sympathy with the concerns that she seeks to address. I also pay tribute to her personal bravery and courage over the past few years in standing up to some of the drug barons who are making life a misery for her constituents in Paisley and surrounding areas.

On this, the bicentenary of Edmund Burke's death, I should like to open my remarks with one of the most famous sayings attributed to him:

"It is necessary only for the good man to do nothing for evil to triumph."

Nothing demonstrates the truth of that statement more powerfully than society's attitude towards crime.

Our criminal justice system is founded on the support and participation of the public. We rely on witnesses coming forward to report crimes, to help the police and to give evidence in court. Without their support, we could not hope to catch the number of criminals that we do.

Of course, we must not take the good will of the public for granted—and the Government do not do so. It is not enough just to sit back, adopt a neutral stance and hope that justice will flourish. We must create a climate in which law-abiding people feel that they will be supported and that criminals will be punished rather than the other way round.

We recognise, too, that some witnesses will be reluctant to tell the police and the courts what they have seen. They may fear for their own safety and that of their families, or worry that getting involved will result in too many demands on their time, or they may simply feel overwhelmed by the whole process and the unknown world of the court room. Such fears may be heightened in certain locations, for example on high-crime estates where the threat of reprisals may be greater. We heard a moving description of those circumstances from the hon. Lady.

Encouraging the participation of all witnesses—whether reluctant or not—is one of our priorities. It is a task that calls for a vigorous and comprehensive response and I believe that the Government can be proud of the measures that we have taken—both individually and in partnership with the police, courts and voluntary organisations—to improve the position of witnesses. It makes for an impressive record. In the context of today's debate, it would be useful if I spent a few minutes outlining some of those provisions before turning to the hon. Lady's Bill.

Tackling the problem of witness intimidation at source is a key part of our strategy. Those who intimidate or threaten witnesses must be punished severely. That is why we introduced a specific offence of intimidating or threatening a witness. Those convicted can be sentenced to up to five years' imprisonment. The provisions have been in force for two years and are used extensively—there were nearly 500 prosecutions in 1995 and significantly more in 1996.

We are taking those new measures a step further. From April this year, the courts will be able to quash an acquittal when a person is subsequently convicted of an intimidation offence that casts doubt on the outcome of the original trial. A retrial of the original offence can then

be instigated by the prosecution. Those who would commit such crimes now know that not only will they face a heavy sentence, but their attempts to interfere with the course of justice will be frustrated.

Responsibility for the protection of witnesses rests with the police. When the police consider that there are serious risks to witnesses, they go to considerable lengths to protect them and their families. Identities can be changed and families relocated. Homes can be made secure through surveillance and the installation of alarms. The name and telephone number of a police contact can be provided to offer witnesses further reassurance. Of course, such measures can bring unwelcome disruption to the lives of witnesses, but the public can take comfort in the increased security that they bring.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Lady has introduced an important Bill and I must put the Government's position on record. I do not have much time.

Mr. Morris: Will the Minister give way on that point?

Mr. Maclean: I am sorry, but I have only six minutes left.

The police have built up considerable expertise in this field and provide a high-quality service. Good examples include the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Metropolitan police. The Strathclyde police, with whom the hon. Lady is of course familiar, are at the forefront of such work in Scotland, having launched a pilot witness protection scheme last August. Following on from that, funding of £210,000 is being provided by the Government over the next three years to support witness protection initiatives in Scotland.

Fortunately, only a minority of witnesses require a high level of police protection. In the vast majority of cases, a less disruptive response will be appropriate. A wide range of measures are available to cater for the needs that arise in individual cases.

Many witnesses have expressed unease at having their addresses given out in open court. It is no longer standard practice for that to happen. Judges have been advised that there is no need to ask for the address of a witness in open court, and addresses have been removed from witness statements. That simple step has greatly assisted witnesses without compromising the trial process.

The occasions on which prosecution witnesses will come face to face with the defendant and his family or friends have also been reduced. Wherever possible, courts provide separate waiting areas and facilities for prosecution and defence witnesses. We are implementing practical measures, such as changing the design of courts, to make things easier for witnesses.

Powers are available when a witness has concerns about giving evidence in open court. If a witness is unable to give oral evidence through fear, a written statement can be used instead. Alternatively, screens and voice distorters can be set up in the court room, so that the person's identity is not revealed. If there are national security considerations, witnesses' identities can be withheld from the defendant and the defendant's lawyers. Such powers are designed to protect the anonymity of witnesses. They are not used lightly by the courts. Judges need to weigh up the needs of the witness with the defendant's right to a fair trial.

Encouraging the public to act as witnesses is, however, not solely a matter of removing the scope for intimidation. For many people, attending court is a bewildering experience and scares them even if they are not being intimidated by some hoodlums or criminals. We have tried to make things easier for witnesses by publishing the "Statement of National Standards of Witness Care in the Criminal Justice System". All such measures are designed to make life easier for witnesses attending courts.

Returning to the Bill, I reiterate my sympathy for its sentiments. As I said, there is more to be done to protect witnesses. Despite the many provisions, some members of the public are still afraid of the consequences of telling the authorities what they have seen. We must do something to protect witnesses better in circumstances where—rightly or wrongly—they are terrified to come forward.

On the particulars of the Bill, I can see several merits in it. I can see potential advantages in prohibiting the media from publishing information that would identify witnesses to a crime. Perhaps most important, there may be occasions when intimidation of a witness would be prevented by such a ban. If those who carried out or threatened such cowardly attacks found out the address of a witness only through, say, the local press, a media blackout would cut off their source of information. Although it might often be true that retaliatory attacks will be inflicted by associates of the defendant, that need not always be so. I therefore accept that on occasions failure to publish the name might help the witness.

As well as preventing some intimidation of witnesses, the Bill could influence the public's perception of the threat of intimidation. The public might come to believe that, if they come forward, they will be protected in all cases. That might help to bring more witnesses forward, but we would have to ensure that the reality met the expectation.

The merits of witness anonymity of the type proposed in the Bill have already been recognised for victims of rape and other sexual offences. To encourage victims of those dreadful offences to report them to the police, it was decided that a ban on publicity was justified. Although such points are in favour of the Bill, I have some concerns about it.

First and foremost, I have some doubts on whether the proposed media ban will achieve the desired results. If the defendant or his associates are intent on threatening a witness, the chances are that they will already know his or her whereabouts without getting the information from the television or the wireless. On high-crime estates, for example, where we know that intimidation is a problem, the identity of witnesses will usually be common knowledge in the neighbourhood. If the prime aim of the media blackout is to protect witnesses from reprisals, the Bill will therefore prove ineffective. Indeed, as the Bill would not protect the witness's identity from the defendant, it could be said that its main purpose is largely defeated.

A related point is the impact on witness expectations. If the Bill of the hon. Member for Paisley, North was passed, and people came forward with a misplaced expectation that they would always have anonymity and

[Mr. Maclean]

not therefore suffer retaliation, there would be serious consequences when that turned out not to be so—as it often would.

I also have some difficulties with the duration of the news blackout. It would prevent media coverage as soon as the offence had been committed, which would seriously hamper police investigations. The police would, for example, no longer be able to appeal for a key witness to come forward or for information about a missing child, by broadcasting his details on television and in the press. Placing such shackles on the investigation of crime cannot be in the interests of justice. There are some good programmes on television that aim to bring witnesses forward and to help to solve crimes.

The Bill would also seriously curtail the freedom of the press. We have a tradition—whether we, as politicians, like it or not at times—of open justice, of which we are rightly proud. Conducting criminal proceedings in the open strengthens the operation of justice and increases public confidence that the system is working fairly. While placing restrictions on that freedom is justified on occasions, limiting media coverage to the extent proposed in the Bill seems to me to go too far. The ban would apply to all witnesses, whether prosecution or defence. Indeed, it would cover the defendant himself if he testified. The ban would last from the commission of the offence until the final determination by the court, and the Bill would provide no judicial discretion to lift the ban, whatever the circumstances of the case—unlike, for example, the anonymity provisions for rape victims.

I have other broad concerns—

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed upon Friday 7 February.

Remaining Private Members' Bills

POLICE (HEALTH AND SAFETY) BILL

Read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

SEXUAL OFFENCES (PROTECTED MATERIAL) BILL

Read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

DANGEROUS DOGS (AMENDMENT) BILL

[Lords]

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 14 February.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As you know, the Dangerous Dogs (Amendment) Bill has been through another place on two occasions, first introduced by the late Lord Houghton of Sowerby and secondly by Viscount Falkland. The Bill has wide support and has been scrutinised by the Select Committee of the House of Lords. It is also in line with the recommendations of a House of Commons Select Committee. In spite of that, an objection has been raised today. Will you ask Madam Speaker to discuss with the Leader of the House ways in which we can ensure that legislation that has been given consideration in another place, and passed through all its stages, receives a proper and courteous hearing in this House?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): That is a matter for the Select Committee on Procedure.

UNITED KINGDOM MEMBERSHIP OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (REFERENDUM) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 14 February.

DISABLED PERSONS AND CARERS (SHORT-TERM BREAKS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day?

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): Noting the Whip's objection, Friday 7 February.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 7 February.

ABORTION (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 28 February.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, notwithstanding Standing Order No. 14B (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community documents), the Speaker shall—

(1) at the sitting on Monday 3rd February put the Questions on the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Gummer relating to Local Government Finance not later than Ten o'clock; and

(2) at the sitting on Tuesday 4th February put the Questions on the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Hague relating to Local Government Finance (Wales) not later than three hours after the start of proceedings on the first such Motion or Ten o'clock, whichever is the earlier.—[*Mrs. Lait.*]

SEX OFFENDERS BILL

Ordered,

That, during the proceedings on the Sex Offenders Bill, Standing Committee D shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it shall meet.—[*Mrs. Lait.*]

Alcoholism (Rehabilitation)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mrs. Lait.*]

2.33 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I am grateful for the opportunity for a short debate on the question of rehabilitation from alcoholism, and for the Minister's attendance to reply. This is not, it might be thought, the most populist subject, but it is very important. I want to explain why I chose this subject for debate and to set it in context.

The Minister is aware, I think, that an organisation called the Alcohol Recovery Project is based in my constituency. I was privileged to be invited to speak at its 31st anniversary event in November last year. I have had many dealings with the organisation before—it is based near the Elephant and Castle in Newington Causeway—and that event coincided with the launch of a document it had commissioned, called "Preventing Homelessness Supporting Tenants with Alcohol Problems", which was written by Shelter and paid for by British Telecom—it was very much a partnership enterprise.

The request to speak set me thinking about issues that—like many people, probably—I tend to put to one side because they are both challenging and disturbing. I shall begin by sharing three examples with the Minister and the House. First, the Alcohol Recovery Project distributes a good leaflet, which has the following question on its front page:

"What is the common factor in: up to half of all social work caseloads; up to one quarter of occupied hospital beds; one quarter of accidents at work; over 8 million lost working days each year; half of all juvenile crimes; three deaths every hour?

Think about drink."

The answer is self-evident from the context of this debate. Drink has a huge impact on vast areas of our public life.

The second example concerns a man who came to my constituency surgery about five years ago. He was relatively the worse for wear when he came in and told me the story of his circumstances. Within two years he had gone from having a professional job as an officer in the Army, with a stable marriage and home circumstances, to being on his own, on the street and an alcoholic. He had already tried to commit suicide and he made a further attempt subsequently. We can all be stable human beings one day or one year, but be thrown considerably off beam by circumstances.

The third example is a current constituency case. A family in my constituency suffered a terrible tragedy in the summer a year and a half ago, when one of the three adult sons lost his life diving into Greenland dock in the Surrey docks to save a friend who was drowning—both of them drowned. Not long after, the mother, who was disabled, had to go into a home, which left father—a pensioner—and the one son who was still at home looking after themselves. The result of the death and the loss of the mother from the home indirectly—I do not pretend more than that—meant that both father and son started to drink more heavily. They got into financial difficulties and, last year, lost their home. Some months later, we are still trying to find

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

them housing. It has been terribly depressing. Again, I do not have to tell the Minister or colleagues that such cases are often nearly intractable and yet the people may be really deserving—they may be difficult sometimes, but they are deserving.

Those are examples of the issues that come the way of an organisation such as the ARP and many of the public services every day. I shall flag up the issues that are on the agenda of a project that caters for the wide range of organisational concerns and share some thoughts, reflections and requests. I do so entirely constructively and, I hope, in a way that can influence what the Government do—even during the remaining time of this Parliament—irrespective of who is in government after the election.

In the autumn, I asked people at the ARP what the issues were for them. First was funding, which will always be an issue. The second concerned advice, education and information about alcohol and alcohol-related products. The topical example last year was alcopops, which very much hit the headlines. The third issue was housing and all hon. Members know from their constituencies how under strain public sector or rented housing is, let alone housing for people with alcohol problems.

The fourth was how to deal with people who are homeless and have alcohol problems—very much a marginalised group. They are often seen as a threat and are not popular—in some senses, they are not nearly as appealing as young people who are homeless, or people who have come here as asylum seekers, for example.

Fifthly, as we often see in urban surgeries, there is a growing link between alcohol abuse and mental health problems. I am conscious that we are having this debate three or four working days before the Government are to produce their Green Paper on mental health, with which there is a strong link.

Alcohol abuse is self-evidently drug abuse. "The Oxford Textbook of Medicine" regards alcohol and drug abuse as a single issue, as both act on the mind. Most of us partake of alcohol and we know that it has an effect; it becomes a drug when it takes control of us, as other drugs do.

People's reasons for starting to abuse alcohol are multiple, as with other drugs: social attitudes, social changes, the quality of the social environment, family relationships, home, work, pressures and other factors impact on people in a way that may result in alcohol abuse and alcoholism.

A study in 1993 of people seeking admission to an in-patient alcohol treatment research unit found that 51 per cent. of the men studied, and 48 per cent. of the women, reported the use of one or more drugs in addition to alcohol. There is often multiple drug abuse by people who use alcohol to excess. All the evidence is that people who are simply abusers of alcohol are a minority of those who present themselves with drug abuse and dependency problems.

I understand—this is the really telling statistic—that there are 10 times as many alcohol abusers as other drug abusers. That is not an absolutely scientific figure, but if that is the order of the problem, we need to spend more time on the issue; but we seem to give more public prominence to other drug issues, as has been evidenced in the past few days.

A Scottish Office report in 1993 showed that research into the links between alcohol and offending is contradictory, unevaluated and often based on crude interpretations of data. It is also sometimes fairly subjective. That is unacceptable. We all have experience that suggests a close correlation between alcohol abuse and crime.

There is no lack of evidence, and that evidence is telling. The British Medical Association estimates that alcohol is associated with 60 to 70 per cent. of homicides—one third of victims are intoxicated at the time of death—75 per cent. of stabbings; 70 per cent. of beatings; and 50 per cent. of fights or domestic assaults. The Police Superintendents Association of England and Wales says that alcohol is present in half of all crimes. The National Association of Probation Officers found in 1994 that 30 per cent. of probationers and 58 per cent. of prisoners had severe alcohol problems, and it argued strongly for a clear strategy to reduce alcohol-related crime.

The all-party group on alcohol abuse, in a 1995 report, said that, in the view of all the professional agencies engaged in the criminal justice system,

"there is a need for a more concerted and coherent response to alcohol-related crime."

It is estimated that alcohol abuse costs employers £2 billion a year. I support "The Health of the Nation" programme, but according to the evidence we are missing the target set in 1991 to reduce over-the-limit drinking in women to one in 18 of the population, and in men to one in six, by 2005. The National Audit Office's report last year said that it was unlikely that we would meet the target. There is no net downward trend in over-the-limit drinking among men, and a rising trend among women.

There is a philosophical and attitude problem to alcohol abuse compared with the abuse of other illegal drugs and of cigarettes. The social services inspectorate says that there is a built-in prejudice against people who abuse alcohol, but not against cigarette smokers or people addicted to tobacco or other drugs. That is one of the reasons why low priority has been given historically to those who abuse alcohol, as it has to those with mental health problems. There is a general perception that people with alcohol problems are less deserving; that they have brought their problems on themselves.

The recent record has not been good. The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys figures showed that the proportion of children in England aged 11 to 15 who said that they drank every week was 17 per cent. in 1994, compared with 13 per cent. in 1990 and that weekly consumption—not just the numbers but the total consumption—had increased. We now have alcopops, alcoholic lemonade and artificial insertion of alcohol into other drinks.

The Government used to ring-fence alcohol rehabilitation in their budget allocation process. In 1992, the then Secretary of State announced that ring fencing would end. The ARP took the Government to court and lost. Ring fencing finished with the introduction of community care. Although many local authorities previously ring-fenced voluntarily, budgetary pressures are driving them away from doing so.

The structure of the community care budget, which does not allow for ring fencing at national level, is unhelpful and undermines much of the work which difficult, deserving but not potentially popular projects such as the ARP are doing. They compete with other projects, funds and services. The National Health Service (Primary Care) Bill which is in the other place and will come to the House next month does not look as if it will make the position any better because the problems are particularly prevalent in inner-city areas and there is no guarantee that projects will be funded.

I commend—I have said so publicly before—the Government's "Tackling Drugs Together" initiative. It has been focused on specific drug issues. I do not think that it was intended to include alcohol. It has concentrated on other things. The all-party group recently called for a ministerial group on alcohol misuse based in the Home Office to co-ordinate policy in response to alcohol-related crime. The Government could make a similar commitment to tackling alcohol as they did to tackling drugs and launch an initiative later this year called "Tackling Alcohol Together". That would be to everyone's advantage. I am aware of what the latest parliamentary answer said. Such an initiative should have the same high-profile leadership as the Leader of the House has given to "Tackling Drugs Together". We need that sort of commitment and leadership.

We must have authoritative statistics. In one of its main recommendations, the all-party group said:

"The single biggest barrier faced by those who would wish to see an on-going strategy for concerted action to tackle alcohol-related crime is the absence of detailed statistical evidence."

I am not being over-critical, but we need to get a grip on the facts.

Perhaps most important—I think that this is in the Government's mind, but I want to make sure that we are clearer on it—we need much better collaboration between the relevant agencies, including Departments, social services departments, housing departments and health authorities. The social services inspectorate reported about 18 months ago:

"In most cases services were inaccessible to service users who often had to jump through a number of hoops, and express high levels of motivation before gaining access to a service at all."

My advice from the ARP is that

"we are struggling with the lack of 'joined-up thinking' between Central Government Departments, local government and NHS planning structures which don't consider the knock-on effect of proposals for change".

The King's Fund report on mental health which came out about 10 days ago concluded that there was a lack of coterminosity in London. The Government intend to come up with proposals on mental health. I welcome that. I ask that we have a seamless service on alcohol-related issues, as we are to have for mental health, and that legislation be introduced which will allow the merging of health and social services so that they can co-ordinate and work together, pool their budgets and share responsibility for joint commissioning. We have to deal with these things together. I ask that we take on the thinking that has already been applied to the Green Paper on mental health.

I now come to my last two points. In November, soon after his appointment, the Minister answered a parliamentary question about what plans there were

"to assist general practitioners in detecting and treating patients suffering from alcohol-related illness."

The Minister replied:

"We are currently considering what support we might give to purchasers of treatment and care for people with alcohol misuse problems. This would include general practitioners involved in the purchasing and planning of such services. We aim to produce, by next summer"—

now this summer—

"guidance equivalent to the guidance we issued this year to purchasers of services for drug misusers".—[*Official Report*, 7 November 1996; Vol. 285, c. 626.]

I welcome that as the peg and I would be grateful if the Minister could confirm that the Government see these matters as a priority. I would encourage him and offer to work for the maximum all-party support, even before the election, to ensure that we instate alcohol abuse and alcohol-related problems as a high priority on the social, parliamentary and Government agenda. There are many people out there who would benefit from such action and society would benefit incredibly.

2.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Simon Burns): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) for raising this important issue and I pay tribute to the constructive, thoughtful and thought-provoking way in which he has dealt with a very sensitive subject.

The Government's record on the provision of alcohol services is a good one and I am pleased to have the opportunity to comment on it, to mention some work that we have in hand to assist the provision of an even more effective alcohol service, and to address several of the hon. Gentleman's points.

First, I add my own tribute to the hard work and dedication of the staff of the Alcohol Recovery Project. We are well aware of the good work that they do—indeed, we currently fund from our drugs and alcohol specific grant two projects run by the ARP.

Some of the issues that the hon. Gentleman raised about alcohol service provision in London were summarised in the King's Fund London commission report on mental health, which was published last week and to which the hon. Gentleman referred. That report made a number of recommendations about substance misuse service provision generally which we are studying very carefully. However, many of the issues that the report raised were also examined during our review of effectiveness of treatment services for drug misusers which we published in May 1996. The recommendations in the King's Fund report are similar to those in the effectiveness review and we are still considering how best to implement many of the 80 or so recommendations that it made. Although the review dealt with drug services, there are many themes in it which might also be relevant to alcohol services.

We are aware that one of the biggest concerns in the alcohol field is that the support for provision of alcohol services has not had the kind of strategic attention from the centre that has been given to drugs since the publication of the White Paper, "Tackling Drugs Together," and more especially since the publication of

[Mr. Simon Burns]

the review of effectiveness and our draft circular in August 1996 on purchasing effective treatment and care for drug misusers.

We have been considering in the Department what further support we might provide for statutory purchasers of alcohol services, in the light of the warm welcome that our drug effectiveness review and purchasing guidance received. Department of Health officials consulted representative purchasers both from local authorities and from health authorities on such issues and received a number of representations which we took very seriously indeed. We are particularly concerned to ensure that the emphasis on drugs is not interpreted as giving reduced priority to alcohol—a point that the hon. Gentleman made which I would wholeheartedly endorse.

Therefore, as I announced in my speech to Alcohol Concern's annual conference in November last year, we shall be issuing draft guidance in the summer on alcohol service purchasing so that purchasers of such services can use it in drawing up their purchasing plans for 1998-99. We aim to produce a document covering similar ground to the drugs guidelines and intend that it should cover effective purchasing, the range of service options, possible performance indicators and recommendations about local co-ordination, although its eventual shape will depend very much on the views of a working group that we shall be putting together to prepare the final draft.

The production of the guidance will be in two phases. The first stage will be to draw together existing evidence and knowledge on types of service provision and their relative effectiveness and to prepare a draft review document by the end of April to enable the second phase to begin—the preparation of practical guidance for purchasers by a small working group of representatives from the alcohol field. The review document from the first phase of work will be published alongside the draft purchasing guidance. Through the first phase of work, we hope to be able to address an issue that has received much debate in the field: which types and combinations of treatment are most effective.

There has been criticism—although not so justified as I suspect that some people who make that criticism would claim—about apparent lack of provision for in-patient and residential detoxification. Research studies summarised in a 1994 publication by the Centre for Research on Drugs and Health Behaviour failed to show any overall advantage of in-patient or residential treatment over out-patient or community settings. However, this is one of the issues that our review will address and I would not wish to prejudge that review by pronouncing in favour of a particular regime. Different patients have different needs and we are keen to ensure that treatment is effective and addresses those needs.

In our review, we shall consider the whole question of effective co-ordination between various bodies. We are anxious that organisations in the health and social care fields working for health authorities and local authorities, and the voluntary sector work together as effectively as possible to provide the best possible service for patients in need. We want to consider not only different types of treatment but the possible desirability of a city-wide or pan-London approach to services, and other issues relating to alcohol services generally. We shall gather together evidence such as that produced by the King's Fund and the Centre for Research on Drugs and Health Behaviour and would welcome contributions and examples of good practice from the field for consideration for our review.

That is all for the near feature. For the present, there are still several areas in which alcohol service co-ordination is actively being improved. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey mentioned drug action teams, which we established following the publication of "Tackling Drugs Together". We made it clear in the White Paper that drug action teams have the option of looking at prevention and treatment issues more generally by bringing other forms of substance misuse, including alcohol misuse, within their remit.

The widening of the DATs' terms of reference to include alcohol—where they choose to do so—can bring local alcohol services within the remit of a body with a much higher profile than before. It represents a valuable opportunity to ensure that all concerned work more closely together to develop and provide services. We regard such local partnerships as a vital key to tackling substance misuse problems effectively. Our latest reports show that more than a quarter of DATs nationally have decided to do that, and several other teams are reviewing their position. We are encouraged by such developments, and I hope that that reassures the hon. Gentleman.

We are aware, however, that the DAT model for alcohol services is not the only one. Where other local arrangements exist which address the problems just as well, there is clearly no reason to disrupt them, although we would wish them to co-ordinate their activities with local DATs in areas of shared interest, such as the provision of services for young people. Where such arrangements are not yet in place, and where the DAT is clearly preoccupied with issues surrounding illegal drugs, we would expect purchasing authorities to consider what else can be done to develop better, more co-ordinated standards of provision for alcohol services. Overall, our priority is a high standard of service provision, no matter what the exact arrangements are for delivering it. That is what we shall seek from our purchasing guidance.

As the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey will fully recognise, the voluntary sector has a crucial part to play. Support for developments in voluntary sector service provision is considered by the Government to be equally important as part of our national policy. One way in which we have helped to stimulate local initiatives is through the Department of Health's drugs and alcohol specific grant. Since 1991-92, the Department of Health has grant-aided more than 100 drug and alcohol projects, giving out about £13.2 million, and we are making available a further £2.5 million for the next financial year.

The grant has enabled us to encourage new forms of service development. For next year, we have identified a single national priority in response to valuable feedback from the field. We are giving priority to projects supported by local authorities providing services for the homeless with drug and alcohol problems, in areas currently designated by the Department of the Environment either as rough sleepers initiative zones or else as zones eligible for funding from the rough sleepers revenue fund. We have £1.65 million available for new

projects, which will be supplemented by a further 30 per cent. of funding from other sources. We hope that through the grant we will be able to fund a number of innovative projects dealing with this most unfortunate group of our society.

While we accept that services for alcohol misusers are under pressure, especially in London, developments in alcohol services since the introduction of community care have made considerable strides. Obviously, we cannot be complacent, but it seems to me that much of what needs to be done is a matter of fine tuning rather than wholesale reform and the upheavals that that causes.

Finally, I thank the hon. Gentleman once again for the timeliness of this debate. It comes as we are about to embark on our review of the effectiveness of alcohol services, which we hope will provide some useful pointers for statutory purchasers about how they might co-ordinate and purchase alcohol services more effectively. We shall certainly consider the hon. Gentleman's observations and comments very seriously as we take that review forward in the next few months.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 3 February 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

NEW WRIT

For the county constituency of Wirral, South, in the room of George Barrington Porter, Esquire, deceased.—[*Mr. Goodlad.*]

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery (Historical Items)

1. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list those items of historical importance which have received national lottery funding in order to keep them within the United Kingdom. [12216]

The Minister of State, Department of National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): The heritage lottery fund has made 33 grants for nearly £27 million for the acquisition of items of historical importance which might otherwise have been exported overseas. I have arranged for a full list to be placed in the Libraries.

Mr. Mans: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Will he explain how the new National Heritage Bill will contribute towards keeping ever greater numbers of items in this country? Will he explain also how the Bill will allow lottery funds to be used for items that at present do not come within their remit?

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend is right to draw the attention of the House to the improvements that the National Heritage Bill will make. It will mean that lottery funds will be able to be used for the acquisition of individual items, as they are now, and it will mean that education, information technology access and other matters beyond preservation and maintenance will be able to be dealt with by the national heritage memorial fund.

Mr. Skinner: That was an interesting reply. As items of historical importance could be worth a bob or two, will this lousy Government, in their dying days, give a categorical assurance that, having bought such items with the proceeds of the lottery, they will not sell them off?

Mr. Sproat: There are two simple answers. First, it is a matter for the national heritage memorial fund, which makes decisions about how moneys will be disbursed. Secondly, there will be opportunities for clawback in the contract that is agreed between the memorial fund and a commercial organisation or a private person when lottery funds are allocated.

National Lottery (Pitches)

2. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will take steps to provide an all-weather pitch to every community in excess of 5,000 people using proceeds of the national lottery. [12217]

Mr. Sproat: The lottery sports fund for Wales has so far supported the provision of 20 all-weather pitches throughout Wales. The English lottery sports fund has so far supported the provision of 149 all-weather pitches, costing more than £11 million. In total, the national lottery has made more than 2,465 awards of some £428 million to provide new, improved and upgraded sports facilities across the UK.

Mr. Ainger: Is the Minister aware that in my county council area, which covers a population of 110,000, there are only two all-weather facilities? Does he accept that the best way of distributing lottery money fairly in terms of improvements to sports facilities is to provide all-weather facilities? That is the view taken by sports development officers. Rather than spending a significant sum on a few individual and high-profile capital investments, is it not about time that we started spreading more lottery money into rural areas and providing basic facilities that take account of Britain's appalling weather?

Mr. Sproat: It is certainly true that all-weather pitches are an extremely important addition to current sports facilities. Although 20 such pitches in Wales have been provided by the lottery, there are actually 62 all-weather pitches throughout Wales. The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, but all-weather pitches are not the only facilities that need to be provided. Where they are, however, the sports councils for Wales and England will take them fully into account.

Mr. Harry Greenway: I welcome all new sporting facilities, including all-weather pitches. Is my hon. Friend aware of the serious situation that will arise if the new football stadiums are not taken up in 2006 for the World cup? Is it not a disgrace that Union of European Football Associations has gone behind the Football Association's back to promote Germany rather than this country without telling anyone?

Mr. Sproat: It is certainly true that Wembley stadium is probably the biggest brand name stadium in the world, and that lottery money will be used to refurbish it to the highest possible standards.

On the other implications of my hon. Friend's questions, I have spoken to the Football Association many times in the past few weeks, and I am seeing its representatives immediately after Question Time.

Airport Tax

3. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations she has received on the impact of the airport tax on tourism in the United Kingdom. [12218]

Mr. Sproat: We have had representations from several tourism organisations. Tourism is a prosperous and expanding industry, and there is no evidence that the duty has had any significantly damaging effects on tourism. Indeed, since the duty was introduced in 1994, we have had record numbers of overseas visitors to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Bayley: The Minister will be aware that, in its first year, the airport duty raised £350 million for the Treasury. Has his Department make representations to the Treasury proposing that some of that money should be used to expand the job of the British Tourist Authority abroad to encourage tourists to come to Britain?

Mr. Sproat: No, it has not, because it is a well-known principle of government—it obtained under Labour Governments as well as the present one—that the Treasury does not like hypothecated income.

Sir Donald Thompson: Has my hon. Friend considered the effect of the tax on destinations within the United Kingdom? Does it not put a strain on airlines, especially given the amazing and huge revival of the railways since privatisation?

Mr. Sproat: I am glad about the improvement in the railways. It is true that the amount of money spent by our population on tourism has gone up at the same time as the spend by foreign visitors has increased. The answer to my hon. Friend's question is that the tax has not affected things one way or the other.

National Lottery (Canals)

4. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many canal restoration projects have received funding from a national lottery funding body; and if she will make a statement. [12219]

The Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): Canals and other inland waterways have been at the heart of many successful lottery bids throughout the country. They act as a focus for regeneration in their surrounding areas. So far, four major canal restoration projects have received lottery funding of nearly £52 million.

Mr. Luff: Does my right hon. Friend agree that that answer puts a different gloss on the Inland Waterways Association's rather negative campaign on canal funding? Her statement will bring great hope to Worcestershire, where the rejection by the Millennium Commission of the bid to refurbish the Droitwich barge and junction canals was so disappointing? Does she agree that such projects bring enormous benefits to a huge area—not just the immediate area around the canal—including to the excellent company, Viking Afloat, which is run by my constituent, Mr. Robert Bell, in Worcester?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am well aware of the economic effects of investing in our canals, and the huge opportunities for canal projects that are provided by lottery funding. I met someone at the boat show from the project to which my hon. Friend referred. Those involved in inland waterways were enormously excited by the potential for the holiday and leisure industry of this substantial investment.

Mr. Miller: If the Secretary of State recognises the importance of canals to our tourism infrastructure, why is she passing the responsibility on to the lottery rather than directly supporting projects, such as the Ellesmere Port boat museum, which is so important to tourism in my constituency?

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman knows that I visited that museum and was very impressed by it.

Mr. Miller: The right hon. Lady told me.

Mrs. Bottomley: I told the hon. Gentleman, because it would have been contrary to usual practice to visit without having given him prior warning. He shows that the Labour party would ensure that all lottery money went to its friends in local government and elsewhere, and would dictate policy. It wants to dictate the distribution of lottery funds. Lottery funds are distributed by independent bodies, and judgments on particular projects are a matter for them. I hope that a great deal more money will go to museums, as set out in our excellent policy document "Treasures in Trust".

Arts Access (Young People)

5. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps she has taken to make the arts more accessible to young people. [12220]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Increasing access to the arts, particularly for young people, is a top priority for my Department. In the last year, I have published "People Taking Part", a handbook of good practice on facilitating access; "Setting the Scene", containing a wide range of recommendations and commitments to encourage a greater involvement by the young in the arts; and "Treasures in Trust", which encouraged museums to look at new ways of reaching a wider audience. The national lottery has had an enormous impact in delivering the objectives, reviving the arts infrastructure throughout the country and now, through the new "arts for all" scheme, creating new revenue opportunities for a wide range of groups and organisations.

Mr. Butler: I thank my right hon. Friend for that compendious answer. May I add that there is never any need for her to warn of visits to my constituency? Notice would be sufficient.

May I ask whether my right hon. Friend enjoyed her visit to my constituency a couple of weeks ago, when she saw not only Olney rugby club and Olney tennis club but

John Dankworth and Cleo Laine's "The Stables", which have received more than £2 million of lottery funds? In particular, may I ask what view my right hon. Friend formed of the young people's summer camps, where each year several hundred children go to learn from experts in all sorts of music? Finally, may I ask whether my right hon. Friend has yet used John Dankworth's excellent book to learn to play the saxophone, and, if not, whether she will lend it to me?

Mrs. Bottomley: I well remember my excellent visit to my hon. Friend's constituency. The lottery is bringing new opportunities to his constituency, as to so many other areas. There is the magnificent Wavendon project: I strongly commend its summer camps, which are involving more young people in a love of music and the arts. There is also the splendid £19 million project for the borough council, to promote its theatre. As my hon. Friends the Members for Milton Keynes, North–East (Mr. Butler) and for Worcester (Mr. Luff) are well aware, involving young people in worthwhile, constructive activity is extremely important.

Mr. Tony Banks: May I say to the Secretary of State that there is nothing more artistic than a 40 yd pinpoint pass from Ruud Gullit or a pirouette from Gianfranco Zola on the football field? It is little wonder that football has been described as working-class ballet. Will the Secretary of State ensure that the working-class ballet is brought to this country in 2006 for the World cup, and that, when she and her colleagues go to protest about the failure of UEFA to consider the English bid, she takes the Leader of the Opposition with her so that we can see that there is an all-party effort to secure the World cup for Britain in 2006?

Mrs. Bottomley: I do not think that I need reassure the House of the strength of feeling among all Ministers about the bid. The stadiums in this country are now formidable: they are of extremely high quality, thanks to substantial investment in them. Euro 96 was a great triumph, and I shall do all that I can to secure that long-term bid.

Mr. Dicks: Why is my right hon. Friend so concerned about making the arts more accessible to young people? Most of the kids I know would go bonkers if they had to sit through anything like that. Why subsidise this? Why spend taxpayers' money on such nonsense? If kids want to go to the ballet or the opera, or to see classical plays, either they or their parents ought to be made to pay the economic costs. This is not just a subsidy; we are worse than the lot on the other side.

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend has said that he will escort me to various arts events. We have not yet managed to arrange any such visits, but I am determined that he will join me at, for example, the National Youth Theatre. A £2 million lottery award enabled the theatre to buy its lease, and it provides opportunities for youngsters from all over the country. I know that, like me, my hon. Friend worries about young people who may be more bored than bad. Providing worthwhile activities, whether in sport or in art, is an excellent way of growing the citizens of tomorrow.

Mr. Fisher: If increasing access for young people really is the Secretary of State's top priority, how does she explain the fact that her Government, through their dogmatic hostility to local authorities, which she has demonstrated again this afternoon, have presided over the reduction to a rump of our theatre and education network in schools, the destruction of peripatetic music teaching and the virtual elimination of all individual instrument teaching in schools? Is that the way to increase access? Has she ever had a meeting with the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to discuss increasing access through education and, if not, why not?

Mrs. Bottomley: Once again, the Labour party is good at preaching to other people about homework, but it never does its own. I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman has actually read "Setting the Scene", in which he will find a programme of action to encourage more involvement by young people in the arts—despite my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks)—including the appointment of a schools governor, the involvement of the Office for Standards in Education, consideration of the school curriculum and consideration of all manner of practical ways in which to invest in the arts and young people.

For the Labour party to say that no money goes into the arts when, this year, there have already been more than 2,000 lottery awards and £734 million has gone into the arts, is extraordinary. About 87 brass bands have been funded and any number of theatres have been supported, as have dance groups and public arts projects. The lottery offers schools the opportunity to become involved in those projects under new directions, which I issued last year, which the Labour party seems suddenly to have discovered and thinks might be a good idea for the future, and which are already enabling revenue funding to promote access and education in the arts.

Tourism (Social Chapter)

6. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessments he has made of the impact of the social chapter on the United Kingdom tourism industry. [12221]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: With the help of the Government's reforms, British enterprise has created an increase in employment of well over 500,000 jobs since 1993. The social chapter would damage labour market flexibility, raising costs, destroying jobs and reducing competitiveness in world markets. The Government will never willingly place unnecessary burdens on business, such as a statutory minimum wage or the social chapter.

Mr. Evans: I am delighted to hear that, but does my right hon. Friend agree that it is not only Conservatives who are giving out warning signs about the social chapter and the minimum wage? Does she agree with the chairman of Bass, Sir Ian Prosser, who said that Bass was conscious of the difference between social on-costs in the UK of 10 per cent., and in Italy of 43 per cent., or with Forte, which says that social on-costs are 50 per cent. in France and Germany? Does she agree that it is pointless the Labour party talking about having a tourism strategy when it makes no reference to the fact that, if it introduces

a social chapter and a minimum wage, hundreds of thousands of jobs will go from all sectors of industry, but particularly the tourism industry in Britain?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend is exactly right. There has been a substantial increase in employment in the tourism and hospitality industry. It would be the most hard hit by the imposition of a minimum wage and social chapter.

My hon. Friend refers to leaders in the industry who have already made the point powerfully. I would also quote Robert Collier, chairman of Inter-Continental Hotels:

"This year the London Inter-Continental will run a gross operating profit 50 per cent. higher than the sister hotel in Paris.

The difference is entirely in the costs of social benefits and insurances for which employers in France are liable. Put yourself in the position of a multi national corporation and I ask you which is the country you are more likely to invest in? Which economy is the more conducive to generating new jobs?"

The Labour party's policy paper on tourism was disregarded as irrelevant. This is the key question that the industry minds about.

Dr. John Cunningham: As for the untruthful claptrap and scaremongering that we have just heard from the right hon. Lady, let us face a couple of facts. The social chapter does not deal with incomes; nor does it deal with the minimum wage, as the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) implied; nor does it deal with the social costs of other nations.

As the hon. Gentleman mentioned Bass in his inaccurate tirade, perhaps he would explain, and perhaps the right hon. Lady would explain, why Bass is one of the 57 British companies that has signed the European works council deal under the social chapter's provisions. As Bass is active in the leisure and hospitality industries, is it not clear that, far from what he has said, it sees no threat whatever from the social chapter? Finally, apart from the diatribe and nonsense from the right hon. Lady, perhaps she would also like to explain to people in the hospitality, tourism and leisure industries why she and her right hon. Friends are so intent on maintaining poverty levels of pay in those industries?

Mrs. Bottomley: First, I welcome the right hon. Gentleman to our questions. We have missed him greatly. He looks refreshed from his world travel. It is a pleasure to have him back with us, from, I understand, visits to different parts of the world.

Of course, we want to promote travel and tourism in Britain. We believe that the tourism industry is one of Britain's most important industries. It requires a flexible labour market. If the Labour party does not understand the damage that would be done to the industry by the social chapter and the minimum wage, it has failed to listen to all those leaders in industry who do understand. For example, a recent Confederation of British Industry survey showed that 80 per cent. of those surveyed were opposed to introducing paternity leave and 66 per cent. were opposed to other elements of the social chapter. We believe in jobs, in businesses and in the tourism industry.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend recall the comment of Mr. Jacques Delors, who said that Britain's exemption from the social chapter would act as a magnet for inward investment to the United Kingdom? Is that not as true for the tourism industry as it is for manufacturing industry?

Mrs. Bottomley: I remember that comment. The tourism industry is flourishing—and is doing so because Britain has a Government who believe in deregulation, in liberalisation and in reducing the burdens on and the interference with employers. We want a well-motivated and well-employed work force, but not at the diktat of Brussels.

Millennium Exhibition

7. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what estimate she has made of the costs that would be incurred by her Department in the event of the cancellation of the millennial project at Greenwich. [12222]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: As I informed the House on 20 January, an exhibition will take place in Greenwich to mark the millennium. Significant progress has been made on the project since then. Greenwich council gave planning permission last week and I understand that English Partnerships is close to completing its purchase of the site. The detailed design work is well under way and contracts have been let for work to begin on site. The millennium exhibition will be a showcase for Britain; it will be enlightening and enjoyable, involving the nation as a whole.

Mr. Mitchell: The right hon. Lady has not answered my question, which was about the costs of junking the exhibition. Would not the cost of junking the exhibition be small compared with the humiliation and extravagance involved in going ahead with what essentially will be a boil on the bum of the millennium? It is a project which has no purpose—unlike the exhibition of 1851 and the festival of 1951—which business does not want, in which companies will not invest, which is being built in a place that no one wants to go to, and could not get to even if one did—and which will have no permanent value apart from a Hezza-dome, which is likely to be as transient and as vainglorious as its progenitor. Would not the money involved be better spent on putting schools, museums, galleries and public buildings on line to national culture, rather than being chucked away on an expensive piece of land reclamation?

Mrs. Bottomley: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should debate the design with his noble Friend Lord Richard Rogers, who may feel that it is a subject for a television debate with the hon. Gentleman.

Despite the shameful amateur dramatics of the Labour party, it has consistently supported a millennium exhibition at Greenwich, both through its nominee on the Millennium Commission and in other discussions. The Labour party also believes that for Britain to have a world-class exhibition on a magnificent regeneration site, with a futuristic building alongside the wonderful naval college, will be a tremendous opportunity.

When the hon. Gentleman and, indeed, my hon. Friends see more of the detail of the exhibition, they will understand the messages involved and the degree to which the exhibition will involve the nation as a whole. I look forward to that shortly.

Sir Norman Fowler: Do I understand that, in addition to a vast amount of public money, my right hon. Friend is considering setting up a public corporation with a Minister in charge? Are we not getting into rather curious policy territory with the exhibition?

Mrs. Bottomley: It is the view of the Millennium Commission and the Government that the right structure for the operating company is a non-departmental public body, for which the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster will be responsible—because, as chairman of the Millennium Commission, I cannot pay the grant to myself in another capacity. I know my right hon. Friend, and I was very surprised to hear him ask his question without mentioning that he is absolutely delighted by the launch of the Digbeth millennium point—a £50 million project in Birmingham—and by the many other ways in which the national lottery has supported his constituency, thanks to his active championing of the case.

Mr. Thurnham: Will the Secretary of State say what lessons have been learnt from the very high costs of the Greenwich site? Are we not in danger of spending too much millennium money in London, as there are plenty of derelict sites elsewhere in the country?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for accepting that as a planted question, because I wanted to tell him that Greater London has received only 15 per cent. for capital projects, as opposed to 19 per cent. for the northern region. To date, £767 million has been awarded to 94 projects in 2,045 sites across the United Kingdom. As I said, only a small share of that money has come to London from the Millennium Commission. In the past quarter, the largest increase was in the area in the west midlands represented by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler).

The hon. Gentleman will also be aware that, apart from the £200 million being spent on the millennium exhibition, £200 million will be spent on millennium awards, which will have an endowment attached. I should like to spell that out to Labour Members, because they have invented a new concept, called an "endowment fund". If they did their homework, they would discover that the Millennium Commission has already taken up that concept.

Mr. Jessel: As well as all those other schemes across the country, does not my right hon. Friend think that people at home and abroad will be absolutely astonished and utterly amazed if we get to the millennium—once in a thousand years—without some grand, national, central exhibition to celebrate it?

Mrs. Bottomley: I do—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members cheer and sneer. The millennium is a quite remarkable and very exciting moment, and I pay tribute to the work of churches and of those in local authorities, the arts, sports and the heritage fields for the work that they have already done in finding ways in which the millennium can be celebrated which will genuinely lead to renewal and regeneration of communities across the country. I hope that we will be able to set out those plans in more detail in the near future.

Mr. Raynsford: Does the Secretary of State agree that, although some hon. Members on both sides of the House might have preferred another location, there is only one logical location for Britain's millennium exhibition—in the place to which the entire world will be looking in the year 2000? The meridian line in Greenwich determines time around the world. Now that we have a proper and sensible budget to which we can work, is it not essential to focus on making a success of the exhibition, so that all hon. Members and people across the country can take pride in it, as the rightful successor to the great exhibitions of 1851 and 1951?

Mrs. Bottomley: Yes.

Mr. Booth: In addition to that praise of Greenwich, may I ask my right hon. Friend whether holding the millennium celebrations there—on a derelict 400-acre site which is the last in central London to require urban regeneration, and which is one of the most polluted in the world—will not only transform it from dereliction to celebration but represent a great event for the normal people of London and a great triumph for the Government?

Mrs. Bottomley: I thank my hon. Friend. The opportunity of such a major regeneration project close to the heart of our capital city is enormously worthwhile. I recently travelled on the new Jubilee line to see the large underground station that will be available at the site.

My hon. Friends should also be aware that Bristol has a major £41 million millennium project, Newcastle has a £27 million regeneration project, Cardiff has a £46 million project, Salford has a £15 million project, Hampden Park in Glasgow has a £23 million project, Doncaster has a £50 million project, Portsmouth has a £40 million project and Birmingham—

Madam Speaker: Order. Let's finish this off. Come on.

Dr. John Cunningham: We all know that, if the right hon. Lady and her right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister had had their way, there would have been an open-ended cash commitment to a project at Greenwich, which was heading towards costing the people £1 billion. Will she assure us that she, like us, is committed to working to make sure that the Greenwich millennium project stays on course and within budget, and that not a penny more than that budget will be spent on it?

Mrs. Bottomley: The right hon. Gentleman knows full well that neither the Government nor the Millennium Commission had any intention of signing a blank cheque. The Labour party had a nominee on the commission. Information has always been readily available. I am delighted about the magnificent project, which I believe will be delivered to budget, in spite of the shameful scaremongering and positioning of the Labour party in recent weeks and months, which can only threaten the project, rather than achieve the result that would be in the nation's interest.

National Lottery (Charities)

8. Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many charities have been awarded grants from the national lottery. [12224]

Mr. Sproat: The National Lottery Charities Board has made 6,925 awards totalling £478 million to charities and voluntary organisations. The other distributing bodies have made a total of 5,194 awards totalling £2.352 billion, many of which will also have gone to charitable and voluntary organisations.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Is it not a fact that all the good causes are charities and that the total so far received is nearly £3,000 million? Will my hon. Friend confirm that, although originally there were fears that charitable giving would fall off as a result of the lottery, that has not happened? Will he also confirm that one of the best ways to deal with the scourge of juvenile crime is to devote as much of the resources as possible to getting young people off the streets and into better sporting facilities and artistic facilities, or engaging them in other activities that will lead them away from delinquency?

Mr. Sproat: My hon. and learned Friend is right. Well over half the awards funded by the distributing bodies have gone to voluntary charitable organisations. He is also right that, so far, there is no evidence that giving to charities has fallen. We are looking into that at the moment and hope to provide interim results in May. As for his third point, getting young people off the streets is extremely important. The National Lottery Charities Board funds the crimecrackers-Belgrano scheme in Wales and a scheme in Leeds to get young people into things other than crime in their spare time, particularly the many sporting facilities that it provides. Those are all good ways of channelling the energy and enthusiasm of young people.

Mr. Cunliffe: Is the Minister aware that supporters of animal welfare charities are anxious because they are not getting their rightful share, considering the size of some of those organisations? They believe that they are discriminated against to some degree because they are not fashionable organisations, such as those for sport, culture and the arts. Will the Minister remind the distributing bodies that such organisations play a positive role in helping to create certain pleasures for society?

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, which I will draw to the attention of the distributor body.

Tourism (Social Chapter)

9. Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what meetings she has had with the tourism industry about the social chapter. [12225]

11. Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of the effects of imposing the provisions of the social chapter on the tourism industry. [12228]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The tourism industry is one of the most dynamic in this country, containing one in 12 of all small businesses and with 20 per cent. growth in employment over the past 10 years. The year 1995 was a record one for the industry and indications are that 1996 will be even better. We must ensure that the industry is not damaged by unnecessary burdens and I have discussed that point with industry leaders.

Mr. Waterson: Does my right hon. Friend recall her excellent visit to Eastbourne pier last summer when she met representatives of the local tourism industry? Does she recall the concerns expressed about the effects of the social chapter and a national minimum wage? Does she agree that the danger of the social chapter is not just some of the provisions that already exist, but the fact that it could be extended limitlessly by the use of qualified majority voting? Would it not all end in tears?

Mrs. Bottomley: Undoubtedly it would all end in tears. I well remember my visit to my hon. Friend's constituency; I was most impressed by all that I saw, especially his pier, which was one of the influences, during the year of the pier, in our trying to modify the lottery rules to ensure that private as well as public owners could receive lottery money. My hon. Friend is entirely right. The tourism industry needs flexibility and the social chapter would be a huge threat and danger to it.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is precisely the small business element of the tourism industry, to which she referred, that would suffer most as a result of the introduction of the social chapter, the 48-hour working week and the minimum wage? Will she view with considerable suspicion the tendentious conclusions of the report on employment emanating from Brussels today?

Mrs. Bottomley: My right hon. Friend is precisely right. One in 12 small businesses are involved in tourism and hospitality. The key is to ensure that there is a minimum of regulation, that liberalisation is promoted and that burdens are removed from employers. If one listens to the industry, one finds that that is the message that it gives time and again; that is the message that we have heard. When we set out our further strategy for tourism and hospitality later this week, we shall do so on the basis of working with the industry and not on the basis of imposing our ideology, as the Labour party does.

Mr. Bermingham: Does the right hon. Lady agree that if she made any inquiries in, for example, the Derbyshire peak district, south Lancashire and the Fylde area around Blackpool, about the wages paid there, she would find that they are currently in excess of what is likely to be the minimum wage? [HON. MEMBERS: "How much?"] To continue, is it not reasonable in rural areas, where one of the primary sources of income is the tourism industry, that people who work in that industry should receive a decent living wage, which would protect not only their rights but the rural economy generally?

Mrs. Bottomley: The Labour party never listens and never understands. It has heard representative after representative in the industry make it clear that a statutory minimum wage has an adverse effect on employment.

Most people would rather have jobs than a statutory wage that meant that they were without work. This country has been incredibly successful in terms of having a low level of unemployment; there is more to do. The Labour party threatens a successful industry and the jobs and livelihood of our people.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Is not the right hon. Lady aware that her own Department's document on tourism, "Tourism: Competing with the Best", rightly makes the case for the need for quality and the need for training? Does she not understand that that quality of product will not be achieved on the basis of poverty pay and sweated labour?

Mrs. Bottomley: Nobody wants poverty pay and sweated labour; that is precisely the Labour party's argument. I have said time and again that the industry wants well-motivated, well-rewarded staff with proper training; that is precisely what our work has been setting in hand. Coercion and compulsion are not the way in which to achieve that goal. That has been made clear time and again; people do not do the right thing because they are coerced into it.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on pointing out how destructive the encroaching tide of European legislation can be. May I point out, perhaps with some glee, what an effective recruiting agent to the Conservative cause the Labour party support for the social chapter is, because people realise how many jobs would be destroyed?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend identifies one of the most powerful influences in current political debate. Time and again, when people in the tourism and hospitality industry talk about what they most fear, it is the interfering, regulating, domineering approach proposed from Brussels and supported by the Labour party.

Football Safety

10. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps she is taking to ensure the continued implementation of the recommendations of the Taylor report. [12226]

Mr. Sproat: The Government remain committed to delivering essential football ground safety improvements agreed following the Taylor report.

Mrs. Prentice: I thank the Minister for that reply. He is clearly aware of the problems facing the lower league clubs in implementing the safety work at their grounds following the impact of the national lottery on the Football Trust income from pools companies. He will also be aware that the Football Trust has now put a moratorium on any further awards. When he meets the Football Trust, will the Minister take a positive approach to ensure that all possible solutions are examined to ensure that those clubs can implement that important safety work?

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Lady makes an extremely important point. She is certainly accurate in saying that the Football Trust has suffered because of the effect of the lottery on the pools industry. I am meeting Lord Aberdare of the Football Trust on 5 March. Today the Sports Council is considering whether or not the Football Trust can be helped by the lottery. Above all I hope that all sports—particularly football which will receive some £700 million—that benefit from broadcasting rights will use some of that money to improve safety at sports grounds.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

County Court Fees

29. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what monitoring arrangements he has established to ascertain the effects of the new system of county court fees on low–income tenants seeking to use the judicial system. [12246]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Gary Streeter): My Department has been collecting information on the number of non-possession housing disputes dealt with by the small claims procedure as part of our monitoring of the effects of the rise in the small claims limit. The information is currently being assessed. The majority of cases dealt with by that route are for less than £1,000 and the fee for those cases has not been increased. Low-income litigants bringing such claims may also have their fee reduced to £10. Moreover, litigants bringing larger claims who are eligible for legal aid will continue to have their court fees paid by the legal aid fund.

Mr. Cohen: Have not citizens advice bureaux expressed dismay at the hike in court fees which they describe as being targeted at those least able to afford them? As the setting down for trial fee will be £150 and it will cost a tenner even to apply for an exemption for a court fee, will it not be easier for bad landlords to harass and evict tenants and harder for tenants to use the law to protect themselves?

Mr. Streeter: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. He will know that we have been moving towards full cost recovery of court fees for a number of years. It is important, however, to protect access to justice for those on modest incomes. We have done so in two ways: first, the Legal Aid Board continues to pay the court fees of those on legal aid and, secondly, those on low incomes who are not eligible for legal aid can apply for reduced fees. We believe that we have got the balance right. However, the hon. Gentleman must take something up with his own Front Bench. If Labour is criticising the increase in court fees, but refusing to say that it would reverse it in the unlikely event of forming a Government, that smacks of hypocrisy.

Mr. Boateng: Is the Minister aware that court fees are not recoverable as disbursements under the green form legal aid and advice scheme? As they are not, will the Minister review the rules and regulations of that scheme to give at least some help to the poorest litigants? We will review the rules. Will he?

Mr. Streeter: The green form scheme has never reimbursed court fees. It is a system for giving people

initial advice not for dealing with litigation, where full legal aid is available. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman did not know that. I am coming reluctantly to the view expressed by Robert T. J. Brown of Darlington and Parkinson, Solicitors, who wrote to *The Guardian* on 29 January saying:

"Paul Boateng displays a shocking combination of ignorance and prejudice."

Judges' Statements

30. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what guidance he (i) has issued and (ii) plans to issue to judges on the subject of public statements on (a) constitutional matters and (b) other matters of current party political controversy. [12247]

Mr. Streeter: In accordance with the principle of judicial independence, my right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor made it clear in advice issued in 1989 that it is for each judge to decide individually whether to make public statements. A copy of that advice, which was sent to every judge at the time and is sent to new judges on appointment, is available in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Prentice: Do not judges feel that their independence is being compromised, as Lord Ackner very recently said in another place? Will the Minister join me in condemning the views of the chairman of the Conservative party, the Minister without Portfolio, the right hon. Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney), who was exhorting members of the public to write to judges and seek to intimidate them if they handed down sentences that were considered too light? Is it not about time that we took the appointment of judges away from politicians and instituted an independent system for appointing members of the judiciary? Will not many judges otherwise be fearful that, if they speak out on controversial matters, they will be blackballed by the Government and not promoted?

Mr. Streeter: That was a fairly extraordinary outburst. On appointment in 1987, my right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor relaxed the rules to enable judges to speak out on issues of the day. It is important that experienced and senior judges speak out, express their opinions and take a full part in debates in the House of Lords. If the hon. Gentleman expects me to condemn my right hon. Friend, the chairman of the party, he is living in a fantasy land. It is important that members of the public make their views known, if they feel that sentences passed in local communities are not appropriate, by going to see or writing to their Members of Parliament. That is what we call democracy, and Conservative Members actually believe in it.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be far better for the respect with which the judiciary is held if it were never tempted to get into any party political arena and never given the opportunity to do so?

Mr. Streeter: My hon. and learned Friend makes a valuable point. It is not appropriate for members of the judiciary to involve themselves in party politics; I am not aware that they are doing so. It is important, none the less, that debates on issues in which they have experience are enriched by their contribution. That has happened in the past and we look forward to it happening in the future.

Magistrates Court, Bolton

31. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent representations he has had about the need for improved magistrates court accommodation in Bolton; and if he will make a statement. [12248]

Mr. Streeter: Representations have recently been received from the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville), who is in his place, and from the chief executive of the Bolton metropolitan borough council. The Bolton scheme is in our existing programme, but was not selected as part of the first tranche to be taken forward, as others had an even more urgent need. A further selection is due to be made in the autumn.

Mr. Thurnham: Is the Minister aware just how deeply disappointed, indeed angered, people in Bolton are not to be getting the long-needed new court? Will he act now to restore Bolton to its first place in the priority, as it has long deserved?

Mr. Streeter: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has expressed his view in such strident terms. While the hon. Gentleman has been shouting and criticising from the sidelines, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West has been working hard. Indeed, only last week, he brought to see me the chairman of the Bolton bench, and I believe that we have thrashed out a basis on which we hope to be able to support an interim refurbishment programme for the Bolton court. My hon. Friend has been working hard and getting results; the hon. Gentleman has been criticising from the sidelines and getting nowhere.

County Courts

32. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many county courts there were in England and Wales in 1967; how many there are currently; and if he will make a statement. [12249]

Mr. Streeter: In 1967, there were 301 full-time county courts and 105 part-time offices. Currently, there are 240 full-time county courts and three part-time offices. Before the Lord Chancellor decides to close any county court, there is a full public consultation on the proposed closure.

Mr. Llwyd: I thank the Minister for that reply. I do not know whether he is aware that the nearest county court trial centre to my constituency is at least an hour and a half's drive away. If there are to be any further closures pursuant to the Woolf report, I urge the Minister to consider carefully the issue of local access to justice, including county court centres.

Mr. Streeter: The hon. Gentleman has been diligent in championing the cause of county courts in Wales and I pay tribute to him. He will understand that the Court Service constantly monitors and reviews the viability of the court

network in the light of workload trends and business needs. I can give him the assurance that he seeks because we intend to ensure that there are sufficient county courts throughout England and Wales as we implement the Woolf reforms in full over the next two years.

Mr. Miller: Will the Minister look more carefully at the issue of the closure of court offices, to which he referred in his response? Does he not realise that his actions have meant that constituents of mine now have to make a bus journey to make payments at court offices and that, as a result of one of his earlier decisions, people now have to make two bus journeys to get to a magistrates court? That cannot be right.

Mr. Streeter: I am sorry to learn of the hon. Gentleman's complaints about decisions that have already been made. He might have done better to come and discuss the matter with me at the time, but he will understand that it is important to review the efficient performance of the Court Service from time to time. We endeavour to make decisions that deliver access to justice at local level.

Property Law Report

33. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he plans to introduce legislation to implement the recommendations of the Law Commission in its report "Property Law: Liability for Chancel Repairs", Law Commission No. 152. [12250]

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend has long championed a change in the law relating to liability for chancel repairs. He will understand that the likelihood of legislation in this Parliament is now remote.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer, although it was disappointing. This is a complex issue and the problem is that those people with the liability find that it is arbitrary both in the timing and in the amount that they have to pay. Will my hon. Friend accept that it is an anachronistic concept? Tithes were redeemed with compensation some time ago. Does my hon. Friend accept that that should be the ultimate aim for chancel repairs liability? Will he seek to continue to discuss the problem with the relevant parties so that something can be done?

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend has been determined in pursuit of that important matter. He will know that the Law Commission report threw up some complex issues of principle and law that require full and careful consideration. Some of the concerns remain and we will of course continue to consider the matter carefully. I am sure that he will continue to lobby on behalf of his constituents.

Legal Aid

34. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received about the 1997–98 legal aid budget. [12251]

Mr. Streeter: No representation has been made to me specifically about the 1997–98 budget, although I have on a number of occasions received correspondence concerning the level of legal aid expenditure generally. The Government are introducing a major reform of the legal aid system to bring the budget under control.

Mr. Marshall: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Does he accept that most people welcome some control over the legal aid budget, which they think has got out of control? Most people are appalled that the shadow Lord Chancellor wants to extend legal aid to industrial tribunals, which will cost the taxpayer dear and benefit his chambers.

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Our White Paper reforms are intended to bear down on and seize control of the legal aid budget to improve the service that we deliver. In contrast, the Labour party is talking openly and widely about expanding legal aid further by installing a law centre in every town and extending legal aid to industrial tribunals. Those proposals will cost the taxpayers many millions of pounds. There is an apparent conflict of interest when people call for an extension to the industrial tribunal system knowing that it would benefit themselves.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Instead of talking about the amount that legal aid costs, why does not the Minister astonish the House by looking at the way in which legal fees are raised by solicitors who spend well over a year deciding on whether or not to pursue a case—all the time seeking legal aid fees—and who then tell some of my poorest constituents that there is no case to pursue? If he were doing his job properly, there would be more than enough money to extend representation to industrial tribunals.

Mr. Streeter: The hon. Lady makes an interesting point, and I accept that there are times when the service delivered by solicitors falls short. If she is aware of a specific case, I hope that she will raise it with me, the Law Society and other appropriate channels.

35. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement about the level of the legal aid budget over the past three years. [12252]

Mr. Streeter: In 1993–94, net expenditure on legal aid was £1.2 billion. In 1995–96, expenditure had risen to £1.39 billion, an increase of just under 15 per cent.

Dr. Spink: Will my hon. Friend take time in the near future to set out how the Government intend to control legal aid expenditure more rigorously, and whether they will set caps on it? Is it not shameful that the legal profession and Opposition Members seek to extend the legal aid budget, particularly to industrial tribunals?

Mr. Streeter: Once again, my hon. Friend is on to a good point. The White Paper reforms announced last July are right and have acquired an unstoppable momentum. They will resolve the current shortfalls in the system. Colleagues will be pleased to learn that I am examining a number of proposals to deal with some of the more obvious abuses in the short term, including perverse decisions by area committees and soft opinions by some barristers to enable their clients to get legal aid. I will have more to say on that shortly.

Point of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I wish to raise a matter about which I have given notice to you and, by telephone and letter, to the hon. Gentleman involved. Last week, I received a letter from the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash), threatening me with legal action arising out of a speech that I made in the House 10 days ago, when I suggested or argued that he and other right hon. and hon. Members supported policies that would lead to the detachment or withdrawal of Britain from Europe. He now threatens me with legal action if I repeat those remarks. In no way did I question his personal honour, probity or integrity. I myself have been accused of being a Euro-federalist, which is a lie. Madam Speaker, is it in order for one hon. Member to threaten another with legal action on an important area of public policy debate?

Madam Speaker: I do not think that I can help the hon. Gentleman. He knows, as does the House, that nothing said during proceedings in this House can possibly give rise to action in the courts. If, of course, one hon. Member takes legal action against another for something said or done outside this House—whatever it may be—it is not a matter for the Chair.

Local Government Finance

3.32 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Gummer): I beg to move,

That the Local Government Finance Report (England) 1997–98 (House of Commons Paper No. 203), which was laid before this House on 27th January, be approved.

Madam Speaker: I understand that with this, it will be convenient to discuss the following motions:

That the Special Grant Report (No. 23) (House of Commons Paper No. 204), which was laid before this House on 27th January, be approved.

That the Limitation of Council Tax and Precepts (Relevant Notional Amounts) Report (England) 1997–98 (House of Commons Paper No. 205), which was laid before this House on 27th January, be approved.

Mr. Gummer: On 27 November 1996, I issued my proposals for the 1997–98 local authority finance settlement for consultation. They included the provision for local authority spending, the level of central support for that spending and my proposals for calculating standard spending assessments. I also announced provisional capping criteria.

Since then, my colleagues and I have received written representations from 210 local authorities and have met delegations from 79 authorities. We have carefully considered all the points that were raised with us during consultation. Our final decisions in respect of grants and notional amounts are embodied in the reports before the House today.

As I made clear when announcing the provisional settlement, all public expenditure programmes have to be examined rigorously each year, and local government spending, accounting as it does for a quarter of all public expenditure, is no exception.

Bearing in mind the Government's objectives for the economy as a whole, I have looked hard both at the pressures on local government spending and at the scope for greater efficiency and effectiveness within local authorities. The days of rolling forward last year's budget and adding a wish list to that are long gone.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): When the Secretary of State considered the pressure on local authorities' resources, did he also considered the pressure on services? Because of the strictures of past years, the policy on funding local authorities is biting harder this year. Has the right hon. Gentleman considered the effect on services? Even libraries, schools and old people's homes are suffering because of the tightness of the budget provision. Will he give some assurances that he will undertake a review, as some authorities are having to impose restrictions on services, which are beyond the pale and not what they were set up to do? Will he give the provision of services some consideration?

Mr. Gummer: I always take into consideration what the hon. Gentleman says and I think that he will agree that I have dealt with a number of specific cases. I hope that he will take into consideration the words of the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), who said that if a Labour Government came to power,

they would stick to the figures that we have in front of us and to the capping regime, not only for this year but for next. The hon. Gentleman has to accept that the pressures that we are discussing are now supported, at least nominally, by his party. I do not think that Labour would stick to them, of course, and I shall say something about that later. The hon. Gentleman should say what he has to say in the context of the fact that the Labour party is committed to supporting the figures that we have in front of us for this year and next.

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): As my right hon. Friend will recall, the Government kindly agreed that Oxfordshire faced particular problems last year and provided an extra £3.5 million in this year's settlement. It is my view and that of the Conservative group on Oxfordshire county council that the difficulties persist. I look to my right hon. Friend for an assurance that he will continue to look seriously into the case that is being put to him.

Mr. Gummer: As I have always told my hon. Friend, if new facts or a different way of looking at things emerge and the council wants to talk to me about them, I shall listen—my Ministers and I have always sought to listen. Last year, we had that situation—one does do that—but there are also difficult positions elsewhere.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Gummer: Perhaps I may get on to the meat of my speech.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central) *rose—*

Mr. Gummer: I will move on a little, but I shall remember the hon. Gentleman and shall not miss him in a moment or two.

The announcement on 27 November proposed total standard spending for England for 1997–98 of £45.66 billion. During consultation, we adjusted that figure slightly to reflect accurately the funding arrangements for the nationwide introduction of nursery vouchers. The final TSS figure for England for 1997–98 will be £45.67 billion, which represents an increase of £1.13 billion—2.5 per cent.—over the adjusted 1996-97 figure.

At a time of low inflation, that is a substantial increase and it reflects the importance that the Government attach to the services that local authorities provide and, in particular, to education, law and order, the fire service and social services. We have provided for a 3.6 per cent. increase for education, a 3.4 per cent. increase for the police and a 4.2 per cent. increase for the fire service, as well as a £325 million special transitional grant for new community care responsibilities.

Sir Anthony Grant (South-West Cambridgeshire): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in spite of the extra £6 million for education in Cambridgeshire, the Lib-Lab coalition is proposing an across-the-board cut for schools of £8.8 million? Is not that yet another example, and an awful warning, of the dangers of Liberals getting into bed with Labour or vice versa?

Mr. Gummer: We have concentrated on education because we have good reason to believe that the majority of people feel that it should be a priority. That is as true in Cambridgeshire as elsewhere. If a local authority does not passport through the money, as is provided for, it will be for the electorate to ask it whether it shares their priorities. If it does not, they will no doubt know what to do when the county council elections come along on 1 May. I confidently expect that Cambridgeshire will be returned to sensible hands that will do the job properly.

Mr. Illsley: The Secretary of State said at the outset of his speech that the total amount of funding available had been agreed by Labour. Rather than talking about providing extra money for local government, will he consider a fairer distribution among the local authorities?

Mr. Gummer: We do that all the time, and we listen carefully to the views of the Labour-controlled associations of local authorities. From what I say later on, the hon. Gentleman will see that I have followed their views in some of the changes that we have made, and in the changes that we have not made. If he is referring to what John Humphrys the other morning called the "mathematics of the madhouse"—I refer of course to the mathematics of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson)—I shall have a good deal to say about that later.

I think it only fair to give way to the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), whom I did not mean to ignore earlier.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I am most grateful to the Secretary of State. To return to the subject of Cambridgeshire for a moment, is he aware that the £6.5 million that has been allocated for Cambridgeshire's education has been swallowed up by £8.4 million in inflation and an extra £1.3 million merely to stand still, because of the extra children in the county? That is hardly a fair deal, when we already have class sizes approaching 40 in some of our primary schools.

Mr. Gummer: What an amazing admission from the hon. Lady. She means that Cambridgeshire is so perfect that it can make no savings at all. She does not mention any possibility of anybody running anything better. What public company could begin to argue, year on year, that the next year it had to do everything as it did it before, or could constantly talk only about extra money and extra means?

The hon. Lady must realise that she no longer has the confidence of her Front-Bench spokesmen, because her party is committed to no increase. If she wants any extra money, she must say from which councils she wants to take it. No doubt she will soon tell me which counties, districts or metropolitan councils she wants the money to come from. Otherwise, she is running against her party's policy, and I know that she is committed to the Trappist vow never to do that.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): My right hon. Friend spoke earlier about the need for efficiency in spending public money. Is he aware that when the London borough of Barnet put its refuse collection contract out to tender, it refused to accept the lowest tender, and voted instead for an in-house contract that would cost the

[Mr. John Marshall]

ratepayers an extra £500 million—I mean £500,000—over the life of the contract? Is he surprised at that and at the fact that the Lib-Lab pact has censured those of us who pointed out the cost?

Mr. Gummer: I noticed that Labour Members laughed at the figure of £500,000, as if that were not a large amount or one that really mattered. We know their attitude to mathematics. We are currently investigating the case, to determine whether it is in accordance with compulsory competitive tendering. It is no surprise that the Labour party is opposed to competitive tendering, as it knows perfectly well that it does not want the competition or to look after the ratepayers; it wants only to pay for the trade unions, in whose pocket it increasingly is.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: I have not given the Liberals an opportunity to speak. As only one of them is here to take such an opportunity, I shall give way.

Mr. Rendel: The Secretary of State argued at length that there are always opportunities for efficiency savings. Since the Conservative Government came to power in 1979, by how much has real central Government spending been cut?

Mr. Gummer: We have done a great deal of efficiency saving. I shall give one example. There has been an enormous reduction in the number of civil servants and an enormous extension of outside contracting in my Department. I am now happy to preside over a Department that does a great deal more at a very much lower cost than before. That is the result of efficiency savings—something to which the hon. Gentleman cannot point in Liberal-controlled Newbury. I shall have something to say about that later.

I must ensure that we are making equal comparisons. We need to compare the total standard spending for each year to be able to discern the difference. We cannot compare the total standard spending figure for the next financial year with what local authorities are spending this year. Each year, there is an additional spend that comes from what local authorities bring down from reserves and from the levies, fees and charges that they make. Those make a difference. This year, local authorities are budgeting some £2.5 billion more than this year's TSS. No doubt they will do that next year. We have to compare like with like.

The Labour party is committed to TSS being at the level given in the Red Book. If it wants the TSS to be at the level at which local authorities actually spend, they must tell the House where in the Budget the money will come from—or will this be another occasion on which Labour's Front-Bench spokesmen say something different in debate from what the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East says? We shall no doubt find out when the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras speaks.

Mr. Roy Thomason (Bromsgrove): On budgeted expenditure, will my right hon. Friend confirm that he has received representations from Hereford and Worcester, as have other hon. Members, about the cost of local government reorganisation there? Will he confirm that money has been made available for that and that the county council's allegations that that money is grossly insufficient do not properly take into account commitments that the Government have made to give further moneys later in the year to meet redundancy payments? Are not, therefore, many of the county council's arguments specious and misleading?

Mr. Gummer: At the request of local government, we have a system that gives two tranches. Local government felt that it would be easier to account for the real cost of redundancies after reorganisation if it were done in that way. My hon. Friend is right. Anyone who has said the opposite in Hereford and Worcester can have done so only for party political reasons.

The total of aggregate external finance for England for 1997–98 will be £35.77 billion, as previously announced. That is an increase of some £530 million, or 1.5 per cent., on 1996–97. Within that total, revenue support grant will be £18.68 billion. That is slightly lower than the figure announced in the provisional settlement, largely because grant to provide transitional relief to council tax payers in reorganised authorities will be correspondingly higher.

The increase in aggregate external finance is less than the increase in total standard spending, reflecting the Government's belief that local taxpayers could meet slightly more of the cost of local services. However, the responsibility for council tax bills rests firmly with local authorities and not with the Government. The level of the council tax will depend on the decisions that they take, and I do not intend to speculate on what those decisions might be. However, I will say that, contrary to the claims made by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, local authorities do not have to increase council tax bills next year if they want to maintain or improve services. That is not only my view, but one shared by many commentators and even by some Labour council leaders.

Councillor Mike Bower, the Labour leader of Sheffield city council, speaking to the Sheffield chamber of commerce, said:

"The Council probably has the capacity to make enormous improvements in the services it currently operates, with the resources it currently has".

It is a shame that Councillor Bower's colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench will not accept that what he says is true. However, that is hardly surprising—after all, two of his predecessors from Sheffield sit on the Opposition Benches. One has pretensions to preside over Britain's education system and both have an almost unrivalled record as leaders of a spendthrift, wasteful authority. It is no wonder that Councillor Bower has so much elbow room to improve services at no extra cost. We must recognise that the record of the hon. Members for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) and for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) is a warning of the true nature of new Labour.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): I am sure that my right hon. Friend agrees that, regardless of party affiliations, a council leader's comments should be examined carefully. I hope that he shares my astonishment at the fact that the mention of Councillor

Bower's name produced derision and laughter from the Opposition environment spokesman, the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), and other Opposition Members. That is an astonishing attack by Labour Members on a Labour city council leader.

Mr. Gummer: I understand the reason for that attack: Councillor Bower seems to have discovered that, over the years, two prominent members of the Labour party did not have the fingertip control of finances that the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East claims that the Labour party has caught on to. Councillor Bower has let the cat out of the bag.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): It is clear that leadership of Sheffield city council is a passport to becoming a Member of Parliament, so no doubt we shall eventually welcome Councillor Bower to this place.

Does the Secretary of State accept that certain local authority problems derive essentially from central Government decisions? I am thinking of the issue of refugees who are allowed into this country and who move to areas such as Newham. There are 15,000 refugees in Newham, which puts enormous pressure on local services. What are the Government doing to recognise that problem and what additional assistance will be made available to boroughs such as Newham?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman knows that we are discussing with local authorities precisely how we should deliver on our commitments, and he will no doubt find that those commitments are honoured fully. Perhaps he will recognise in future that this problem, like many others, must be faced squarely. We cannot allow problems to continue to arise in the way that they do at present.

However, that is not a key issue for Sheffield—I have outlined its problems already. We shall take Newham's problems seriously, and I hope that we shall be able to solve them.

Sir Irvine Patnick (Sheffield, Hallam): The situation in which Councillor Bower finds himself is not of his making. As my right hon. Friend correctly points out, it is the result of the actions of the hon. Members for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) and for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett). Council tax and rents were not collected. When I explained to the House the litany of mistakes in Sheffield, my comments were greeted with derision by the Opposition. Anyone who wants to see an example of Labour in power should look at Sheffield. We should also remember that Sheffield has had socialism for longer than Moscow had communism.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend might also have said that all the things that the Opposition education spokesman wants in our education system could have been his when he was in Sheffield. However, there were no school uniforms, no standards and no comparisons then. The issues that matter so much now did not arise when the hon. Gentleman was in Sheffield. That is why most of us do not believe him when he speaks on education now. When he had the chance—it is the only chance that he will have—he did nothing to promote the very causes that he now takes so much to heart.

I hope that many other Labour and Liberal—

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth) *rose*—

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North–East) *rose*—

Mr. Gummer: I must make progress. I shall give way shortly.

I hope that many other Labour and Liberal group leaders share Councillor Bower's attitude. At present, most councils are run by Labour or Liberal Democrat councillors, or a combination of the two. They will be the ones who take the decisions. If council tax bills increase, it will be because Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors choose to increase them. If services are cut, it will be because Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors choose to cut them. No one is forcing them to increase council tax bills or to cut services. What is more, the Labour party is committed to the proposition that they would not get any more money anyway. Whatever the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras has to say on those matters, he is expressing his own opinions. The official opinion of the Labour party is that no more money will be forthcoming, not only this year, but next year.

Efficiency savings could be made, as the Audit Commission has shown. Labour and Liberal Democrat councils could collect more of the money owed to them. They could reduce their debt. If they do not or if they will not, they will be responsible for the cuts in services and the increases in council tax that will result.

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): In the light of what my right hon. Friend has just said, is he surprised that the Opposition Front Bench is holding up Harlow council as a model Labour authority? That council has the second highest council tax in the country. It spent £28,000 on flowers and a flower bed outside the town hall. It blew all its reserves shortly before the previous general election because it believed that a Labour victory would produce a Government who would bail it out. If anyone wants to see the horrors of a Labour Government, let him or her come to Harlow.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is too kind to Harlow council. In 1994, it spent 34.2 per cent. over its standard spending assessment. It was 66.9 per cent. over that assessment in 1995–96. It is budgeted to spend 63.2 per cent. over its SSA in 1996–97. It is one of the worst councils in Britain. However, it is held up by the Leader of the Opposition as a model council. It is the sort of council that reflects what Labour would do in office—over-spend, over-tax and then over-spend and over-tax again. The task of clearing up the mess will then be passed on. That is what Harlow has done and what a Labour Government would do.

The attempts of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras to pin the blame on the Government for the high taxes and poor services of many Labour councils reveals a contempt for local democracy. It is about time that the hon. Gentleman started talking responsibly. He is—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members do not like the word "responsibly" when it comes to the consequences of new Labour policies.

The standard spending assessments form the basis for the distribution of the revenue support grant. We seek to take account of the factors that affect the need for

[Mr. Gummer]

spending by each local authority. There are many such factors and there are continual pressures to refine the SSA formulae. There are also expressions of exasperation at the complexity that each refinement adds. In judging whether to change the SSA formulae, I wanted to be sure that changes really would produce a sounder assessment. No one would thank me for making changes one year, only to have to reverse them a year or two later in response to better evidence becoming available.

It is against that background that we have not adopted changes flowing from the review of the area cost adjustment and the major research on children's social services and residential services for the elderly. All the local authority associations argued that the results of last year's review of the area cost adjustment should not be implemented for 1997-98. They have agreed that further work should be done this year.

All of us recognise that the existing system is not satisfactory. People do not accept that it reflects properly the difference in the costs of employing people in different parts of the country. Both the Government and the local authority associations have tried to find better ways of addressing the issue, but have had to recognise how complex the problem is.

The most recent study gave us a great deal of valuable information without yet yielding a solution that we can incorporate into the SSA formula. We intend to press ahead with work to achieve a well-founded solution that can command broad support among local authorities. Once that is available, we shall want to incorporate it as rapidly as possible in the SSA calculation.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): I trust that all hon. Members recognise the duty on local authorities at all times to search for improvements in efficiency, and I warmly endorse what my right hon. Friend said in that respect. It is the duty of Government to ensure that grants are as fairly distributed as possible. The statement that my right hon. Friend has just made on the area cost adjustment will be particularly warmly welcomed in Somerset, where it is profoundly believed that the last attempt to review the matter was not satisfactory. We warmly welcome his promise that the work will be undertaken and that its results will be implemented as speedily as possible.

Mr. Gummer: I thank my right hon. Friend for his comments. I accept the fact that some people will be in favour of the changes and some against, so there will still be difficulties when I come to the House in a year's time. I am not sure whether I shall be able to carry out the work as quickly as that: it may take a bit longer, but I shall do my best.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): I underline what my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) said. There is an agreed stance on the inequities between outer London boroughs and inner London areas. That was brought to the Secretary of State's attention by all-party delegations from the outer London boroughs. I hope that further studies will be undertaken with some urgency, because they will bring some rewards under the new Conservative Government.

Mr. Gummer: An equally powerful, all-party group from the inner London boroughs could point to other aspects of the problem. I have always been open and willing to consider any difficulties, and I have always sought an agreed response. I shall do my best in my hon. Friend's case.

Sir Peter Fry (Wellingborough): I am not sure whether I am more pleased by the Secretary of State's comment that he will be standing at the Dispatch Box next year, or by his promise that progress will be made on the area cost adjustment. Will he underline what he has just said? Is it his intention that progress really will be made next year? I understand the problems that he has had to deal with for next year, but will he assure us that progress will be made, so that the unfairnesses that affect certain counties can, at last, at least begin to be reduced?

Mr. Gummer: I accept that it is widely felt that the present system does not reflect the situation as it really is. Local government organisations believe that this is not the right basis on which to move to a permanent change. I said that I shall do my best to ensure that we make a change as soon as possible—I hope that it will be next year. My hon. Friend must accept that that is the strongest assurance that I can give. We want a system that is acceptable to all, but it must have stability. He was the first to point out that we do not want a yo-yo position, whereby one cannot compare one year with another. I shall do my best to provide stability and to achieve the change that is necessitated by the extra work.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth *rose—*

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington) *rose—*

Mr. Gummer: It is only fair that I give way to the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), because he has asked me several times.

Mr. Ainsworth: The Secretary of State says that he has been working on the issue for some time, and that he does not want to make any changes that are not complete in their effect, but surely he can do something about the most blatant consequences of the current grant system. For instance, he says that tax should reflect the efficiency of councils—but Westminster spends £214 per claimant on dealing with benefit administration, and has one of the lowest council taxes in the country. There is no excuse for discrepancies of that kind, is there?

Mr. Gummer: I shall have quite a lot to say about Westminster in a moment. If the hon. Gentleman will wait until then, he will find out what I have done. I hope that he noted that I took considerable pains, and encountered considerable difficulty, to meet Coventry city council's need for a particular way of looking at its problems in relation to the assessment of those receiving benefit. I also hope that he agrees that we try to meet requirements wherever that is possible.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose—*

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South) *rose—*

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South) *rose—*

Mr. Gummer: I shall be happy to give way in a moment, but I must get one more paragraph in first.

During the period of consultation on our proposals, we have received representations from individual local authorities and from local authority associations, all of which we have considered carefully. Some of the representations concerned the accuracy of the data used in the calculation of the SSAs. We have examined each of the concerns, and have made corrections where necessary. As in previous years, we shall seek to discuss with representatives of local government possible ways in which the SSAs might be improved in the future.

No doubt the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras will repeat his allegations about the SSA methodology in his speech. He has never quoted any significant expert opinion supporting his case—although that comes as no surprise, given that the last time we discussed those issues, he boasted that he

"never felt compelled to agree with experts."—[*Official Report*, 1 April 1996; Vol. 275, c. 56.]

Fortunately, the experts do not feel compelled to agree with the hon. Gentleman.

A report by the independent Audit Commission concluded that the SSA system was

"a more sophisticated system for equalising needs than any overseas system examined in this study and . . . an improvement on its predecessor in many respects".

It will be remembered that its predecessor was the system so often lauded by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras. Another study, by Rita Hale of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and Tony Travers of the London school of economics, found that

"no overseas country appears to have a full grant system which goes so far in its attempt to achieve full equalisation".

If the hon. Gentleman wishes to continue his line of argument, he needs to answer two simple questions. First, if—as he alleges—the Government rig the system in favour of Westminster city council, why were the previous Labour Government more generous to Westminster, relative to most other authorities, than the present Government; and why, when Labour Members asked for the figures and they were put in the Library, did they discover that they were wrong and I was right? They do not refer to those figures any more.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): The fact is that—as one of the junior Ministers pointed out in a letter to my hon. Friend the Member for North–West Durham (Ms Armstrong)—things have changed so much that the Government cannot say whether Westminster received more or less.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman does not notice the truth. Westminster received proportionately more under Labour: in comparison with what other authorities received, it received more. That is a fact; that is the fact that Labour Members criticise; that is the fact that my figures in the Library prove. The hon. Gentleman's whole case is shot below the waterline, and he knows it.

That was pointed out to the hon. Gentleman this very Friday by John Humphrys—not a well-known supporter of the Conservative party. Mr. Humphrys described the hon. Gentleman's mathematics as the "mathematics of the madhouse". That is what he said when the hon. Gentleman could not answer any of his questions except by returning to the subject of Westminster.

The second question is this. Why, in every local authority finance settlement since the SSA system was introduced, has Westminster done worse than the inner London average, while Camden and other councils receive more and more? Would the hon. Gentleman like to explain that? Again, his case is shot below the waterline.

As I said in November, I shall continue to pay a special grant to compensate authorities that have lost more than 2 per cent. of their SSA as a result of SSA methodology changes. That is a fair arrangement that recognises the special problem of a sudden drop in SSA, although also recognising the need to phase out such support, so that grant can be redistributed according to improved measures of need. The Special Grant Report (No. 23) will establish the grant for 1997-98 and some £65 million will be distributed to local authorities next year.

I also propose to damp council tax increases that are a direct result of reorganisation and come above a £52 threshold at band D—that is £1 a week—for authorities reorganised this year and last year. That threshold is lower than that on which we consulted and takes account of representations that were made to us by authorities. The scheme will result in the payment of grant worth £14.53 million and will benefit council tax payers in North Lincolnshire, Redcar and Cleveland, Rutland, Dorset and Bedfordshire. It builds on the scheme that has operated this year. I shall lay regulations to implement the scheme before the House tomorrow.

This morning, I received a letter from the chairman of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, Sir Jeremy Beecham, objecting to one tenth of 1 per cent. of revenue support grant being used in that way. One tenth of 1 per cent.—so much for brotherly love. The Labour leader of the Local Government Association says no, not a penny more to help Labour North Lincolnshire, not a penny more to help Labour Redcar and Cleveland and not a penny more for independent Rutland or Liberal Democrat Dorset, let alone all-party Bedfordshire, despite the particular difficulties of their council tax payers. So much for the egalitarian Labour party and for those who want to share the burdens. They do not want us to give a penny more, even it amounts to only one tenth of 1 per cent.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Will my right hon. Friend take into account the fact that, although Devon county council cannot run a whelk stall, in the past two years, it has twice been given more than the average increase for its SSA, but has run its reserves down lower than is sensible, and lower than they have ever been? It suggests that it will give up educational discretionary grants because it cannot afford them, although the money would have been available if it had spent the budget properly.

Will my right hon. Friend take into account the fact that there is a real problem with Torquay and Plymouth leaving the Devon region? That involves educational factors and affects many local schools in villages. Torbay, Torquay and Plymouth are of course compact. Will he please consider those matters when he comes to the decision on the SSA for Devon as a single county?

Mr. Gummer: We shall certainly have to consider all the ramifications. That is why we have offered, for example, immediate help in two tranches to those that are reorganised. We shall of course have to consider the

[Mr. Gummer]

SSAs. That is true for special credit approvals as well, so my right hon. Friend is absolutely right to put that point to me.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): The Secretary of State will recall that, when the City of York was established as a unitary authority, people in the outlying areas that were absorbed into York received an assurance from the Government that their services and, in particular, their schools would be funded at the same level as the county council's, yet the SSA for City of York council has increased by less than the national average—by 1.1 per cent. compared with a 1.5 per cent. national average—and North Yorkshire county council's SSA has been increased by 2.4 per cent.

The Secretary of State will know that the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration kindly received a deputation from myself, the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), and councillors from all parties on City of York council, who believe that the SSA settlement was both unfair to York and broke the Government's pledge to treat York in the same way as the county council from which it was taken: in the final SSA figures, York's SSA has been reduced rather than increased. Will the Secretary of State comment on the position? What hope can he hold out that York will be treated as generously and in the same way as North Yorkshire county council?

Mr. Gummer: The disaggregation between the City of York and North Yorkshire county council was done by mutual agreement—both sides agreed to the disaggregation. Of course, it is right to say that in future we may look again at the way in which various figures are put together. However, the hon. Gentleman should not make the figures for this year the subject of disagreement between us, as there was agreement between the two local authorities involved. It was one area that did not have the fierce arguments that almost cause the need for someone outside to broker an agreement.

I am aware that we have received a delegation and we shall be considering certain aspects that it put forward. However, the hon. Gentleman should accept that for this year the disaggregation was agreed between the two authorities and was not imposed from outside.

Mr. Spearing *rose—*

Mr. Gummer: I must get on with my speech, but I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman later.

I am also specifying a base budget in the relevant notional amounts report for local authorities that are being reorganised, are subject to a boundary change, or whose budgets are affected by changes in funding arrangements for nursery vouchers or national parks. That will allow me to make a fair comparison between years for capping purposes.

Finally, I come to my proposed capping criteria. I have listened carefully to the strong arguments put to me to relax the provisional criteria that I announced in November. *[Interruption.]* I shall again take interventions from hon. Members. If that makes a little longer the time that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras will have to contain himself, it will not harm the House, as his contributions are universally and uniformly silly—as they are when he speaks from a seated position. If I am helping hon. Members by putting off the evil moment when the hon. Gentleman opens his mouth, I am sure that they will cheer me on.

As I said, I have listened carefully to the strong arguments put to me to relax the provisional criteria that I announced in November—*[Interruption.]*—arguments that Nottingham council would support. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) is bored by his council. Both Nottingham and Nottinghamshire councils had their usual complaints, to which we listened with our usual courtesy—something that the hon. Gentleman has never extended either to them or to me.

I have decided to maintain the criteria. Our economy is one of the most competitive and successful in Europe. We have achieved that success by taking tough decisions to control public spending. Local government accounts for about a quarter of public spending, so the Government clearly need to keep it in check. The provisional capping criteria do just that. Copies of a table giving provisional cap limits for each authority will be available from the Vote Office after I sit down.

Final capping decisions will, as always, be taken after local authorities have set their budgets. I shall ensure that final caps are reasonable, achievable and appropriate to local circumstances.

Mr. Hardy: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: Yes. Then, to be fair, I shall give way to the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing).

Mr. Hardy: From time to time in his speech, the right hon. Gentleman has tried to build divisions between different types of local authorities—for example, when he referred to Sir Jeremy Beecham. Does he agree that the vast majority of local authorities want a sensible relaxation in the capping level? He should look carefully at the possibility of relaxing the capping level, to allow local authorities to take from capital receipts their contribution to single regeneration budget repayments and capital challenge costs, so that they can contribute to the repair and essential maintenance of buildings that are beginning to fall apart because of neglect.

Mr. Gummer: I remind the hon. Gentleman that we recently made some changes along those lines. However, we understand that, in general, the capping arrangements are now to be supported by the Labour party. If he believes that there should be a change in the arrangements, I suggest that he first speaks to the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East. He has said that, far from what was said last November, there would be no question of any relaxation, were there ever to be a Labour Government. He has said that capping arrangements would remain as they are, at least for the foreseeable future. So the hon. Gentleman must first convince the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, and then he can perhaps come to me.

Mr. Hardy: What about capital receipts?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman should consider what the Labour party suggests on capital receipts. It now

suggests that it could do a fiddle on capital receipts and move them outside controls, as a way in which it could get round its promise not to increase capital expenditure. However, Labour Front Benchers have not told anyone that, if they were to do so, authorities in many parts of the country that might think that they were to receive capital receipts would not, and many others that were not determined to require receipts for housing would receive them.

Under Labour's new fudge, Newcastle, Birmingham, Hackney and Southwark, which have no capital receipts, would not be able to build any new homes, whereas Newbury, Basingstoke, Malvern Hills and West Dorset would be able to build almost as many council houses as they wanted. That is what would happen under Labour's capital receipts system. Not only is it a fudge that no one else in the world would accept, but it increases demands on the Government and would not help the very areas that Labour claims would be helped. Capital receipts would go to the leafy areas and not to areas with the greatest need. Yet again, the Labour party—although not the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy)—has shot itself in the foot by trying to fudge and to slide in something.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Gummer: I must try to continue, although I promised the hon. Member for Newham, South that he could intervene, and I keep my promises.

Mr. Spearing: Having heard Conservative Members' remarks in this debate, will the Secretary of State acknowledge that, two years ago, I led a deputation from Newham, when he acknowledged that Newham was an outer London borough with inner London needs? As my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks) pointed out, one of those needs is connected with the social costs of 15,000 refugees. The Secretary of State has acknowledged that that is a national problem. However, there is a need for equity. Should not those additional costs be a national matter and not be laid upon residents in the areas to which refugees naturally tend to go? Is not the truth that he has done nothing yet about the matter?

Mr. Gummer: It is of course true that it is a national matter, but it has a local dimension; it is a mixture—*[Interruption.]* We have said that there would be special grants to help the localities most in need, and I have reaffirmed that. When we have completed the discussions, we shall ensure that the hon. Gentleman's local authority—like others, not least those in London—receives those grants as soon as possible. I say the same to the hon. Member for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks), who is speaking from a sedentary position.

Mr. Rendel *rose—*

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Gummer: In a moment—I shall try to, but I must continue.

Having set out the Government's proposals in such detail, I should reply properly to a point made, sometimes sotto voce, by the Opposition. Fewer than three months ago, in reply to my oral statement on the settlement, the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras said that our proposals for local government spending were inadequate, and that they made

"no allowance for inflation, the cost of pay increases or the cost of providing extra services for the growing number of old people and of children at school"

and that, consequently,

"local people will once again have to pay more and get less".—[*Official Report*, 27 November 1996; Vol. 286, c. 343.]

Although the hon. Gentleman did not say by how much, it was clear from his remarks that he believed that both total standard spending and aggregate external finance should be higher.

Those comments are why Conservative Members, and—judging from their interventions—some Opposition Members too, were very surprised to hear the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East say that a Labour Government would not reopen departmental spending allocations for the financial years 1997-98 and 1998-99. If the shadow Chancellor is to be believed, Opposition Front Benchers have changed their mind and decided that our spending plans are adequate after all. That is the inevitable result. Either the right hon. Gentleman is right now or he was right in November—on any reading of either statement, he could not be right on both occasions.

In the light of what the shadow Chancellor has said, I was looking forward to the Labour party supporting the Government in the Lobby tonight. I was therefore astonished to hear the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras on the "Today" programme on Friday morning repeating his previous claims that the settlement was inadequate and promising that Labour would vote against it. He does not seem to have heard what the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East said.

The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways—either Labour Members agree with the level of next year's settlement or they do not. If they do not—if they think that local authorities need more money—they must explain how much more and which taxes they would increase to pay for it. It is time for the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras to come clean. Does he think that local government needs more money?

There is one way—I hear it whispered on the Opposition Benches—in which the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras always tries to duck out of that challenge: by mentioning Westminster. During the "Today" programme interview last Friday morning, John Humphrys told the hon. Gentleman that his proposal was—I have said this before—the "mathematics of the madhouse".

Everything would be all right, says the hon. Gentleman, if Westminster did not get such a large grant. I have done the maths for the hon. Gentleman. Various people have suggested different amounts by which Westminster's grant should be reduced. I have taken a figure three times greater than any put forward by the Labour party and have calculated what would happen if, instead of Westminster receiving the higher grant that it used to have under Labour or the grant that it has under the Conservatives, we halved the grant. Nobody, not even the Labour party, has suggested that, but let us see what would happen. I am prepared to provide the figures for any part of the country. I shall give one or two examples.

[Mr. Gummer]

Bury would get less than 0.5 per cent. more grant if Westminster's grant were halved—I repeat that nobody suggests that such drastic action is possible. Birmingham would get less than one third of 1 per cent. more grant. Bristol would get less than 0.5 per cent. more. Even if Westminster's grant were cut to a level that nobody has ever sanely suggested, there would be no significant effect on the figures elsewhere.

Constantly talking about Westminster is not a truthful argument. We know that it is nonsense, because Labour used to give proportionately more to Westminster. It is an excuse. Every time the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras mentions Westminster, he is trying to avoid facing the real issues and the consequences of the public spending pledge made by the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East.

Tonight we shall find out how much that pledge is worth. If the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East and the rest of the Labour party vote against the settlement tonight and continue to argue that the levels of total standard spending and aggregate external finance that we are proposing—levels that the shadow Chancellor has claimed to support—are inadequate, the electorate will be forced to conclude that new Labour's commitment to controlling public expenditure is a sham and that once again, as always, Labour is the party of higher taxes and higher spending. The £30 billion of extra public expenditure, with all the increase in taxes that that would require—an increase that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) longs for—will prove to be an underestimate of tax-and-spend new Labour.

The matter is in the hands of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras tonight. We shall watch him. If he votes with us, we shall know that he is honourable. If he votes against us, we shall know that he is honourable, but in his own way—able to say both that he would keep to the rules and that he would spend and tax more.

I have dealt with the main issues covered by the three reports before the House. This settlement will help local authorities to meet the needs of their citizens in education and other key service areas but, at the same time, local authorities will need to continue to make every pound that they spend go further. I commend the settlement to the House.

4.29 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): The Secretary of State should perhaps be awarded a charter mark for making a speech that lasted less than an hour.

The vote at the end of the debate will set the level of the Government's grant to each local council. The total was set by the vote on the Budget; we voted against. Today's vote will decide how that grant is shared out between the councils.

Conservative Members will be voting for a settlement that will force through average council tax increases of 6 per cent., equal to £40 extra for every household, together with cuts in services to local people. Most Tory Members will vote for their own constituents to pay more and get less, and will express their satisfaction with that arrangement. They will then try to blame their local councils for both the tax increase and the cuts in services, but they will not succeed because everybody knows that the council tax increases are part of the Government's plans.

When the Chancellor of the Exchequer introduced his Budget in November, he did his best to direct attention at the 1p cut in the standard rate of income tax. He tried to distract attention from his plan to force council tax up by an average of 6 per cent. this coming year and his plan over the next three years to force council tax payers to cough up an extra £4 billion, equal to a 2p increase in the standard rate of income tax. He was up to his usual trick of publicly giving with one hand while furtively taking away with the other, but he was found out straight away. In his response as Leader of the Opposition immediately after the Chancellor had presented his Budget, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) pointed out what the Chancellor was up to.

The facts are clear, not from Labour party propaganda, but from the documents that the Government are forced to publish on Budget day. Figures produced on Budget day by the Department of the Environment show that the Government are planning a 6 per cent. increase this year on the council tax, equal to £40 per household, and a £4 billion increase over three years, equal to £200 per household. Figures in the Red Book, published by the Government on the same day, confirmed that they were planning for a council tax rise of 7 per cent. on average; that higher figure includes Scotland and Wales as well as England. All that is part of the Government's long-term plan to make council tax payers contribute more towards the cost of their council services and it is no use them denying it.

Government officials have publicly stated that Ministers take the view

"that the Council Tax can take more of the strain",

adding for good measure:

"The downside is that your taxes go up quite sharply".

No Tory Member should have any illusions about why the council tax is going up. It is going up because the Treasury intends it to go up.

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry): The right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) has said that, for the first two years, a Labour Government would observe the public expenditure framework set by this Government. Is the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) now saying that a Labour Government would not allow council taxes to increase in year 2? If that were the case, where would a Labour Government find their public expenditure?

Mr. Dobson: I shall come to our intentions in due course. [*Laughter.*] Oh yes, I will.

Despite all the evidence, the Government have tried to blame the forthcoming council tax increases on councils, although the increases are the inevitable consequence of the Government's policies—the planned result of the grant settlement that will be forced through tonight. One item that will show up in the council tax bills which the Tories will try to blame on Labour councils is the increased contribution by council tax payers to the cost of their local police force, which is not covered in the settlement.

The Government claim credit for increases in police funding. Their contribution averages less than 2 per cent. in England and ranges from a princely 0.01 per cent. in Essex to 3 per cent. in North Yorkshire. However, the council tax contribution to increased police funding is a different matter altogether. The average increase in England is 13 per cent. and is as much as 18.5 per cent. in Cleveland and 16 per cent. in both Humberside and Leicestershire. That is the result of deliberate Government policy, but you can bet your boots that the Tories will try to blame Labour councils when the council tax bills start dropping on people's mats.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way, but he cannot have it both ways on council tax. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has progressively lightened the capping regime to allow councils more discretion in expenditure. The Labour party wants to increase council tax, but the hon. Gentleman is criticising councils that exercise that discretion. He can either have the discretion and the increases or not have the discretion or the increases. Which way does he want it?

Mr. Dobson: Whether or not councils have the discretion, it is the Government's intention that the average council tax increase should be 6 per cent. this year and they are forcing it through.

The Tories claim to have provided 3.6 per cent. extra money for education. There is just one problem with that claim: it is not true. The Government have said that they will let councils spend more money on education provided that most of it comes from increased council tax bills and cuts in other services such as the protection of children, help for elderly people or maintaining local roads.

It is no good the Tories trying to deny the truth of what we are saying. Whatever fiction they may wish to peddle, if, next year, every education authority in England kept its spending to the Government's target, the amount spent on each pupil would be £41 less. What Ministers and Tory Members are calling an increase is actually a reduction of £41 per pupil.

It is no wonder that people are concerned about numeracy skills. The Government do not even understand the difference between plus and minus. The problem goes deeper than that. The Tories do not just have problems with numeracy and literacy; their real problem is with veracity. They are no longer able to tell the difference between fact and fiction.

The reduction of £41 per pupil is a national average. The figure varies between education authorities. Let me give some examples. The Secretary of State for Education and Employment represents a Norfolk constituency. If Norfolk education authority set its spending next year at the level suggested by the right hon. Lady, it would have to spend about £70 less per pupil. Education authorities in Birmingham, Bury, Coventry, Croydon, Leeds and Sandwell would require a reduction in spending of more than £100 per pupil to comply with the Government's target.

That inevitably takes me on to the unfair way in which the Government's grant is distributed between councils. Everyone knows that it is a racket. It is designed to look after the interests of a few privileged Tory councils. It all springs from the way in which the Government rig the system for judging the needs of each area.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Is my hon. Friend aware that a 6 per cent. cut in Calderdale will require raiding the primary school budget by about £1 million, central services by about £1 million and possibly not funding the teachers' pay rise? That is a triple whammy and anyone who votes for the motions tonight will be betraying the children of Calderdale.

Mr. Dobson: I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that the fourth part of the whammy will be when the local Tory candidates blame Calderdale council for what has happened.

The problem with the allocation of funds springs from the way in which the Government rig the system for judging the needs of each area. They decide which areas are most deprived and give them extra money. That sounds fair until we find out which parts of the country the Government have decided are most deprived.

The Government rank councils in an order from one to 357, with Tower Hamlets in first place as the most deprived, Hackney second and Islington third. Few people would dispute those rankings, but how can anybody explain why Runnymede is 37th when Great Yarmouth is 50th, or why Hereford is 41st when Basildon is 121st and Gravesham is 117th? How can anybody justify Mole Valley in Surrey being 102nd when Corby is 220th and Forest of Dean 233rd? Why is Guildford in Surrey 133rd when Waveney in Suffolk is 251st?

Huge question marks arise over any scale of deprivation under which Mid Sussex, which is 231st and Surrey Heath, which is 249th, are regarded as more deprived than Wigan, which is 276th, St. Helens, which is 279th and Rotherham, which is 280th? More startlingly still is the ranking of Huntingdonshire, which includes the Prime Minister's constituency. It is 295th and therefore treated by his Government more generously than Barnsley, which is 326th, Amber Valley which is 293rd, Bolsover which is 322nd, Warrington which is 332nd and Easington which is 331st. Nobody on earth can seriously believe that Easington, Barnsley, Bolsover, Warrington and Amber Valley are among the least deprived places in England—but that is the system that the Secretary of State is running.

Sir Peter Fry: The hon. Gentleman has clearly shown some of the unfairness of the present formula. Will he give the same assurance as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on changes to the area cost adjustment, bearing in mind the fact that any proposed change this year was effectively torpedoed by Labour-controlled local authority organisations?

Mr. Dobson: The undertaking that I give is that we shall have a fair system of allocation. The present one is manifestly not fair.

Mr. Gummer: If what the hon. Gentleman says is true, is it not surprising that he appears to muddle up different sorts of authorities? More important, if what he says is true, why does not one of the Labour-controlled local

[Mr. Gummer]

authority organisations support him or demand such changes? All the levels on which we operate have been set in consultation with them. Will he explain that?

Mr. Dobson: I shall come to that in my speech—*[Interruption.]* If I say it now, I shall be saying it twice. The Secretary of State has made it quite clear that he consults the local authority associations, and then decides. It is no good him pretending that he can shuffle responsibility on to other people; the decisions are his decisions.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dobson: No, I have given way about three times on this issue.

The rankings are determined by the Government. The low rankings of deprived areas are used by the Government to reduce the grant that such areas get. If, on the other hand, one uses a scale that reflects the wealth of the wealthy areas, Runnymede would move from 37th to 327th and Bromley from 115th to 310th. It is obvious that the system has a racket right at its heart.

Mr. Sumberg: The hon. Gentleman's answer to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State just will not do. He has to explain why the Labour councils that control the metropolitan authorities are not pushing for the change to which my right hon. Friend referred. In the unlikely event that the hon. Gentleman becomes Secretary of State for the Environment, what will he do to impose such terms on them?

Mr. Dobson: The local authority associations and individual local authorities accept that, while the Government are in power, all that they can expect is fine tuning of the system. The more I look at the system, the more I believe that it needs to be changed root and branch because it is a racket.

Mr. Gummer: May I ask the hon. Gentleman the following very simple question? He uses the word "racket", so will he please explain why, in almost four years as Secretary of State for the Environment, none of the local authority associations in any of the many friendly and reasonable meetings that I have had with them—even though such associations are controlled largely by the Labour party—has ever asked me to do what he is saying ought to be done?

Mr. Dobson: My understanding is that they have asked for some of the things about which I am talking to be done.

The biggest scandal of the lot—the racket at the heart of the racket—is the Westminster racket—*[Interruption.]* The problem is, "They don't like it up 'em!"

According to the Government and nobody else on earth, Westminster is the fourth most deprived place in England. That must come as a surprise to the residents of Belgravia and Mayfair. In fact, it is remarkable that some estate agents in those areas have not challenged the Government for threatening property values by bringing the area into disrepute. Nobody denies that there are not some deprived parts of Westminster—the Government use such parts as their excuse to entitle Westminster to so much extra grant—yet the money that is earmarked for them does not get there or deal with people's problems there. It is squandered instead on the most expensive local services in the country and concentrated on the least deprived parts of Westminster.

I shall give just one example of the squandermongers. By not collecting service charges from people who had leased houses and flats from the council, £7 million was squandered. It is simple: the council was supposed to ask people for that money, but the man chairing the housing committee in 1988 ordered that it not be done.

Westminster council is showered with help by the Government. According to a brief produced by Conservative central office—so it must be true—if every council in the country had the same level of help as Westminster, it would cost the taxpayer £23 billion. That shows the extent of the racket. That figure is the Government's, not mine. Westminster does not deliver the goods. It is on record that its education service, for instance, is not very good.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Dobson: No, the hon. Gentleman is not from Westminster, and I am talking about Westminster. He may live there, but I do not know.

The Government grant per pupil for education in Westminster vastly exceeds that of most other education authorities. If Essex, Kent and Lancashire got the same Government help per pupil, they would each be able to take on more than 7,000 extra teachers in the coming year. Given the same help as Westminster, Cheshire, Nottinghamshire and Staffordshire would be able to take on 5,000 more teachers; Hertfordshire, Birmingham, Devon and Derbyshire would be able to take on 4,000 extra teachers; and Berkshire, Gloucestershire, Hereford and Worcester, Leeds, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Norfolk and Suffolk would each be able to take on more than 3,000 extra teachers. Yet tonight, Tory Members of Parliament from the areas that I have mentioned will traipse through the Lobby to force through a grant settlement that will swindle the people whom they are supposed to represent and betray the children, parents and teachers in their areas.

The unfair way in which the Government have allocated grants to local councils is not, of course, confined to education. Let us look at it another way: the contribution that council tax payers are expected to make towards the cost of their local council. The Government say that Westminster is their flagship council, so we can assume therefore that the contribution that the residents of Belgravia and Mayfair make towards the cost of their council is roughly what the Conservatives think to be right. It is certainly the level that Conservative Members will be voting for tonight. So what are the facts? In Westminster, council tax payers next year will contribute around 10 per cent. of the cost of their council services, so that must be the level that the Government believe to be fair.

What are we to make of a proposed settlement—for which Conservative Members will vote tonight—which will leave the average council tax payer in the rest of

England contributing 25 per cent. of the cost of council services, compared with 10 per cent. in Westminster? In some areas, the Government's allocation of the grant means that local people will have to find a higher proportion. The Government are planning for the people of Harlow and Crawley to find 45 per cent. of the cost of council services. In Basildon, the figure is 42 per cent.; in the Forest of Dean, 39 per cent.; in Stevenage, 37 per cent.; in Amber Valley and Redditch, 34 per cent.; in High Peak, 32 per cent.; in Falmouth and Camborne, Corby, and Worcester 31 per cent.; in Chorley, Dover, South Derbyshire and Thamesdown, 30 per cent. Tonight, Tory Members who represent those areas will vote for a settlement that leaves their voters contributing between three and four and a half times more towards their local councils than the rich voters in Belgravia and Mayfair. Tory Members for another 30 areas will vote tonight for a settlement following which their constituents will have to pay more than twice the 10 per cent. required of council tax payers in Westminster.

Local people will be entitled to ask where the loyalties of those Members of Parliament lie. Do they lie with the people who elected them, or with the discredited Government? If Tory Members opt for party loyalty tonight, they will pay a heavy price in fewer than 100 days from now.

Mr. Gummer: My right hon. and hon. Friends will opt for party loyalty tonight. Their constituents know that the figures obtain because when a local council spends more than it ought to, it does not receive as much grant. Otherwise, the rest of the country would be subsidising overspending Harlow and Basildon, as well as the other Labour overspenders. Will the hon. Gentleman answer one simple question? When Labour was in power, did it give proportionally more grant to Westminster? If it did, the figure that he quoted earlier would be better than the figure when Labour was in power. How would he explain that to the country?

Mr. Dobson: The Government know, the officials know and the Secretary of State ought to know by now that the figures for the past and for the present are literally incomparable.

Mr. Gummer: They are comparable.

Ms Hilary Armstrong (North–West Durham): The Secretary of State is lying. He said that himself in a letter.

Mr. Dobson: If they are comparable, will the Secretary of State tell us what the figures are? I will allow him to intervene.

Mr. Gummer *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I think that I heard an hon. Member use the word "lying" from a sedentary position. I would be grateful if the hon. Member concerned would withdraw that word or confirm that she did not say it.

Ms Armstrong: I am happy to withdraw it, and I shall deal with the issue in my winding-up speech.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am most grateful to the hon. Lady. I think that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) had the Floor.

Mr. Dobson: I was just about to give way to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras knows perfectly well that he asked for details that are in the Library. These prove him to be wrong and me to be right. The hon. Gentleman has repeated something that is not true. The Labour party gave a greater grant proportionately to Westminster than the present Government, and that shoots his argument below the waterline.

Mr. Dobson: The fact that the Secretary of State—who is privileged to come to this House armed with innumerable advisers—has not produced a figure suggests that there is something amiss in his argument.

Sir Peter Fry: The hon. Gentleman should give us the figures.

Mr. Dobson: It is not my argument—I do not need to produce the figures.

Why do the Tory Members support this unfair settlement? If every council received the same help per head as Westminster, most would not need to collect any council tax at all. Most would be able to pay rebates instead. In Luton, the council would be able to pay a rebate of £529 to every council tax payer. In Bedford, the figure would be £499; in Erewash, £812; in Burton-on-Trent, £796; in North-West Leicestershire, £798; in Corby, £795; in Stourbridge, £700; in Gloucester, £831; in Lincoln, £731; in Staffordshire, Moorlands, £781; and in Slough £865. People in those places will want to know why their Members of Parliament have not got them a better deal.

The fiddling of the deprivation rankings does not stop with the residents. Councils get their grants increased in proportion to the number of visitors they get—in Westminster, it amounts to 81 per cent. The fiddling does not even stop there. According to the Government, visitors to an area are just as deprived as the inhabitants. So, according to the Government, all the people who stay overnight in Westminster are—like its residents—the fourth-most deprived in Britain.

We all know that homelessness and the numbers of people sleeping rough reach record levels under the Government, but the typical overnight visitor to Westminster is not homeless—far from it. Yet the settlement assumes that all Westminster's visitors are deprived. So we have the unbelievable situation that, for the purposes of calculating the Government grant, 12 per cent. of the people who stay at the Ritz, the Savoy, the Lanesborough and the Park Lane Hilton tonight will be regarded as living in grossly overcrowded conditions. Westminster is therefore entitled to extra grant to deal with that overcrowding.

If I said that, the Tories would accuse me of jeopardising the tourism industry by talking down the quality of London's hotels, but that is the Government's official position. Westminster does not just get a grant to match the number of overnight visitors—it gets extra

[Mr. Dobson]

grant to compensate for the deprivation those visitors have never experienced. The Secretary of State has described this situation as the "mathematics of the madhouse".

I will use one example to illustrate how crazy the system is. Let us follow a couple of foreign tourists as they visit places of historical interest in England. They come to London and stay at a hotel in Westminster. While they are in Westminster, they are regarded as being among the fourth-most deprived people in the country, and Westminster receives extra grant to meet their needs. When that same couple tire of sightseeing in London, they go to see the Brighton pavilion and immediately go up in the world. They become only the 32nd-most deprived people in England.

When this upwardly mobile couple go to see the imp in Lincoln cathedral, they move up to 59th, and they move up to 62nd when they pass through the Erpingham gate into the cathedral close at Norwich. They move up to 68th when they visit Exeter cathedral, and 87th when they visit Gloucester cathedral to see the first perpendicular gothic window in the world. They move up to 125th when they visit Worcester cathedral, and 219th when they gaze down from the ancient walls of Chester. A visit to York minster further improves their social standing to 274th, while a visit to the red sandstone of Carlisle elevates them to 288th. A visit to the High Peak secures them yet higher status, 290th, but even that cannot compare with the superiority they gain from a view of Durham castle and cathedral, which puts them at 334th.

Let me remind the House—these are the same tourists, but, according to the Government, they are not the same. The further they get from Westminster, the less deprived they become. That is social climbing with knobs on. It is not just ridiculous—it is unfair. It is also serious because, as the Government's ranking of deprivation is reduced, so is the grant that the councils receive.

The fiddle does not end there. Westminster council takes in more than £20 million a year in parking charges levied on those poverty-stricken visitors. It is allowed to keep all that money, which is not netted off against the grant for visitors. It is true that the same rule applies to every council. It is just that Westminster has more visitors who are more impoverished—according to the Government—and who pay more parking charges. The arrangement may apply to everybody, but it was custom-built to benefit Westminster.

The Government always claim—the Secretary of State has done so today—that the allocation of funds is backed by the local authority associations. That is not true. They are consulted, but they do not make the decision. As the Secretary of State has said—

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dobson: Please do not interrupt—I am about to quote the Secretary of State. He said last year:

"Someone has to decide . . . That is a responsibility of mine".

Mr. Hughes: Is not one of the holes in the hon. Gentleman's argument the fact that local authority associations have not seriously queried the Secretary of State's methodology? If they did, as the marionette sitting next to him cannot stop shouting, they would not only tell the Secretary of State but take him to court on judicial review. If the hon. Gentleman is right, they would win. They have not done so and they have not even argued that case. In other words, they think that the hon. Gentleman is talking complete nonsense.

Mr. Dobson: The hon. Gentleman's electors in Harrow will probably think that his time would be better spent ensuring that he does not vote for a system under which, if his area got the same help per head of population as Westminster, people would get a rebate of £416, or for a settlement under which his local people will have to pay 26 per cent. of the cost of the council instead of 10 per cent. as they do in Westminster.

Mr. Gummer: Can the hon. Gentleman just answer this question? If it is as he says, why have the local authority associations not asked for the root and branch change that he is proposing? Given that he has made this speech on previous occasions, why have none of the four associations supported him? He has made it at least five times to my certain knowledge.

Mr. Dobson: First, on an issue of principle, I am not the mouthpiece of the local authority associations. Secondly, as I have explained, those associations believe that they cannot expect any root and branch change from the Government and so, as long as they remain in power, they are looking for limited adjustments.

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak) *rose—*

Mr. Dobson: I shall not give way at the moment. Recently, Ministers—including the Secretary of State today—have started to claim backing from the Audit Commission for their system of funding local councils. The Secretary of State quoted an Audit Commission report today, but the quote was pretty partial. The commission said that the present system was more sophisticated than foreign systems and better than the Tory scheme that preceded it. It did not leave it at that, however, and went on to say:

"there is nothing indisputably right about the present system . . . Its basis is simply a set of imperfect statistical models. Yet immense authority is invested by the Government in the current SSA formula".

The Audit Commission went on to point out that

"some of the system's objectives were contradictory".

For good measure it added:

"Comparing the system with a checklist of objective criteria reveals that it is deficient in several ways . . . The technical performance of the system delivers a degree of fairness which could be improved."

The commission continued:

"The system is neither simple to understand nor stable in outcome",

adding that

"Some authorities receive grant and spending power for services they do not provide."

As I said, the Government have been planning for months to drive up council tax bills this coming April by an average of 6 per cent. or £40 per average household

and to blame councils, but they have been found out. The Government have told too many lies and broken too many promises. Scarcely anyone believes a word they say.

Mr. Hendry: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dobson: No.

On top of that overall plan to blame councils for the cuts in services and council tax increases that will follow this settlement, the Government are persisting in their now discredited, unfair share-out of grant between councils. So, if the Government force through the settlement, the distribution will be unfair and we shall vote against it. As I made clear before Christmas and on 6 January, if the settlement is forced through tonight, councils will perforce have to live with it. That is because the Government's craven postponement of the general election means that there is no alternative.

Under laws passed by the Government, councils have to decide their budgets by 11 March, which means that they have to know the level of Government grant that they will be getting well before that date. To ensure that all councils knew where they stood, I made it clear in December and January that, whatever the settlement forced through by the Government tonight, it will be the settlement for the forthcoming year and that that must include the capping levels.

We want to get rid of capping, subject to fall-back powers to deal with any council that might get totally out of line, but that certainly cannot be done this year. Councillors and council officials were entitled to know that, so we made it clear. Councils know where they stand. We are determined not to do as the Tories did at the last general election, when they made promises that they knew they could not keep. They promised tax cuts; they delivered tax increases. They promised increased public services; they delivered cuts in public services. Then they tried to blame everyone but themselves for what they had done.

The incoming Labour Government will be based on the supposition that democracy depends on the people who take the decisions carrying the can and the people who carry the can taking the decisions. So we shall be honest in our relations with local councils and we shall take responsibility for our share of those decisions. We shall not roam around the country blaming local councillors for decisions that we have taken in the House of Commons. We shall take responsibility for our decisions and they will have to accept responsibility for theirs.

Tonight, we shall vote against the grant settlement because it is unfair. If the Government manage to force it through, it will be with the help of many Tory Members whose constituents are being dealt with unfairly. Those hon. Members will be held responsible for their decisions, not by me or the Labour party, but by the—

Mr. Hendry: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman has referred to my constituency twice. Is it not the convention in the House that, if that happens, the hon. Member who represents that constituency should be heard?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Conventions are not the responsibility of the Chair.

Mr. Dobson: I was trying to speed things up, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Hon. Members who vote for the settlement tonight will be held responsible for their decisions by the voters at the general election and that election cannot come a minute too soon.

5.7 pm

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): I make no apologies for devoting all my speech to the serious situation faced by my constituents in Bury because of the threat by the Labour council to cut vital public services drastically.

The council has put forward proposals for consideration that will reduce spending on primary, secondary and community education and cut out three public libraries in my constituency. There is much anger and fear in the community at those proposals, as they would severely damage the excellent quality of education in Bury—the ratings and examination results have been among the highest in the country. If the measures are implemented when the council sets its budget in a few weeks' time, it will be an outrageous attack on the education system that operates in my community and it will be entirely unacceptable.

Unfortunately, this is not the first time that the Labour council has threatened those vital public services. It is almost an annual exercise—an exercise that causes great distress and anger among the children and parents whom I represent. Last year, the council threatened to close every public library. In previous years, it threatened to close nursery education in its entirety and old people's homes and to cut adult education severely. Year by year, such threats have been made at this time. On each occasion, the council has been forced to decide where its priorities lie. It was forced to do so by public protest and outrage, and those important community services were all saved and they still operate effectively to this very day.

That record of threats followed by the withdrawal of threats leads to a certain amount of scepticism. If the threats were genuine in those previous years, when those council services were faced with extinction, I have to ask why action was not taken year on year—perhaps in a more modest way—to avert the serious situation that we face today.

It is convenient that that situation has arisen just before a general election. We all know from our experience of life and business and our professions that, if one fails to deal with a financial problem when it first arises, achieving the eventual solution becomes all the more difficult.

Bearing in mind the sorry chapter of events over several years, there can be only two verdicts on the way in which the council has behaved: either it was working year by year on the Micawber principle that something would eventually turn up to solve the problems, or it was deliberately misleading the public each year about the severity of the cuts to vital services so that, when they were saved, as I have explained they all were, the Labour council could pose as the white knight in shining armour coming to the rescue of parents, children and the community in general. Either verdict would be a sorry one: financially incompetent or morally unacceptable.

If, unlike in previous years, the financial crisis in Bury today is real—I think that there is indeed a real threat to the primary and secondary schools and colleges—two factors must be taken into account. One is extremely old, and the other new.

[Mr. David Sumberg]

The old factor is a unifying point for the council—whatever its politics—for my constituents, for me and for my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt): the formula that is used to decide how much each local authority is to receive from central Government and, in particular, the area cost adjustment. It has not worked well for Bury and the unfairness has persisted over many years; it does not take account of the borough's special position as a small authority with no economies of scale which is neither overwhelmingly rich nor especially poor.

I accept 100 per cent. the difficulty in changing a formula for anything, as consensus must be reached with other authorities. As has been vividly demonstrated in this debate by remarks from the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) and others, there is a great difficulty in getting that consensus from all concerned. It is an obvious difficulty, because those who gain from a formula do not want to give up their advantage, while those who lose press them to do so.

It is misleading to say, as the Opposition have said, that the only gainer from the formula is Westminster city council. It may well be that many other Labour and Liberal councils also gain. That is why the metropolitan authorities are incapable of coming to my right hon. Friend or to any future Secretary of State for the Environment with a united voice, presenting a formula to deal with the matter differently.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there will never be a consensus about changes across the whole of local government, that his authority is losing out massively from the current formula, and that the Secretary of State could change it if he wanted? Why then does the hon. Gentleman continue to support him?

Mr. Sumberg: I entirely accept that my local authority is losing out massively as a result of the formula, but the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras know that there is no large bank of money sitting in Whitehall that could do something about it. Nor can—nor should—my right hon. Friend make changes without consensus. The formula applies not to one authority alone but to all of local government.

Having said that, I must tell my right hon. Friend that my hon. Friend for Bury, North and I have urged a change in the formula that would apply throughout the system. I wish it were possible for the change to apply only to Bury, but it is not. We have long urged the Department to do something, because the current position is not fair and cannot continue. I understand the difficulties, but I am sick and tired of making this point, which I have made before in the Chamber and in delegations. I say to whomever will be Secretary of State for the Environment after the general election that something will have to be done.

I referred to an old and to a new factor. The new factor will require hon. Members to use a little bit of imagination and believe the Labour party's promises. Unlike in previous years, when I have faced criticism in Bury for the amount of local government expenditure, that criticism has this year been followed by a demand for more public money to be spent on local government.

This year, and next, we face a Labour commitment that, if Labour were in government, it would not increase by a single penny the amount decided by the Government for the next two years. Unless the Labour party is prepared to respond to that point, all its injunctions for Tory Members to vote with it tonight will fall on very stony ground.

Labour Members know the truth: if they come to power, there will be no alteration in the formula or in the amount of money that will be allocated to local government. That has been made absolutely clear by the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown).

Mr. Dobson: There can be no change in the formula this year, because councils have to set their budgets by 11 March, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that, if there is a Labour Government, there will certainly be changes in the allocation next year.

Mr. Sumberg: We shall wait and see. I do not believe it, because none of the hon. Gentleman's friends in local government, as I said before, has proposed any change whatever in the formula. On the whole—although some of them lose out as we do in Bury—they are satisfied with it. In the unlikely scenario that the hon. Gentleman posits, he will face exactly the situation currently faced by my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: This debate has been revealing about Labour policy—or not even policy, but merely tactics. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) read out great lists of councils that he alleges would receive more money under a Labour party allocations scheme. In other words, Labour is promising any part of the country, any town, city or county, that a change in the allocation would give it more money. Is that not profoundly dishonest?

Mr. Sumberg: It is profoundly dishonest for the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras to refuse to make a commitment, today or ever, that there will be more money for local government. I cannot tell the people of Bury that, in the unlikely event of a Labour Government, they will have more money. They will not.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras tells me that there will be a review of the formula, and I am sure that, if there is a Labour Government, we shall have reviews coming out of our ears; but can he give a commitment that the people of Bury will benefit from the change in formula after that review? I very much doubt it.

Mr. Dobson: In case the hon. Gentleman misheard, I said not that there would be a review of the formula but that there would be a change in the way in which the money was allocated.

Mr. Sumberg: The hon. Gentleman will not speak again in this debate, but perhaps the hon. Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong) will set out in detail the way in which the formula will be changed rather than regaling us at length with what Westminster council gets or does not get. If she is prepared to do that, the House and the country may be prepared to listen.

Every local council now knows without a shadow of doubt that, whatever the outcome of the general election, or of tonight's vote, there will be no more money for local services. Bury's Labour council must face the difficult reality of the present situation. Whatever Government are

in power, Labour or Conservative, next year and the year after, our problems will not disappear overnight. To accept that reality would be honourable and honest, and would not mislead our constituents, who are already angry and anxious enough. The really important vote, with all due respect to the House, is not tonight's.

Mr. Jon Trickett (Hemsworth): When will the Government have the nerve to call the general election?

Mr. Sumberg: The really important vote will be called soon, because it will take place in Bury council chamber some time in March to decide what priority the Labour council gives to the services enjoyed by my constituents. I make no bones about the fact that some elements of the situation are unfair to Bury and to the council. However, just as we in our private lives must accept the situations that we face and deal with them, so must local councils. We cannot pretend that our bank manager is charging us 5 per cent. when he is charging 15 per cent. on our overdrafts, because that would result in financial disaster. Equally, while the situation may be difficult and harsh, the council cannot pretend that it lives on another planet.

If my community is to maintain our excellent education services—which is what I and the people whom I represent want—every other aspect of council spending must be examined. Some harsh, politically difficult decisions must be taken by people in the Labour party, who, I accept, hold their views very sincerely. As Aneurin Bevan said, they must use the language of priorities. Our children's education should be a priority. If the Labour council in Bury is prepared to do that, to put aside political prejudice and to work to find a solution that will preserve our excellent primary and secondary schools and adult education, it will rightly command the respect and admiration of the community; it will also have my total support.

5.23 pm

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): Mr. Deputy Speaker, the last time I was involved in a local government finance debate, I think that you were also involved. We both realise how long ago that was. As I listened to the Secretary of State's bluster, I reflected that I had not missed much over the past few years. If it were not for an pressing problem in the city of Leicester—I mention that to ensure that the Minister knows where my constituency is—the Secretary of State might well have driven me from the Chamber. I cannot but believe that his speech, and that of the hon. Member for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg), had more to do with the coming general election than with the needs of local government. However, like the hon. Member for Bury, South, I am seeking the Secretary of State's assistance, so perhaps I should curtail my criticism and get on with my substantive point.

I think that all hon. Members accept that councils of all political persuasions—even the few remaining Tory administrations—agree that this year's proposed spending limits are inadequate. Despite the vehemence with which Ministers put their argument, local government and local authority bodies believe that, on a like-on-like basis, local authority spending in 1997-98 will increase by 1.5 per cent., not by 2.5 per cent. as Ministers claim. Inevitably, that will increase pressure on service provision and lead to the difficult problems highlighted by the hon. Member for Bury, South.

Nowhere are such problems clearer than in Leicester. The Minister received a deputation from Leicester in December 1996. He knows that Leicester will become a unitary authority in April. Everyone in Leicester agrees that this is one of the most traumatic periods in the political life of the city council. At this traumatic time, the city is faced with the worst budget settlement in its history. The Minister knows that Leicester is the only 1997 unitary authority that is capped at its notional 1996-97 budget plus 1 per cent., even though Ministers accept that inflation forecasts are running at between 2.5 and 3 per cent. The council faces the lowest budget settlement of any reorganised authority, this year or last. If that goes through unaltered, it will have disastrous consequences for service provision and development.

The Minister knows that, as a non-metropolitan district, Leicester is permitted to overspend to the tune of 40 per cent. above standard spending assessment. It gives me no pleasure to say that, because I know that political opponents will seek to attack it, but that is the reality. As part of the agreement with the Government, the council pursues a strategy of managed budget reduction. When it becomes a unitary authority in April 1997, it will be an authority with a spending limit of 2 to 2.5 per cent. above SSA. If the council does not receive additional assistance from Government, it will have to reduce its budget by £15 million to £18 million.

If services transferred from the county council, such as education and social services, are ring-fenced and protected from cuts to avoid the draconian action that the hon. Member for Bury, South described, the consequences for services presently provided by the non-metropolitan district, such as leisure, housing and planning, will be horrendous. The housing renewal strategy in the inner city, which assists owner-occupiers, will be especially hard hit; it will virtually cease. Neighbourhood centres throughout the city will face closure. Leisure service provision in Leicester will be decimated.

There is real disquiet among city council employees who sense the threat of redundancy. They have already seen the present Leicestershire county council issue 600 redundancy notices as a consequence of reorganisation. We hope that many of those redundancies will not occur. Nevertheless, the redundancy threat is having an enduring effect on the morale of staff of the county and city councils, which will persist long after 1 April 1997.

I hope that the city of Leicester and I can convince the Secretary of State and the Minister that it would be disastrous for the new unitary authority to start its life with large service cuts and redundancies as a consequence of the unexpected harshness of the revenue settlement. I realise—I am sure that my realisation will be borne out by experience as the debate continues—that the Government will be subjected to special pleading from hon. Members on both sides of the House. Nevertheless, I hope that Ministers will take further action to ameliorate the consequences of the decisions that they have taken already regarding the city of Leicester. Some of the worst consequences may be avoided if they consider the views and options identified by the delegation that met the Minister. I await the Minister's reply in hopeful anticipation of further assistance for the city of Leicester.

5.30 pm

Sir David Madel (South-West Bedfordshire): The hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg) drew

[Sir David Madel]

attention to the fact that the debate is about the important issue of state spending levels. The hon. Member and my hon. Friend drew attention to education and its importance locally and nationally, and both pointed to the relentless pressure on Government for increased state spending. That is particularly true at local government level, as I believe that the country is now much better informed about the activities of local authorities. Local authorities today spend much more time informing the electorate of their aims and achievements, and Governments will face continuing debate about how much the country can afford to give them in order to assist with important expenditure items.

Like the hon. Member for Leicester, South and my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South, I shall devote my remarks to my local situation. I believe that the debate is not so much a time for special pleading but a time for drawing special attention to particular local problems. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration for receiving a delegation from Bedfordshire county council that my hon. Friend the Member for North Bedfordshire (Sir T. Skeet) and I brought to see him last month. Some progress has been made following that meeting, which I shall outline later.

My right hon. Friend is well aware that Bedfordshire faces particular difficulties as a consequence of local government reorganisation. Luton has been separated from Bedfordshire for the second time in 35 years, and it will become a unitary authority. One may ask whether Luton should have been joined with Bedfordshire in 1972 or been allowed to retain its county borough status—which it was granted in 1962, and thus had enjoyed for a mere 10 years. The answer is that it should have remained as it was and been allowed to develop in that direction. However, in the 1970s the Government of the day were involved in Common Market negotiations, in altering housing benefit, introducing value added tax, reforming industrial relations, and changing Ulster's constitution—it was helter-skelter legislation. Against such a background—with the Government desperate to move on—mistakes will inevitably occur, and I think that the Government's decision regarding Luton in 1972 was a mistake.

Nevertheless, Luton will become a unitary authority on 1 April. I believe that the consequences of local government reorganisation in Bedfordshire require further rapid detailed discussion between the county and the Department of the Environment. The reorganisation decision will result in the transfer of resources to Luton. The problem is that Bedfordshire's assessment of how much is currently spent in Luton is different from the Department of the Environment's provisional assessment—that is, the notional amount. Based on current expenditure levels, the county estimated that the notional amount should be £6 million more than the Department's initial estimate. As my right hon. Friend knows, that factor formed part of our representations to Government.

The transitional costs of local government reorganisation involve two elements: making the change—that is, providing information to Luton about services and reorganising the county—and compensating staff, especially those who are made redundant. The greatest concern in Bedfordshire at present is the cost of redundancies. It is impossible to predict what that will be, as the county is in the middle of reorganisation and Luton is still recruiting staff. The Government have made available resources of £2.5 million over two years, which the county council has supplemented with resources generated internally.

The Government have asked what Bedfordshire county council is doing about the reorganisation problem, and the response has been good. The district auditor has commented:

"Bedfordshire County Council is handling the challenge of local government reorganisation well."

I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to three developments in Bedfordshire. First, departmental structures have been reorganised and there has been a 60 per cent. saving in chief officer posts, with the number of departments reduced to four. Secondly, staffing structures for core staff are being filled at only 60 per cent. of current staffing levels, which amounts to a saving of £4.5 million after adjustments for the transfer to Luton. Thirdly, central support services, such as finance and legal, have been reduced more than front-line services.

I thank my right hon. Friend for the changes that he has made to the damping grant. The Government have confirmed that Bedfordshire will receive an extra £4.2 million in Government grant, which aims to reduce the impact of local council tax increases caused by the cost of local government reorganisation. Departmental estimates suggest that that will be worth £33 to the average band D council tax payer in the county. That was one welcome consequence of our meeting with my right hon. Friend last month.

However, other problems remain, which I ask my right hon. Friend to consider. Bedfordshire county council expects to have reserves of about £1.5 million at the beginning of 1997-98. That leaves no scope for using reserves in the short term while long-term savings are realised. I offer two suggestions to my right hon. Friend which could assist the county. The Government could provide additional capital approvals or allow the county council to utilise some of the capital receipts that are frozen. That would allow expenditure to be incurred in order to achieve long-term savings.

In making that plea, I do not suggest that the Government should take the general brake off local government spending. We know what would happen if they did so: someone, in the guise of the late Anthony Crosland, would have to say "the party is over"—we all remember those vivid words. There is a risk that spending would shoot out of control, as it did when Mr. Crosland was Secretary of State for the Environment in 1974. However, I believe that there are several different brakes that could be eased gently when it comes to local government reorganisation, and one of them applies to Bedfordshire.

I ask the Government to take a swift and detailed look at my two proposals to ascertain whether, because of the costs of reorganisation, the brake on Bedfordshire could not be gently and temporarily eased. The council understands that it is asking for temporary and special treatment to see it through its temporary difficult position. There is a willingness at county hall not to spend through the roof. In other words, there is a willingness to keep expenditure reasonable. I ask the Government to

understand that only a minority of councils have been reorganised in the way that Bedfordshire has. I hope that my right hon. Friend may be able to inch his way forward and accept one or other of my two suggestions to help Bedfordshire.

5.40 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): It is sad that the debate is a depressing one for all those who are involved in local government, not least because of a sense of déjà-vu. There have been similar debates in previous years, and I recall particularly the debate that took place on 31 January 1996. The same points had to be made in January last year because the Government were doing very much the same thing.

The settlement this year will lead inevitably once again to cuts in local government spending and, at the same time, to higher council taxes. The spending assessments determined by the Government are increased in total by about 2.5 per cent. while the grant that the Government are providing for local authorities is increased overall by only about 1.5 per cent. That means that even if local authorities were to do no more than spend at the rate at which the Government expect them to spend, there would have to be huge increases in council taxes. It is a choice, perhaps, between huge increases in council taxes and cuts in local authority services, but I suspect that most local authorities will find that they must do both.

The Secretary of State said that in every area of Government spending we need regularly to undertake a review to ascertain whether things might not be made more efficient. When I asked him whether that had applied to central Government spending over the period of the Conservative Government, it was interesting that he failed effectively to reply. He merely said that central Government had apparently become more efficient and that any extra savings had immediately been spent on further central Government services.

I wonder why the Secretary of State thinks that it is so important for central Government to spend more on new services out of their efficiency savings while demanding that local government makes those savings and does not introduce any new services, especially when central Government are insisting on local authorities introducing new services year after year.

Central Government spending is up while, on the whole, central Government have been shedding their responsibilities to local authorities. Local government spending is down while, on the whole, it has been receiving extra responsibilities from central Government. How can the Secretary of State complain, when that is the position, that local authorities are inefficient? Clearly central Government must be more inefficient than local authorities.

This year, nine out of 10 of district councils throughout the country have had their standard spending assessments reduced in real terms, and rather more than that have received a reduced grant towards that spending. It is clear that districts will be under immense pressure. One of the extra responsibilities of which the Government have taken all too little account is the extra costs this year of reorganisation in those areas where that is taking place.

There is another factor that has not been mentioned so far. It is that to pay for local authority pensions, which were underfunded at the time of the poll tax, all authorities are now having to put extra sums into their pension funds. Many of the local authorities that received an undue bonus as a result of underfunding pensions at that time were then Tory controlled. Now, when they are run by Labour or Liberal Democrats, they must find extra money from the council tax payer. At the same time the Government have the cheek to try to blame those councils for raising council tax, when the fault rests with the Conservatives in their decision on pensions. For example, Waverley in Surrey has decided this year that an extra £25 per head is due as a result of the underfunding of pensions when the council was Conservative controlled in previous years.

Education always lies at the heart of local government spending. It is the most crucial area of that spending as well as the largest total amount. Most local education authorities are spending above the standard spending assessment. Why is that? The answer is that traditionally, local government has put a much higher value on education than have central Government.

I shall give an example. Last year, the budget for schools in Kingston upon Thames was £46.45 million as against an SSA which was nearly £2 million lower. This year, Kingston believes that it will have to cut its spending on schools by about £1 million. That will be a real cut in spite of the fact that there will be higher pupil numbers and many other needs. Nevertheless, the reduced spending of £45.3 million will still be larger than the Government believe that Kingston should be spending. Its spending will be greater than the Government-set SSA. That demonstrates clearly how any Government pretence that more money is being provided for education now by central Government than in the past is incorrect.

What is more, the Government have failed properly to take into account rising pupil numbers and rising special needs. All the time, more and more people realise that special needs are not being properly met. The problem of the early retirement of teachers is now being thrown on to local authorities. I can give an example of the result of these increased costs. In Northumbria, there will be a gap of about £10 million between a real-terms, stand-still budget and the capped limit. In other words, Northumbria will not be able to achieve a real-terms, stand-still budget. Instead, it will have to cut its spending on education by about £10 million.

A further example is close to my heart. A school in my constituency—Enborne Lodge—is run not by the LEA of Berkshire but, for some time, by Lambeth. It is an old Inner London education authority school. It is a boarding school for those with severe emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school has done brilliant work, achieving results with students who have had the most unbelievable difficulties. It has enabled them to experience a happy and worthwhile childhood while having a proper education and achieving some excellent exam results. It has enabled them also to lead useful lives in society, as perhaps they never could have done otherwise.

This year, the school had to close. Not only that, but the plan of the governing body to enable Enborne Lodge to continue as a grant-maintained school—I thought that the Government would like that—run by a charity has collapsed. Why is that? Lambeth has decided that it must sell the school on the open market for the best price rather than allow such a brilliant school to continue to do that which it has so successfully undertaken.

[Mr. David Rendel]

That is a tragedy. The school has been much valued in the community and by the London boroughs that have sent pupils to it. It has had a huge value to society as a whole. It has enabled its pupils to receive a decent education and then to return to the community to lead happy and normal lives thereafter.

It is a tragedy that that school has been closed, but before anyone gets the idea that it was the Liberal Democrats' fault—we are now the largest party on Lambeth council—let me say that the decision to sell on the open market was taken last Friday night as a result of a Con-Lab pact.

Way back before the last general election, the Liberal Democrat party said that education was a priority. We are delighted that the other two parties now agree with that point of view, and claim to have made education their priority, too. But the Prime Minister's pledge to put education first is seen in this settlement to be a sham, and he should never have made it.

Social services is another crucial area of local authority responsibility. Every year, local authorities are given further responsibilities for social services, but without the funding to match. In the debate last year, I referred to a 90-year-old resident in my area who was trying to obtain bath aids to enable him to remain in his own home. He was told that it would be as much as a year before he would be assessed for those aids, and that it would take a great deal longer than that before they would be installed in his home.

This year I did something rather different: I went to a meeting of people whose family members have learning difficulties. It was a fascinating meeting, and it showed me that there is a real need for the provision of further respite care. Such people should be given a chance to keep members of their family at home, but should be relieved of those duties for a short period each year.

As a result of that meeting, I agreed to spend a day visiting four such families. It was a fascinating and emotional day, and it showed me the difficulties that those families have to cope with. One child with autistic tendencies spent his whole time running round the house destroying it. He tore the paper from the walls, tore at the chairs and knocked over the crockery so that it fell on the floor and smashed, and his parents could do very little to control him. They have to live with him day after day, and they love him dearly. It is unfair for society to decide that such a family cannot have any respite care month in and month out, because of cuts in local government funds. Some councils find it almost impossible to meet even their statutory responsibilities for social services.

Many other areas of local government funding are being cut. Even the Government, in their SSA figures, have accepted that spending in other areas will have to be cut; and that is before they have taken account of the extra costs to local government of the landfill tax.

Transport will be cut, which will mean worse road maintenance year on year. Environmental services will be cut: it will be more and more difficult for local authorities to establish recycling schemes. Recreation and the arts will be cut: they draw tourists into this country. Today, I went to the launch of an appeal by the Watermill theatre in my constituency—I hope that many hon. Members have been there—which is desperately short of funds. I was told that it provides to the Government more in VAT on its ticket sales each year than it receives from the Government in subsidy. None the less, that theatre faces closure because of the Government's policies.

A cut in those areas of local government spending will produce short-term savings, but there will be long-term costs. That is the tragedy of the Government's spending settlements. It is the old story of knowing the price of everything but the value of nothing.

Today's announcement on capping will be a great disappointment, particularly in Oxfordshire. It is interesting that even the local Conservatives are saying that the capping limit is unsustainable and must be broken. All three parties seem to agree—although I understand that the Labour party has refused to propose a budget. The other two parties agree that the budget to be set must be above the capping limit. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong) wants to intervene, she is welcome. I understand that the Labour party has proposed two budgets, but has said that they are for consultation purposes only.

The Tory policy has been to abolish capping: that was agreed at the 1995 Tory conference. The Tory conference produces one or two weird ideas, but it is a great pity that the Government did not listen to what Tory party members told them on that occasion. Capping means that virtually all council spending is, in practice, determined by central Government. It is interesting that the Secretary of State said that his proposals for local government were supported by the local government associations, whereas all those associations have been saying for a long time that capping should go; and so it should.

It saddens me to say that I now regard the Labour party as little better than the Tories when it comes to local government. Labour Members have made a great fuss today, but will they follow up their words with actions? They seem terrified of Tory attacks on their tax policies. They failed to oppose this year's income tax cut, and thereby forfeited their right to demand more central Government grant this year—to be fair to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), he admitted as much. They say that they will stick rigidly to Tory spending and taxation levels in what appears to be yet another Con-Lab pact. They seem to be trying to prove that there is no longer any point in voting Labour.

The cut in income tax, which must be paid for by a rise in council tax, is at the heart of this settlement. The Tories are replacing what is undoubtedly a fairer form of taxation with a less fair tax. Pensioners and people on low incomes do not pay much income tax, but they will be just as hard hit—perhaps harder—by the rise in council tax that the Tories propose. It is hardly a surprise that the Tories have fallen to third place in local government. Why have they not learnt their lesson? Why have they not learnt where they have been going wrong in local government all these years? If they had listened to those of us who have been telling them where they have gone wrong, they might have done better in local government elections.

The council tax is unfair to the elderly and the poor. The real tragedy is that spending cuts will also hit those who are most in need. They will hit children, the elderly, people with learning difficulties and all those who depend on social services. It has been reported in the press today that the Government are prepared to allow the sick in our

hospitals to go unfed. Is this really Britain in 1997? This is the shame that the Government have brought on our country. They should go, and they should not be allowed to return for many years.

5.58 pm

Sir Peter Fry (Wellingborough): There used to be a saying among Conservative Members: "Vote Labour for higher taxation." We still say that, but we have just had a wonderful illustration of the fact that, if we vote Liberal Democrat, we shall be taxed even more than we would be taxed by a Labour Government. All that we have heard is a catalogue of complaints about more and more money being required. Does the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) not realise that there always will be a greater demand for public expenditure? He seems to forget that, because his party will never be in government—unless the Labour party lets the Liberal Democrats into government—he will never have responsibility for raising taxation to meet his demands.

I would prefer, however, to spend a few minutes commenting on what we have heard from the official Opposition. I am coming to the conclusion that, if Westminster council did not exist, it would have to be invented. Virtually all the attacks on the policies of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his colleagues relate to the anomalies that Opposition Members claim exist in that council. I find it much more interesting that—apart from a peculiar phrase about root-and-branch reform—we have heard very little about what the party that expects to take office intends to do about local government. Its policy on capping, for instance, is rather unclear. Does it want to abandon capping completely, and allow councils to let rip and spend as much as they like—obviously, the hon. Member for Newbury would like one council to be able to do that—or will the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) make that impossible?

We cannot assume that a large amount of extra money will be available for local government purposes. We should ask ourselves, therefore, which party is the more hypocritical. Is it the Conservative party, which says, "That is the amount that you will receive; you must make the best of your budget within it," or is it the party that says, "Nowhere near enough is being spent in this or that part of the country, but there will be no extra money to fund what needs to be done"? I suggest that the official Opposition's stand is totally hypocritical and totally inconsistent.

There are those who complain that insufficient grant leads to a considerable reduction in services. As I have said before, we have been given no idea of how any increase in services—or even leaving them at their present level—can be maintained if we stick to the present guidelines for two years. Let me remind the House, and the Opposition in particular, that when a new system is adopted, the present system is generally supported by most people in local government. They may not like this or that aspect, but the overall feeling is an unwillingness to undergo another major change. As my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg) pointed out, there is increasing concern about the way in which the area cost adjustment has been reached in recent years. It is often forgotten that that is a comparatively recent problem, because the formula was revised only three or four years ago.

I have made it abundantly clear on previous occasions in the House that, in my view, the way in which the ACA is currently calculated is grossly unfair to the county of Northamptonshire. Despite what my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Sir D. Madel) has said, I find it difficult to understand why Bedfordshire receives £100 per pupil per year more than we do in the adjoining county. I accept, however, that if the proposals in the Elliot report had been introduced for 1997-98, the system would have been fairer. Northamptonshire would have gained up to £13 million, but—and it is a big but—many local authorities would have received less, and presumably the squeals that would have come from those authorities would have carried more weight than the arguments advanced by those who felt that they were being unjustly treated under the current arrangement.

I agree that all the local authority organisations are resisting change, and I understand that it will take time to negotiate the changes that I would like. I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement this afternoon, and for his answer to my intervention, but what I would like to hear—as, I am sure, would my constituents, no matter which party they vote for—is a similar commitment from Opposition Front Benchers. It is no good talking in vague terms about a fairer system without giving some indication of how the present system is to be made fairer.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Am I right in interpreting what the hon. Gentleman is now saying as meaning that he intends to vote for what he has exposed as a totally unfair settlement for his county?

Sir Peter Fry: Over the past three years, I have expressed extreme concern about the way in which the area cost adjustment has been defined and operated. Two years ago, I refused to support the Government in the Lobby because I felt that—

Mr. Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman is fishing now.

Sir Peter Fry: The hon. Gentleman asked me a question. If he is kind enough to allow me, I will now answer it.

Two years ago, I refused to support the Government because I believed that no progress was being made in ironing out the difficulties of the area cost adjustment. Last year, largely owing to the intervention of all the Northamptonshire Members of Parliament, the Government decided to set up a review of the ACA under Professor Elliot. We made a start in the right direction, and that, along with the amount of grant that we received last year, enabled me to feel that I could support the Government in the Lobby.

This year, I made it clear to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, the Chief Whip and my constituents that, unless there was a meaningful move towards a change in the ACA, I would consider my position in regard to supporting the Government tonight. I have received an assurance from my right hon. Friend, and I have heard not a word in support of that from the Opposition. I—dare I say it?—would rather believe the assurance that I have been given, in very clear terms, because I think that it is generally agreed that some change should take place. That is what the Government have promised, and I would like to think that the Opposition have the courage to make the same kind of commitment.

[Sir Peter Fry]

As I have said, we have experienced problems in Northamptonshire. It has been claimed that the county council is underfunded by some £28 million. That, of course, is the difference between what the Labour county council would like to spend and what the Government feel that it should spend. When we start to investigate the source of that £28 million, we find that, interestingly, there have been enormous overspends for years in both the education and the social services budgets. It is fairly simple to put a finger on where things went wrong in the education budget. The county council decided to educate all the rising fives without obtaining any Government grant to support it; the cost has continued to increase, and now accounts for some £9 million or £10 million of expenditure—money that comes directly from the council tax payer, without Government grant.

We have not looked closely enough at the question of social services. One of the biggest grey areas in recent years has been policy on residential care. Labour's policy in Northamptonshire, where it has been the controlling party for the past few years, has undoubtedly been politically biased: it has attempted to dissuade people from choosing private home care rather than care in county council homes. The committee of the council met on 13 June 1996. The report from the director states:

"Action . . . will continue to ensure maximum use of services that are already funded. This means that directly provided services . . . must be used to the maximum."

The report goes on to refer to

"Making sure that residential beds provided by the county council do not remain empty."

For years, the policy of those who obey the orders of their political masters has been to steer to a county council home anyone who applies for or needs to go into residential care, despite the fact that it is cheaper and often more convenient to go into a private home. People are deliberately not informed of their rights of choice. It is interesting to see how the Labour party in power operates against individual constituent's interests.

For example, a constituent of mine who is 91 years of age was moved into a home outside his home town. As a result, he could not be visited, he was grossly unhappy and he asked to be moved back. I am still waiting to hear from the county social services department whether he can be moved back into the town in which he has lived for many years. There are two private homes, the costs of which are certainly not as high as those of the county homes, yet he is refused the choice that he wants: to stay in the town in which he, his friends and family have lived. That is the choice that the Labour county council has given him. It ill behoves anyone to defend such a policy when it leads to a certain amount of personal unhappiness for elderly people.

The refusal to give people choice is unfair, but the practical matter of cost must also be considered. It has been estimated that about 14,000 people are in residential care in my county. Private home owners claim that they could save up to £100 a week on the true costs of running the county homes. The total saving would amount to £7 million. If it were only half true, the saving would still be more than £3 million and the county council could have avoided some of the cuts that it has had to make this year and in previous years.

I understand that a council cannot suddenly change from putting most people into county homes to putting no one into county homes. A gradual alteration in policy and a rundown in the present structure would be necessary. My criticism is that the county council has known for at least three years of the difficulties that it was going to have. It made no attempt to make major changes to its policy, so it is guilty of mismanaging the social service needs of the people of Northamptonshire. It has restricted choice and undertaken unnecessary over-spending. It has therefore failed to change its policies and to live within its budget.

The effect is that the county council has had to make cuts elsewhere—in other social services—which, if it had followed a sensible policy, would not have been necessary. Other people in Northamptonshire have suffered unnecessarily because of the service reductions that the county council has had to make and because of its failures. I am therefore entitled to accuse its leadership not just of being hypocritical and of pursuing party dogma but of not getting down to managing the council's resources properly.

The county council has decided that, for 1997–98, there will be no increase in the amount paid per pupil to school governors and managers—a real cut in funding. It has already refused in the current year to pass on to school managers and governors about £2 million that the Government had allowed it in last year's settlement. To reduce the amount in real terms and to make no allowance whatever for a teachers' pay increase next year clearly passes the buck from the county council to school governing bodies. Despite that, the local education authority still keeps about 25 per cent. of total education income.

This year, the county council has decided to cut hard in many regions because, according to the blurb from county hall, the position is so serious, but the truth is that the county council, or the LEA, are acting too late. They are just making matters worse than they might have been if they had tackled the problems earlier.

I understand that my friends on the county council who represent the Conservative cause will present an alternative budget that would increase the moneys given per pupil to schools. That will be an excellent proposal because it will help schools to fund the teachers' pay increase. I commend that alternative budget to the Labour party and to the Liberal Democrats and hope only that they will vote for it.

This year, budgets will of course be tight. All along I have felt that the only proper solution to the difficulties faced by many counties is to have a fairer calculation, but I was slightly taken aback, as I am sure other hon. Members were, by the emphatic and ringing declaration by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) that there was going to be root-and-branch reform of local government financing. I do not detect any great enthusiasm among local government officers or councillors, no matter which party they belong to, for another root-and-branch reform. Such a statement, with the only justification for the reform being that it will be fairer, tells us only that some sort of revolution will take place in local government financing. We are told, however, that nothing will happen for the next 12 months. If the reform is going to be that radical, it will take rather more than 12 months to introduce a totally new system of

local government financing. I surmise that what we have been told is going to be radical will be just another sort of tinkering with the present system.

Whatever the reform is, those words from the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras should send a chill down the spine of every councillor throughout Britain. He claimed that the Labour party had a clear policy, but instead we have a threat of great change when most people in local government want a period of stability. They want the unfairnesses taken out, but they do not want another new system of local government finance. There is no demand for it in the country or in local government. It is just one of those pipedreams that the Labour party has invented, but, as with all its pipedreams, it will not tell us how it is going to pay for it.

6.17 pm

Mr. Jon Trickett (Hemsworth): I think that I heard the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Sir P. Fry) refer to the current settlement as tight. In Wakefield, the region that I represent, it is far more than tight; it is devastating. It will devastate local communities. As you are no doubt aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker, even as we hold this debate, local councils are meeting to discuss precisely how to cope with the financial crisis. On the reform of local government finance, the settlement may be tight, but what is unacceptable is that it is inequitable. It is precisely that which is at the core of the Labour party's charges against the current settlement.

I understand that the matter was last debated in the House on 31 January last year. Unfortunately, I missed that debate because I was happily campaigning in the Hemsworth constituency waiting for the result that would be announced the following day. It was—

Mr. Mike Hall (Warrington, South): Very cold.

Mr. Trickett: It was very cold. I recently referred to that in Committee. I should like to share these comments with all hon. Members. It was so cold that parts of my anatomy—certain extremities—have still not defrosted, at least according to my wife.

Although I could not be in the House on that day, I am familiar to some extent with the secrets and mysteries of local government finance, as I was leader of Leeds city council for seven years and, before that, I sat on the management team for three years. Over a period of 10 years, I was responsible for discussing the expenditure of about £10 billion at today's prices. During those years, I learnt a great deal about local government; indeed, I became fondly attached to local government. I was able to witness at first hand the intelligence, integrity and entrepreneurial skills that many people brought to local government. The commitment to public service and civic values was, above all things, what inspired the vast majority of practitioners in local government.

During that period, local government quite literally had dozens of Acts of Parliament or legal enactments of one sort or another imposed on it by this Conservative Government—all of which, without exception, were aimed at constraining the ability of local government to serve its communities. I have every sympathy with local government because of the Government's record and, in particular, the current revenue support grant settlement, which I would describe as both misleading and perverse. I understand that it is not parliamentary to use the word "dishonest" when referring to hon. Members, but I hope that it is not unparliamentary to describe a policy as dishonest—if it is, I withdraw the word immediately and shall return to using the word "misleading".

It is misleading, if not downright dishonest, to reduce national taxation while squeezing local government—thereby bringing about an increase in local taxation and, therefore, an aggregate increase in the overall taxation burden. The Government have made a number of misleading statements. For example, they constantly claim—although it does not fool anybody—that the total increase in local authority spending is 2.5 per cent. However, local government reorganisation must be paid for out of that money, as well as additional policing and new community care clients. In addition, account must be taken of the demographic growth factors in education. Therefore, the spending increase is more like 1.5 per cent. There are further pressures on local government spending, such as inflation and a range of pay settlements that are outside the scope of local authority control.

The truth is that, whatever they say, the Government are effectively setting council tax levels. The scope for local action or creativity by local councillors and officials has all but disappeared. During the seven years that I was leader of my council, we experienced three different tax systems for local government—the old rating system; the ill-fated, disastrous and reactionary poll tax; and, now, council tax. The one that has finally put a straitjacket on local government is the council tax, with all the legal ramifications of capping and so on.

The settlement will cause real problems for local government. I want to talk about the national position before dealing with Wakefield in particular. The Department of Transport has admitted that the £146 million allocation for local road maintenance is inadequate if councils are to comply with the Department's code of practice, let alone with commitments under the citizens charter. The Office for Standards in Education, the Government body that regulates education, has said that standards in more than 5,000 schools have been adversely affected by book or equipment shortages. The British Geriatrics Society has said that shortfalls in social services funding are a significant contributory factor in NHS bed blocking. Serious problems face local government, which impact on local councils, on communities and, ultimately, on individuals throughout the length and breadth of the country.

I want now to deal with the problems facing the authorities that are described as the Webber-Craig authorities, of which Wakefield is one. If the settlement is severe nationally, the formula by which the RSG is distributed is perverse. It is that perversity which lies at the core of many of the problems facing authorities such as Wakefield and others in the Webber-Craig basket.

It has already been said that the formula under which the standard spending assessment is distributed is wholly perverse and does not have a semblance of fairness or equity about it, as can be shown times without number throughout the country. The index of social conditions tries to identify the amount of deprivation within an authority. It puts Wakefield as the 232nd most deprived council area out of 358. Why does Wakefield suffer so badly under the RSG distribution system? Why is

[Mr. Trickett]

Wakefield's SSA per head of population only just over £703, when the average for the whole of England is £37 more?

Everyone is aware of the extent of deprivation in the Wakefield area, so how can Wakefield end up £12 million short compared with the average? Indeed, if Wakefield were raised to the average of metropolitan districts, it would receive £20 million in additional resources. That would mean a great deal in, for example, Hemsworth—traditionally a solid mining area which, over the centuries, has contributed to the wealth of the nation. Now, sadly, it faces severe deprivation because of the closure of the mines.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): My hon. Friend is making an important point. During the past 15 years, Wakefield has lost 20,000 mining-related jobs, yet there appears to be no means within the mechanism for calculating the revenue support grant to take account of the efforts that the local authority has made on economic regeneration. That anomaly in the current arrangements affects my hon. Friend's constituency as well.

Mr. Trickett: My hon. Friend makes a telling and important point. A range of indices is used within the calculations, some of which are given far too much weight, while others are almost entirely ignored. For example, the devastating impact of the closure of mines on the local economic and social infrastructure should be taken into account.

I have been trying to illustrate the perversity in the way in which the formula operates. Why does Wakefield receive £2,536 per pupil when Wandsworth receives £3,551—a differential of about £1,000 per child? Perhaps we should worry about a system that puts a price on the head of a child. It is worrying to think that a child in Wandsworth is somehow considered to be worth £1,000 or 40 per cent. more than a child—or any other individual human being—living in Wakefield. It is a disgraceful system. How can it be justified, morally or otherwise?

Mr. Curry: I should like to pursue the hon. Gentleman's point. Is he saying that the amount per child should be the same across the country, or is he saying that he accepts that it should be different, but that the differential is too wide? It is a very important point. Does he accept, for example, that educating a population with a large ethnic minority group costs more? It is important to know exactly where he stands. It is easy to remark, "We get less, so it is unfair." In that differentiation, he must spell out what he thinks are the bounds of fairness.

Mr. Trickett: I thank the Minister for raising that issue. There are two or three issues to consider in the way in which the SSA system works, and the first is the system's obscurity. It is difficult for lay individuals, elected officials, hon. Members and, undoubtedly, Ministers to understand precisely how the figures are derived. When one analyses them, in many cases, it is difficult to justify the weight given to certain factors. Ethnicity is a difficult example, and it could bear further examination. I do not believe that an individual should be rewarded by additional funding under the SSA simply by virtue of his or her ethnicity. Funding should depend purely on a child's individual characteristics. Ethnicity illustrates the weaknesses of the SSA system.

I was asked about differentials. I find it very difficult to understand how a child in any area can possibly be worth £1,000—or about 40 per cent.—more to one local education authority than to another. The differential is large, and it will take some explaining. Human beings have different requirements and need different educational inputs, but it is difficult to understand how one child can be worth £1,000 more of Government money.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I thank the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intervene, which I do in a constructive manner. The Environment Committee—an all-party Committee—spent a great deal of time examining the current SSA system. We concluded, on the basis of all the evidence that we heard—we heard evidence from all the experts—that, although the system was not perfect, it was the best yet devised. Today I have heard much criticism of the system from the hon. Gentleman and from his colleagues, but none of them has been able constructively to tell the House how they would reform it so that it is fair to all councils.

Mr. Trickett: It seems to me, as the new boy, that the duty of the Opposition is to oppose, and not necessarily to make detailed proposals—at least not at this stage. It is up to the Government to propose a system, to live with the consequences and to face the Chamber's probing.

Another matter that I should mention in reply to the Minister's intervention is differentials between affluent and deprived areas. Wandsworth and Westminster, for example, are manifestly more prosperous than Wakefield. In children's social services, however, Wakefield receives £112 SSA per resident child aged 0 to 17 years, whereas Westminster—hon. Members may be astonished to learn—receives £554, which is almost 500 per cent. more. How can that possibly be justified, even if it were not manifestly obvious that Wakefield's needs are at least as great as those of Westminster?

The way in which all the factors are aggregated compounds the insult to the authorities forming the Webber-Craig group. If Wakefield were to receive per head the same SSA and RSG as Westminster, today a Labour group meeting would not be considering £15 million in cuts and a 9 per cent. council tax increase. If it were to receive the same amounts, we would be facing no cuts and there would be an £825 refund to every household.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Is that the policy that the hon. Gentleman has advocated?

Mr. Trickett: I shall not give way again, because that was an extremely silly point. The point that I am trying to make—I do not think that the hon. Gentleman is listening—is that the system is operating in an entirely perverse manner. How can a system allow such a result? If Wakefield were to receive the same per capita levels of RSG and SSA as Westminster, we could give away £825 to every household in the district and provide current service levels. That demonstrates the problem.

Mr. Hughes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Trickett: I will not give way again, because the hon. Gentleman's previous point was so absurd that I can

only presume that he will try to make another. I should also make some progress, as one of my hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench told me that I should not speak for more than 10 minutes. I apologise to hon. Members who are waiting to speak.

I should like to make one final point on the system's perversity. An index is used in social services which shows money allocated for children at risk, and one of the factors is the number of homeless households comprising a child and pregnant woman. In the past year in Wakefield, 26 individuals in that category have been housed. However, the consequence of that efficient management of resources and humanitarian attempt to get people back into housing has been an SSA reduction of almost half a million pounds. It is a bizarre situation, when efficiency and humanity in housing homeless women have been rewarded by cuts and vicious attacks on the authority.

Wakefield district, because of a perverse RSG settlement, might have to impose a 9.21 per cent. increase—which is £50 per household, or £1 per person per week—in council tax and £15 million in cuts. Hundreds of jobs are at risk, and individuals and families across the district are living in fear of what the council might decide. However, no one will make the mistake of attributing blame to Wakefield council, because the cuts are widely understood to be the result of central Government attacks.

6.38 pm

Sir Irvine Patnick (Sheffield, Hallam): I follow the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Trickett) and note that many hon. Members from Yorkshire constituencies are present. With you in the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker, at least what we are saying will be understood.

As my hon. Friend the Minister will anticipate, I am still concerned about the funding for supertram. I have mentioned the issue before and I shall mention it again. I am convinced that, if the problems with supertram were remedied, it would assist Sheffield with its funding.

The council summons records the treasurer's report on 4 December that,

"Government grant to Sheffield has actually gone down in cash terms by £2.8 million and the Council Tax is likely to have to be increased at the capped level by 8.1 per cent."

Since then, he has recast the figure, and it could be lower.

Over the years, Sheffield city council has compared itself with many cities. There is huge rivalry—as you are well aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker—between Sheffield and Leeds. Sheffield used to compare its funding with Leeds, taking into account facilities such as television centres. As soon as Leeds received less grant than Sheffield, the council moved its sights. I do not know how the council could have done this, but it then looked at Lancashire and started comparing itself with, of all places, Manchester. I thought that those on the council had taken leave of their senses. All along, Sheffield has looked around for a council that is receiving more grant and compared itself with that council.

The council summons gives the city treasurer's forecast that the city council will be £3.8 million overspent on its 1996-97 budget. As a result, it has put a stop to all non-essential expenditure, including staff overtime and many other items.

I read through the council summons report of the meeting on 29 January. It was like all my yesterdays again. Sheffield city council still carries on doing its great things. It has increased the size of the council summons, which is now up to 935 pages. It still has the attitude of a spend, spend, spend council.

As many hon. Members from Yorkshire will know, Sheffield city council used to have its own defence policy, its own foreign policy and its own constitutional policy. From my reading of the council summons, it seems that not a lot has changed.

This year, the council will have written off a further £411,000 of its housing committee debts—that is the amount of rent that it has been unable to collect. Once upon a time, the debt stood at £10 million. I have not had an opportunity to check the latest figure. In addition, it is still owed a lot of council tax and community charge.

I remember looking through the invoices not paid by the county council when I was deputy chairman of the South Yorkshire residuary body. I discovered that, in the 1980s, there were still outstanding unpaid debts from 1972–74, when the council was set up. The figures were shown in the accounts every year. I frequently wondered whether the money would have been forthcoming if the council had sold those debts. History will never let me know.

The council summons also shows that it let 12 contracts for housing maintenance. One of the organisations that weighed in with a tender was, of course, the Sheffield works department. The value of the works—painting, repairs and heating maintenance—was £9.45 million. A private contractor submitted a lower tender. There is a lovely piece of legalese in the council summons, referring to

"the quality criteria weightings for capability assessment, systems procedures, Council values/flexibility and user interface upon which the tenders have been evaluated"

and

"the quality points scored by the two lowest tenderers".

It came to pass that those tenderers were the works department and a private contractor. There are no prizes for guessing who was awarded the contract. Just in case it is not clear, the contract went to the works department.

What does that say about how Sheffield city council works? It had design fees for a school estimated to be £50,000 on a contract of £275,000, with a Government borrowing approval of £177,000, but the £50,000 went up to £65,000 and the £275,000 went up to £343,143.

Many Opposition Members have made much of Westminster. Coming from Sheffield, I find many differeaces in Westminster: refuse collection here is done by private contractors; street repairs are done by private contractors; road sweeping is done by private contractors. Sheffield had to be dragged, kicking and screaming, to bring such policies in. Road sweeping in Sheffield is still done by the local authority, whatever it wants to call itself, as is refuse collection.

I have listened to what Labour Members have said. If they think that the settlement is inadequate, they should provide some figures—such figures have been non-existent—on how much they would increase funding, and admit to the tax implications of that approach. Councils make decisions that determine the level of council tax. That is shown by the huge variations between bills. On average, band for band, Conservative councils cost nearly 50 per cent. less than Labour councils in 1996–97.

[Sir Irvine Patnick]

I have heard nothing from the Opposition about how they think the Government should change their policy. In Sheffield, we carry on in our own sweet way. We have the regional assembly. As I have mentioned to the House before, suddenly, funding was found for that.

The Labour party is trying to reassure everybody about what it will do. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) said on BBC news on 6 January this year:

"Councils are making their budgets at the moment and they're entitled to know where they stand. And I've made it quite clear that whatever settlement the Government forces through the House of Commons at the end of this month"—

I presume that that means today—

"will apply for the coming year—and that, of course, includes the capping limits which the Government has set."

Mr. Dobson: Spot on.

Sir Irvine Patnick: Pardon?

Mr. Dobson: Spot on.

Sir Irvine Patnick: I am sorry. I thought that I was going to have an aberration. The jokes have been the same, but there has been no new policy. I am sure that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras will not mind me saying that he has increased his volume of delivery.

The Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), said:

"You may have heard Frank Dobson say a couple of nights ago to local government: 'You have to work within the existing spending limits.' We could not be clearer about this, and if there are any proposals at all they will be made clear to people, but nothing in this programme implies rises in personal taxation."

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State remarked, the shadow Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), has said similar things.

A new Labour Government would mean higher council taxes and higher council debts as a result of Labour's commitment to allow councils to spend their capital receipts, which are currently set aside to offset council debt. We never hear in the Chamber about the fact that, because councils have capital receipts, they are reducing council debts. We just hear capital receipts talked about as a separate chunk of money which should be available to councils.

Across the country, Labour councillors have been criticising the amount that they will get from the Government next year, yet before the settlement, the chairmen of the Labour-dominated local government associations called for an increase in local authority spending of 5.1 per cent., which works out at £2.3 billion. That is a modest figure, so they advise me.

A survey conducted by the *Sunday Times* on 28 April 1996 showed that four out of five Labour council leaders hoped that a Labour Government would increase the money that councils could spend. Of the 80 council leaders questioned, 46 said that their authority would have spent more in the current year if it had been allowed to do so by the Government. The total amount required by the 49 leaders who were prepared to say how much they needed would mean an extra tax bill of almost £500 million.

The Liberal Democrats are not the angels they would have us believe. We heard nothing from the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) about what the Liberal Democrats would do about council tax. They confirmed in their "Alternative Budget" that they are the party of high taxation. In that document, they restated their intention to put a penny on income tax if they were in government, which would cost £12 a month for people on average male earnings. They announced their intention to introduce a higher rate of income tax of 50 per cent. on incomes above £100,000 and to introduce a new carbon tax which, they admitted, would cost everyone a "great deal of money".

One thing that becomes clear from the council summons for this year—this great book—is that the Liberal Democrats are fiddling while the city burns. While the city council was juggling away to balance the books in 1996-97 and setting a budget for 1997-98, Liberal Democrat councillors proposed a motion for the council minutes, calling on the city council to support the

"replacement of the House of Lords by a democratically elected second chamber . . . establishment of democratic parliaments in Scotland and Wales . . . devolution of power to the regions and communities of Britain",

and the introduction of "fair voting" and a "Freedom of Information Act". As I said earlier, Sheffield city council looked at foreign policy and the constitution. Years on, councillors are still doing that.

A confidential internal review of Liberal Democrat policy, "Towards 1996"—it was so confidential that it was leaked to *The Daily Telegraph*—contains a number of insights into the Liberal Democrat approach to finance. It admits that the Liberal Democrats are a "high tax party" and suggests that they

"should not be prevented from stating . . . strong principled support for an issue, just because it would unbalance the books."

The Liberal Democrats just want to throw money at education. That is a regressive party because its education policies are designed merely to thwart and dismantle Conservative reforms.

The Audit Commission, in its report "Paying the Piper" which was published on 6 January 1995, highlights clearly the areas where further efficiency savings in local government can be made. It says that 60 per cent. of council expenditure is on staff, yet its study of non-manual staff has found that

"few authorities have a consistent and coherent approach to three crucial questions: How many staff do they need? How much should they be paid? How can they get the best from their staff?"

I want to put on the record the words of Councillor Bower, the leader of Sheffield city council. He said:

"There is a great deal we can do with a budget of £600 million a year, and we ought to be doing it better than we currently are."

He was speaking at a meeting of the Sheffield chamber of commerce, and he added:

"The Council probably has the capacity to make enormous improvements in the services it currently operates, with the resources it currently has."

That was reported in *The Sheffield Star* of 17 December 1996.

Economies can be made in council spending. However, I finish where I started—if the funding for supertram can be sorted out by the Minister, the extra cash that would go to Rotherham, Barnsley, Doncaster and, above all, Sheffield would be gratefully received.

6.55 pm

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): I welcome the opportunity to talk about the funding crisis facing the city of Bristol. For this financial year, Bristol city council had to reduce its budget by £20 million to £310.1 million just to stay within the capping limit set by the Government; half the £20 million of cuts have yet to be implemented. Just to stay within the capping limit for 1997-98, the council will have to reduce its budget by a further £16 million.

It is important to remember that Bristol gets less Government financial assistance per head of population than any comparable city in England. Indeed, when I quoted some of the figures to colleagues who come from other metropolitan and large urban authorities, they thought that I must have made a mistake. There is no mistake. Bristol gets £538 per head of population compared with £747 in Birmingham, £835 in Manchester and £741 in Leicester. Bristol is, of course, an education authority. Next year's contribution from the Government is set to fall to £530 per head, so Bristol city council will remain the lowest spender per head of all the big urban authorities while we have the third highest council tax in England.

Bristol city council has made representations on the area cost adjustment—the Under-Secretary seems to think that this is funny—to the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration. During the time in which I have been a Member of Parliament, Bristol—this was also true of the old county of Avon—has sent annual deputations to the Department of the Environment pointing out that Bristol is a high-cost area in a low-cost region and that the area cost adjustment is manifestly unfair. The Government must have accepted that there was some unfairness in the area cost adjustment, because they would not otherwise have asked Professor Elliot of Aberdeen university to conduct a review. If that review were implemented, Bristol would get an extra £11 million a year.

In Bristol, the uniform business rate is beginning to be called the missing millions. The Government say that they are against nationalisation, but they seem to have nationalised the business rate. Many people in Bristol are angry about the fact that £15 million of the money that Bristol businesses pay in their business rate to the city goes straight to Whitehall and is distributed by the Government to other councils. We were astonished to discover that in the uniform business rate regime Bristol lost, while towns such as Tewkesbury gained considerable sums. Nobody can say that the costs of running Tewkesbury are comparatively greater than the costs of running Bristol.

Bristol also had to face the costs of reorganisation when it became a unitary authority earlier this year. The Government have not fully recognised those costs.

Bristol was proud of its record as an education authority until local government reorganisation in the early 1970s. We have an excellent nursery education system and there are seven nursery schools in my constituency. There is none in the entire county of Gloucestershire. Bristol is pioneering the idea of community schools which stay open from early in the morning until late at night. They attract people of all ages from all sections of the community and reinforce the concepts of lifelong learning and the learning family. That good work will be threatened, because the 1997-98 base budget is £17 million more than the Government consider necessary. They then have the cheek to say that Bristol is getting more money for education.

The allowed increase in education—1.8 per cent.—will not cover inflation, let alone the teachers' pay award. This year, Bristol will have the first ever cut in its schools' budget, which will be reduced by 1 per cent. It is likely to be followed next year by a cut of between 3 and 5 per cent. The city of Bristol and Avon county council have always protected the aggregated schools budget, which is why none of our schools considered opting out.

It is all a far cry from Westminster. As my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) said, we are talking about unfairness. If Bristol received the same funding as Westminster, it could reduce the council tax by £484 or employ an extra 1,531 teachers. This year, Bristol may have to sack 450 teachers. If it received the same funding as Westminster, Gloucestershire could have 3,091 extra teachers or reduce the council tax by £831 in the city of Gloucester and £612 in the Forest of Dean. I am amazed that Tory Members can troop into the Lobby to support a local authority settlement that causes such damage to their own areas.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Lady may be deceiving my electors in Gloucestershire. Opposition Front Benchers have already agreed not to increase expenditure next year, the year after and the year after that. If the hon. Lady is proposing an increase in overall expenditure for local authorities, will she please tell us where the money will come from?

Ms Corston: It is amazing that Conservative Members are increasingly behaving as if they were in opposition. We are debating a settlement that has been imposed by the Government and their record of 18 years. Let the hon. Gentleman defend that to the people of Gloucestershire; I do not have to do that.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Corston: No. I have given way to the hon. Gentleman and he can make his own speech later.

Bristol also has regional responsibilities. Bristol council tax payers are expected to provide cultural, arts, leisure, recreational and tourist facilities and regional shopping for people who live in the surrounding area—those people do not have to make any contribution; Bristol council tax payers have to pay the bill.

On 10 January, there was a conference at the Council house in Bristol to enable the city council to explain to representatives from different sectors of the community the depth of the funding crisis facing the city. The chairman of Bristol 2000 asked:

"Why is the Government behaving so illogically towards Bristol?"

A head teacher said:

"The only remaining cuts are of people."

[Ms Corston]

The chief executive of the Bristol chamber for commerce and initiative said that there was an obvious disparity in funding and, although there were exemplary partnerships between the public and private sectors in Bristol, the private sector could not possibly fill the gap.

The conference debunked many of the myths about Bristol which had been put about by Tories in and outside the city in respect of money being wasted on bureaucracy—an accusation that did not stick—and collection rates for the council tax. The latter story was put about by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the right hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave), but it has been demonstrated that Bristol's council tax collection rate is only 2 per cent. below the national average. The most amazing aspect is that the architect of the two budgets that have caused Bristol's problems is none other than that right hon. Gentleman. No one would deny him his place in the Cabinet or the opportunity to sit on the Government Front Bench, but he should stop and consider that his prime duty is to the people of Bristol, who feel angry at the way in which he has sought to evade responsibility.

The right hon. Member for Bristol, West attended the conference on 10 January, as I did, and it was extraordinary that he did not take the opportunity to explain or defend the Government's financial settlement for Bristol and other local authorities. I gather that he is now writing to constituents acknowledging that Bristol is hard done by—but it was done by him.

The Tories have grown used to pushing certain buttons in respect of local government. They talk about high-spending Labour local authorities, but that is a bit rich, considering that people have rejected Tory authorities wholesale. The Tories can no longer rely on that. The local press reaction in Bristol was not what they expected. The leading article in the *Bristol Evening Post* on 13 January said:

"making final choices will not be easy."

It acknowledged that

"no one will envy the councillors the tough choices they must make."

and asked:

"How do you choose between employing fewer teachers and closing an old folks' home?"

That was a sympathetic and understanding response.

The choices facing the city of Bristol are: axing up to 450 teaching posts, closing up to three homes for elderly persons, and closing youth clubs and up to two child and family support centres. This year's settlement will inflict real damage and harm on one of our foremost cities. Not a single alternative proposal has come from local Tories.

We cannot put children on a waiting list for their education in the same way as patients are on waiting lists for hip replacements. Children must have their education tomorrow, this term and this year. They cannot wait another two or three years for things to get better. Parents in Bristol want an assurance here and now that they will be able to provide the best for their children. Many of them have written to me saying, "We shall have a Labour Government in May, so things can change on 2 May, can't they?" However, the measures that we are debating now will take effect next year. Local authorities have to set their budgets by the beginning of March, so any changes will not come through for a couple of years.

We have such a thing as local democracy. Many of my hon. Friends and I have been astonished at the Government's denial of local democracy and accountability and the overcentralisation of power. It was once explained to me somewhat patronisingly by a Conservative Member, who said, "We do not have to take quite so much notice of local government as you suggest, because more people vote for us than vote for them. Only a few hundred people vote for local councillors, whereas tens of thousands of people vote for us." That seemed to be a pretty bogus argument, because local councils and local government have the same political legitimacy as we do and the way in which the Government have treated local authorities in general, and my city of Bristol in particular, is one reason why at the next general election there will be no Conservative Members left in our city.

7.9 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Normally, one thanks Madam Speaker or the Deputy Speaker for calling one early in a debate. I am glad that I have not been called too early in this debate, because I have been able to listen with interest to various voices on the Opposition Benches. Opposition Members have been very good, followed their brief, kept their heads down, avoided the arguments and banged on about points made by Labour party researchers, which is very commendable from their party's point of view.

Such speeches have been interesting, because Labour Members have been trying to peddle points that are incompatible with each other. They have been trying to tell people that, if there were a Labour Government—the hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston) said it too—they could do nothing for a couple of years because the budgets would have been set by the councils. Let us be clear: that is simply not true.

If there were a Labour Government and they wanted to increase the money going to local authorities, they could do it in a new Budget. They could make extra money available, change the regulations, change the capping levels and give more spending and borrowing permission. Labour Members recognise, however, that, if they say all that, the financial writers and people who understand the economy will rumble what the Labour party is about. Labour Members recognise that they cannot breathe a word of all that before the election. If the Labour party wants to pretend to be a tax-cutting party—

Ms Corston: What about the Government's policy?

Mr. Hughes: With the greatest of respect, the hon. Lady spent most of her speech talking about Conservative Members. It is therefore perfectly reasonable for me to talk about Labour policy. I shall come to Conservative matters in a moment. *[Interruption.]* Oh, God, I see that twittering Hilary is back just in time for my speech.

Mr. Deputy Speaker): Order. The hon. Gentleman should retract what he has just said. That is not the type of language that should be used in the House.

Mr. Hughes: I should have said the twittering hon. Member for North–West Durham (Ms Armstrong).

The Labour party wants us to believe that it is financially responsible and would not increase taxes, yet we get all the talk about Westminster. Why do Labour Members go on and on about Westminster? It is because they want us and their constituents to believe that what happens is all a political fix—that Westminster and Wandsworth are given all the extra money because they are Conservative authorities. Why do Labour Members not look at the figures? I see that all the Labour Members have briefing notes in lovely Labour party yellow.

Ms Corston: I have the report.

Mr. Hughes: If the hon. Lady had read it—it is a rather nice yellow—she would have the same figures as me.

Mr. Dobson: The hon. Gentleman is a clown.

Mr. Hughes: Being called a clown by the hon. Gentleman is praise indeed.

Mr. Hardy: Would the hon. Gentleman care to comment on his calculation? He will agree that roughly two thirds of local authority expenditure goes on education. If the proportion of Westminster's population of children in school is half that in Rotherham, why does Westminster get between four and five times per head more from central Government?

Mr. Hughes: Obviously, I do not know, because I do not know the hon. Gentleman's constituency well. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman wants to intervene again, I shall let him do so in a moment. The point is, why does Islington get much more than Westminster? If I represented Westminster or Wandsworth, I would demand to know why my council was not getting as much as Hackney, Tower Hamlets or Islington. I do not think that anybody in the House would disagree that the cost of running services in inner London is higher than in the rest of the country. Why does Westminster, which is so often quoted by the Labour party, come only about halfway down the league table of inner-London authorities? There are only 12 authorities in inner London, yet Westminster is sixth in the table.

Why does the Labour party bang on about Westminster? It is because Westminster is Conservative controlled and Labour Members can make a cheap political point, and because they want people to believe that, were there ever to be a Labour Government, somehow more money would be given to each of their Labour local authorities, just like more money is given to Westminster. There can be no other reason for banging on about the same point speech after speech. They do so simply to mislead people into thinking that more money will be forthcoming.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) has told us that there would not be any more money. His speech was designed for the shadow Chancellor and the City. We are, however, told that more money would go to some local authorities because the way in which the grants were allocated would be changed. What the hon. Gentleman omits to tell people is that calculations must be made on the basis of the most recent information in the Secretary of State's hands and that, if the Secretary of State does not use it, that Secretary of State will be up for judicial review.

If the system were rigged as the Labour party claims, and it were based on the Secretary of State's political will, it would be inconceivable that Labour local authorities would not try for a judicial review and win it. If the money were there, they would go after it. Many of us, on both sides of the House, who have served in local government know that. It is notable that authorities have not taken such an opportunity. Why have they not done so? It is because they know that what the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras says is complete nonsense. They know that, were there to be a Labour Government, the formula would have to be of the same sort, however it was tinkered with, and that such a formula would inevitably produce a system that could be parodied as unfair.

Hon. Members who probably have almost no knowledge of Wandsworth or Westminster ask how such areas can possibly be more deprived than others, especially the ones that they represent. They do not know whether such areas are more deprived. Such a judgment can be based only on the proper indices. If the indices were not the correct ones, they could not have been used because the Government would not have been able to sustain them.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): Does the hon. Gentleman accept the enhanced population figures with which my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) dealt?

The other side of the coin of Westminster's population being swollen by 81 per cent. and being added to the calculation due to people entering the area to work is that areas such as north-east Derbyshire lose 18 per cent. of their population under the calculation because people work outside them. North-east Derbyshire therefore loses grants for that 18 per cent.

A sensible and reasonably weighted enhanced population figure would mean that Westminster would receive much less grant and areas such as north-east Derbyshire much more. Such a methodology for the standard spending assessment would be much more reasonable.

Mr. Hughes: There are, of course, two sides to each element. In a sense, it is swings and roundabouts—sometimes one loses, sometimes one wins. Such arguments have to be put by individual local authorities. Indeed, local authorities have to try to persuade their political friends that such changes should be made.

I turn to one element that affects the borough of Harrow in my constituency: the area cost adjustment, of which much has been made in this debate. What happened with the Association of London Government? It was a Labour party stitch-up. The Labour party in central London did not, of course, want to lose the money that it would inevitably lose if there were a change in the area cost adjustment, as has been suggested.

What happened? Outer London Labour boroughs—not all, but some—voted with the Labour party in inner London to say that they did not want any change in the area cost adjustment and that further studies should be carried out. They did that because they wanted to maintain Labour party solidarity—not solidarity with the people in the boroughs. Their decision had nothing to do with fairness. Local government should not be run in that way.

[Mr. Hughes]

The Labour party in London voted virtually unanimously to stop a change in the area cost adjustment that would have been to the benefit of my constituents.

I wish to refer to the Liberal Democrats, for whom the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) made a characteristic speech. It is also characteristic that, although the Liberal Democrats bang on about these matters throughout the country, there has been one Liberal Democrat Member in the Chamber—perhaps on a shift system—to listen to or take part in the debate. The Liberal Democrats tell us that they would pay for extra services, and speak as if they were the only honest people in politics. They always refer to the extra penny on income tax that would pay for these extra services.

Even in the limited speech that we heard from the hon. Member for Newbury, we heard about the tax increase. However, that increase would not be a penny—a penny does not sound like very much. It is interesting that, when detailed opinion polls are done, people think that the Liberals are talking about just a penny more. They do not understand that the Liberals are really talking about £12 a month in extra taxation for an average wage earner. When that is explained, people are much less ready to back the Liberals' suggestion for an increase in income tax.

The hon. Member for Newbury was not talking about £12 a month, and his shopping list would amount to more like £24 or £26 a month. Add that figure to all the extra money that the Liberals want to spend in other areas—which were not mentioned tonight—and we are speaking about £30 or £40 a month in extra taxation. We can dismiss the Liberals' tricks from this debate, and I now wish to refer to my borough of Harrow.

First, I thank the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford), for his patience in dealing with a delegation from some parties in Harrow. I am afraid to say that the matter has become so politicised by the Liberal and Labour parties in Harrow that it was impossible to have a joint delegation. As is typical of the Liberals in Harrow, so political did they want to make the matter that they did not want to consult the Members of Parliament who represent Harrow. We had to fight to find out when the delegation was visiting my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary.

Even to this day, the Liberal council has refused to give me the paper that it gave my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary in support of its argument. The council tried to fob me off with a paper that I was told was the paper presented, but I know different. All the council gave me was the crib sheet from which it was working when it spoke to my hon. Friend. I am grateful to him for seeing that delegation, and I know from the people who attended that he listened patiently to what was said.

I am also grateful to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary for the patient way in which he has listened to the arguments from me and my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes). We have sought to put to him the important point about the area cost adjustment, and—even if it is not this year—I hope that he realises that outer London needs a change in the adjustment. We have made our points to him with some force, and he has listened patiently.

Harrow has made some points about its education standard spending assessment, but even the council officers say that their argument is weak and that they are obliged to accept that the methodology of the Department is right. For example, Harrow has argued that it has lost money in education SSA because of a change in the way in which the number of income support claimants is measured. The council wants to return to the old method. I can understand that—Harrow did better under the old method.

The old method of collecting data was based on a 5 per cent. survey which showed that, in 1997-98, there would be 10,626 children of income support claimants in Harrow schools. When a 100 per cent. survey was done, it showed that the figure would be 9,726—a 3.5 per cent. reduction. That does not sound like much, but it is a significant amount of money out of Harrow's education SSA. It can hardly be argued that it would be right to return to the previous way of assessing these matters—a 5 per cent. survey—rather than using the current 100 per cent. survey. Much as I would like to see the money going back to Harrow, no one could argue logically for the use of the old methodology. There must be boroughs and councils up and down the country that gain from the new methodology and that would therefore object strongly if we were to return to a less accurate way of doing things.

This is a tight settlement for Harrow, and I do not object to that. In running the economy, the Government must take account of the fact that local authority expenditure is 25 per cent. of the whole of Government expenditure. Therefore, not controlling local authority spending would be foolish indeed. That is certainly not the way in which I or my voters would expect a Conservative Government to behave. What do we get from Harrow? We get an absolute torrent of invective from the Liberals, who do not control the council but form the largest group. They say that they have been handbagged by the Government, and they have used the word "mugged" in their newsletters. They said that they expected £22 million extra from the Government, but that was not true and it never has been true. That figure was the difference between their wish list and the money that was to be made available to them.

I pay tribute to the Liberal party, as it is a fantastic campaigning organisation. In terms of propaganda, it is second only to Goebbels. The Liberals are wonderful at getting their message across. If they would use only 1 per cent. of the energy they use in putting across their propaganda in running the finances of Harrow council properly, Harrow would be a better place today. For three years, we have suffered under a Liberal-run administration whose profligacy has been amazing.

There is a hole in the council's budget—it has had to threaten large cuts in delegated school budgets—because it has spent money on pet projects, notable among which has been the establishment of a driving centre. That is a centre where trainee drivers can go and where the highway code can be taught. It is commendable, but is it a priority? A driving centre in Harrow—which was opened when my party controlled the council—ran reasonably successfully for a number of years, but it was a huge drain on resources. When the time came to make a choice between social services and education on the one hand and keeping open the driving centre on the other, a Conservative administration in Harrow had no choice and closed the driving centre. I think that was the right decision.

When they took power, the Liberals made it a priority to reopen the driving centre. How can that possibly take priority over education? They have spent money on pet projects and ordered council officers to stop looking for savings. Everyone who has been on a council knows that, throughout the year and outside the normal budgeting process, the council has to look for sensible savings. It has to look for money that is wasted or that can be clawed back to be spent on priority areas, and that is true whether the council is run by the Labour party or the Conservatives. The Liberals have stopped council officers doing so, have spent money on pet projects and have upped their councillors' allowances to the tune of £190,000, which is a lot of money for a council. The Liberals have spent that money on other things and have a hole in their budget which is difficult to fill.

The Conservatives have not been in power in Harrow, so we have not been able to make those savings. All that we can do is to try to patch up the budget as it stands. It is clear from the Conservative alternative budget, however—the Labour and Liberal parties even tried to block debate on that, but failed because we called a special council meeting—that it is possible to maintain school budgets without any cuts, retain the vital social services threatened with cuts and make cuts in other areas. That is what a responsible council would do in Harrow. That is what anyone running the council who meant business would do.

I shall make one prediction. I do not believe that the school budgets will be cut, and I shall tell hon. Members why. Once again, the Liberals have been led up the hill by the Labour party. Whereas I may disagree with Labour party policies in Harrow, I think that Labour councillors know what they are doing. They have led the Liberals by the nose and will cut them off when they get to the top of the hill. The Labour party will then come up with a budget that will mean no cuts in school budgets. Doubtless, that will come through.

I hope that the Liberals will be left high and dry where they ought to be—exposed as a bunch of amateurs who do not know how to run a council, who are dangerous to the people of Harrow and who ought to be drummed out at the first opportunity.

7.31 pm

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): This is the fag end of a Parliament and of a Government. The sole remaining serious business of the Government is to make life as difficult as they can for those who will come after them to pick up their burdens.

Since the present Prime Minister became Prime Minister, we have doubled the national debt. In six years, we have borrowed the amount of money that it took 300 years of British Governments to borrow from when the national debt began to May 1979. That is an inheritance that all hon. Members who speak in such debates must bear in mind.

With respect, the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), who spoke for the Liberals, sought to bypass that problem, unwisely. It ought to influence all our discussions on this matter. I do not, therefore, come here from the city of Newcastle to ask for bold changes in the Government grant system from this Government. I do not even come here, as every Conservative Member who has spoken in the debate has come here, to ask for changes in the Government grant regime, welcome though those might be in some respects. All we ask in the city of Newcastle at this time—as time is running out for this Government—is a little flexibility to manage our affairs with our money and to have a sensible debate in our city about how much we think we can afford to put into our local council services.

The problems in our city are formidable. Across the city, two in five of all children are brought up in families who are dependent on income support. My predecessor tried a ludicrous stunt—trying to live for a week on the dole. In the city of Newcastle, those two in five children are not living for a week on the dole—most of them have spent a lifetime in families who are dependent on income support. That damages them, their neighbourhoods and their community.

In one small area of the west end of Newcastle, which is represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) and myself, 1,000 children between 18 and 20 have left school and have no work. The effect on the neighbourhoods in which they live is dreadful. Their prospects are limited.

The Government have cargo culted in sums of money that are time limited over a brief period, leaving an inheritance of voluntary sector projects that are doing good work. We should have the flexibility to absorb some of those projects into the main spending of the local authority. All that we ask for is that the city council should have enough money to match the resources that it is supposed to match within the terms of the additional Government grant scheme, which the Government gave to the city only this year.

All that we ask for is a little flexibility to deal with our education problems. The Government grant assessment per child in Newcastle has changed by £35 in the past four years. It is a totally unrealistic figure. Due to the way in which the capping limits now work in Newcastle, we are contemplating spending only £2 per head more per child next year than we spent in schools four years ago. Is it any wonder that every school in the city has run out of supply cover and has mixed-year classes and that 3,000 more children are being educated in classes of more than 30 than were four years ago?

We do not ask the Government to cargo cult in more money from Government. We ask that, in the time left to them, they give us the opportunity to have a sensible debate within our city about how much more we can all afford to contribute as citizens of that city to make up that difference. That is all we ask. In the time remaining to this Government, it is not an unreasonable request.

That is the issue that we put to the Government tonight. We do not expect them to do now things that in the past 18 years they have never done, or to solve all the problems of our city that have been created in those 18 years. It is too late for them and it is now too late for us. All that we ask is that in the last few weeks of this Government, while they still have the authority of a Government, they give us the opportunity as a city to debate how much of our money we will put in. It is not much to ask. In the remaining time of this Government, surely it is a request that, even now, they might meet. It will cost them nothing.

7.37 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): The speech by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) has been the only speech that I have enjoyed in a debate that has been appalling. In general, I try to avoid these debates because basically they are made up of a politically motivated exchange of views that are a load of rubbish and, unfortunately, one finds that the Opposition say today what the Conservative party may well say if there is a change of Government after the election. The situation is complex, with standard spending assessments, grants and capping levels. Unfortunately, it is so complex that it is possible for almost everything to be misinterpreted.

On the strict understanding that I do not single out the Opposition for blame, I must draw attention to their campaign against Westminster. If, by chance, it happened to be true that the Conservative Government have deliberately picked on Westminster and said, "We will give you a nice settlement because you happen to be a nice Conservative council," I hope that the Opposition will say why the previous Labour Government were even more generous to Westminster.

The hon. Member for North–West Durham (Ms Armstrong) is shaking her head, but I happen to have the figures. Westminster was given £487 per head, compared with £327 for Liverpool, a difference of 50 per cent.; so the last Labour Government gave Westminster 50 per cent. more than they gave the unfortunate, sad and miserable people of Liverpool. That seems a foul and filthy thing to do, but they did it.

Under the present Government, in every year since 1991, the SSA for Westminster has increased by less than the inner London average. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) may shout about it, but he should consider why the last Labour Government gave Westminster 50 per cent. more than Liverpool, whereas today it gets only one third more. That is a straight fact, although I see that the hon. Member for North–West Durham wants to challenge it.

Ms Armstrong: The problem is that the Minister has written to me, after many months of my trying to get an answer, to say that the figures for the year that the hon. Gentleman has cited are not in any way comparable with the current figures for Westminster. He said:

> "In my written answer, I pointed out that figures on a comparable basis, to facilitate year on year comparisons, are available only from 1992-93 onwards."

That is the reality that the Minister had eventually to admit. We cannot compare the figures, because the calculations used to be made on a totally different basis.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I am sure that there have been many changes, but I am making a simple, basic point. Is it or is it not true that the last Labour Government gave 50 per cent. more to Westminster than to Liverpool, and that the wonderful—or miserable, depending on one's point of view—Conservative Government are giving it only one third more?

What has been happening is appalling. Labour issued figures that I know about, because my local press said, along with everyone else, that the proportion of expenditure from the council tax for Westminster was only 4 per cent., and that that was terribly unfair, when the figure for Tower Hamlets was 10 per cent. and for Lambeth 13 per cent. It seemed as though the Government were giving a big handout to Westminster while poor old Tower Hamlets and Lambeth were being hammered.

The fact, however, is that the figure cited by the Labour party was for 1994. Currently, the figure for Westminster is 14 per cent.; for Tower Hamlets, 10 per cent.; and for Lambeth, 13 per cent. I am not trying to say that the Labour and Conservative parties are comparing bad with good. When the Government have imposed a tight settlement and we all know that the Labour party would make no significant change but would apply the same tight figures if it came to power, the political gerrymandering and fiddling with figures that we have heard are almost an insult to democracy.

I am no special friend of Westminster, because I have to work there, but the plain fact is that it has a higher density of population than Hackney, Islington, Lambeth or Southwark; and a higher proportion of people from ethnic minorities, people living in overcrowded accommodation and people aged over 85 than Islington, Lambeth and Southwark. If there has been any unfairness and Westminster has been given a special privilege, that was more pronounced under a Labour Government and has grown steadily less. I challenge any Labour Member to say that that is not true.

Some of my hon. Friends have said equally unfair things about Liberal councils. I wish in all sincerity that people would appreciate that most councils, irrespective of who controls them, are trying their best to do an extremely difficult job and need encouragement, not propaganda.

I have a couple of questions for the Government which are important to me as a representative of Southend-on-Sea. Southend has accepted the great challenge of becoming a unitary borough next year. When it takes responsibility for social services, for that part of education that we still control, and for libraries and museums, there will obviously have to be a new grant settlement. We are worried, because we have listened for years to Essex county council saying that it has to subsidise Southend.

Essex county councillors have told me that they are giving us lots of money because of our special problems. Those problems include a higher than average share of unemployment; a large number of houses in multiple occupation; and a large number of elderly people. We simply want to know whether, when the grants are reviewed, Southend will get a fair deal that takes into account its special problems. Will the Minister give me some assurance that that will happen and some idea about how it will happen? I appreciate that almost every council has difficulties, but when there is a change in the system the specific problems of a place should be taken into account.

I want to make a point about the situation facing Essex county council, from which Southend will break away next year. Like many councils, Essex county council has an acute financial problem.

Mr. Cousins: Did the hon. Gentleman argue in favour of unitary status for Southend and, if so, why did not he consider those issues then?

Sir Teddy Taylor: I supported Southend becoming a unitary borough, because I always feel that it is better

for decisions to be made at local level by one group of councillors, so that we do not get into the position where the borough blames the county and the county blames the borough.

I endeavoured at the time to get the issue of funding clarified by the Government. I received some helpful messages and I hope that, as the change is about to happen, they will be confirmed. That is one reason for saying these things in this debate, in which everything is on the record.

Even if Southend does not get better services, it will certainly have less confusion. Nothing is worse in local government than to have one part blaming the other for its problems. If everything is run by one council we shall at least know where responsibility lies—to the extent to which it is not assumed by central Government.

Essex county council has acute financial problems even though, unlike Southend borough, it had what appeared to be a reasonable financial settlement. The problem is that the county council has for several years been overspending by about £5 million a year on its fire budget, taking money away from other services. It is important to find out why that is so, because there could be several reasons.

One reason could be appalling inefficiency, but an investigation recently conducted by an outside authority said that the Essex fire authority was extremely efficient and appeared to live up to all the appropriate priorities and responsibilities for such departments, so that cannot be the answer.

What is the fire authority to do when suddenly faced, as at present, with a new report saying that it has to open extra fire stations? One of those is in an airport of which the Minister will be well aware—the local national airport, not far from where I live—and the other is in a town in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Newton), where there are big fire problems.

Essex county council faces a bit of a nightmare, as it is already overspending and has been asked to provide that extra fire cover. It has proposed closing three fire stations: one in Rochford; one in Leigh-on-Sea; and the other in Canvey Island. Those proposals are considered preposterous and outrageous by the local community, because we have more people, more buildings and more calls on the fire service than we have ever had, and it seems especially unfair to choose three stations in the south of the county, where we cannot call on other fire authorities, as can be done in the north, because there is water between us and Kent. What can be done about that? Essex could have requested additional SSA from the Government before 10 January to enable it to spend a little more money. Unfortunately, it did not, but it says that it wrote to the Minister expressing its concern about spending at the end of December. It had a reply before 10 January saying that the Government would bear that point in mind.

The big problem is what to do now. Would the Government consider, in the light of the special circumstances, the council spending above its capping level? The difficulty for the county is that if it takes a gamble and spends more than its capping because of the special problem and the Government say, "Get lost," it could face a horrendous bill of £500 million and have to send new local taxation demands to all residents.

Another problem is that Essex county council seems to have had favourable financial settlements over the years. However, the fire service presents a special problem. I would like the Minister to say that he appreciates that carefully negotiated schemes have been drawn to assess priorities. However, what can be done when a service facing special demands, and which has been overspending rather wildly in recent years, has huge new demands placed on it? It would help Essex if the Minister would consider this special, acute problem and would have a word with local Members and councils—not confrontationally, but to examine what can be done.

I in no way suggest that things are necessarily better under a Conservative Government than under a Labour Government. As a Conservative, I believe that our long-term policies are better for the country, but I fear that when special local government funding problems arise, there appears to be no system for examining them and finding whether they can be solved. I hope that the Minister will examine the problem and realise that a serious issue is involved. Although none of the fire stations involved is in my constituency, I would be appalled if fire stations that served areas of increasing need had to be closed simply because an addition burden had been placed on the service. The Government may consider that because our national airport requires additional cover, something extra should be done.

I hope that we can resolve the matter without getting involved in politics. Sadly, politics has been one of the nightmares of local government. I was a councillor for five years in the city of Glasgow, where I represented the Glasgow Progressive party. It was not linked to any other party but it controlled Glasgow and things went very well. When politics came into local government, everything was blamed on the other parties and if we could not blame them, we tended to blame the Government. Whether Labour, Conservative or Liberal Democrat, most councillors endeavour to do the best job that they can for their communities.

The blatant misrepresentation of the Government's policies in the debate has been appalling. The Opposition have tried to suggest that the Government tried to resolve the matter in favour of Conservative councils. My local paper telephoned me before the debate and told me that it had been telephoned by Liverpool Labour party, which had said that if Southend-on-Sea had the same education settlement as Westminster, it could have 7,000 more teachers. That must be either true or untrue. It is either devious, horrible and miserable or wildly out of range. I told the paper that I would raise the matter in the House. I ask the Minister for his thoughts, which I shall ensure are communicated to the people of Southend. We need the truth in such matters, not the blatant distortions that we get from all parties, and especially, I am afraid, from parties in opposition.

In view of the present campaign to bash policy on Westminster, I hope that the Minister will remind people that Westminster got a far better deal under a Labour Government than it gets under this Conservative Government. The facts are clear. If there is any doubt, let hon. Members examine the figures that I have with me. I hope that the Government will try to do what is proper and correct, and tell people the truth. Truth is the secret weapon in politics. If we had more truth and less propaganda, there would be less disappointment in local government and less of a feeling that nobody understood its problems or responsibilities.

7.54 pm

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I was interested that the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) said that local councillors are hard working and require encouragement: that is precisely what the Opposition try to give.

I shall briefly consider the national settlement and relate it to the local settlement and the implications for Barnsley. The Secretary of State announced his 1997–98 proposals for local government finance on 27 November 1996. Total central Government support is £33.185 billion. After taking account of nursery vouchers and community care, that represents a year-on-year increase of only 0.6 per cent., which is further reduced to 0.2 per cent. if police funding is removed. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Trickett) said, the figures are misleading and they impose a harsh settlement that will cause enormous difficulties, especially in my local authority of Barnsley.

In their submissions to the Secretary of State, the local authority associations pointed out that in the previous year, 1996–97, local authorities budgeted to spend £2.522 billion, or 5.6 per cent., more than was provided for in the actual settlement. Their assessment was that the 1997–98 settlement would require another £2.264 billion if services were to be maintained. They argued for a 9 per cent. increase. The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) said that the local authority associations have not suggested any formula changes. They may not have suggested changing the methodology, but they certainly said that some modification to the way in which the settlement was made was needed.

It is clear that the Government's settlement falls well short of what the local authority associations required. After adjustment for funding changes, the 1997–98 settlement is an increase of only 1.8 per cent. When that is further adjusted to take account of the disproportionate increase for police services, the result is a 1.5 per cent. increase for other local authority services. In real terms, it is effectively a 1 per cent. reduction. Perhaps the Minister could comment on that.

The implications for Barnsley are enormous. Its provisional standard spending assessment for 1997–98 is £156.63 million. After adjusting for changes in national funding arrangements, that is only 0.8 per cent. higher than the current year equivalent. However, in real terms, according to figures from the local metropolitan borough council treasurers department, it is a reduction of 1.7 per cent. Barnsley's increase is broadly in line with the overall metropolitan district increase of only 0.9 per cent. For SSA per head of population, we are still in 31st place in the league table of 36. Although there have been no major SSA methodology changes in 1997–98, Barnsley, which is a good provider of nursery education, has suffered as a consequence of the Secretary of State's decision to make deductions from the under-fives SSA block based on current nursery provision for four-year-olds. Although that is presumably an unintended consequence, it must be taken into consideration.

Under the proposed capping criteria for the metropolitan districts, Barnsley's 1997–98 provisional cap is £160.869 million. The cap is roughly 2.6 per cent. above SSA, compared with the 2 per cent. tolerance for the current year. However, that tolerance remains significantly lower than the metropolitan district average of 6.4 per cent. It compares particularly unfavourably with Stockport's tolerance of 12.5 per cent. The difference between Barnsley's tolerance above SSA and the metropolitan district average equates to about £6 million in budgetary terms. Perhaps the Minister will consider that point. Calculations have confirmed that the capping level will force Barnsley metropolitan authority to cut services by about £10 million this year. In the eight years since SSAs were introduced in 1990-91, Barnsley metropolitan council has been forced to cut community services by almost £60 million. Such cuts are enormously detrimental to the community.

I urge the Minister to consider the problems and the needs of Barnsley metropolitan borough council. The cut in local authority services in Barnsley is particularly devastating as it comes on top of the collapse of the coal mining industry and associated engineering business. The Minister winces—I do not know whether that is because he is reaching over or because I have mentioned the coal industry—but I assure him that Barnsley is in enormous trouble, despite its attempts to regenerate the local economy. For example, employment in Barnsley fell by 19 per cent. between 1981 and 1991, compared with a 3 per cent. increase nationally. That shows the scale of our unemployment problem.

I refer the Minister to a recent study conducted by Coopers and Lybrand and Sheffield Hallam university, which confirmed that Barnsley is one of the worst areas for unemployment in England, with high unemployment and hidden unemployment. Barnsley needs 19,000 new jobs—a 25 per cent. increase in total employment—to reduce unemployment to the national average by 2001. I think that the Minister will agree that that illustrates the dire situation facing Barnsley metropolitan borough council.

The Henley centre recently conducted a study that predicted that Barnsley's gross domestic product growth from 1995 to 2001 will be the fourth lowest in Britain. South Yorkshire's GDP is currently only 76 per cent. of the national level. With national GDP expected to grow at four times the rate of GDP in south Yorkshire, areas such as Barnsley will require a great deal more Government support than they are receiving at present.

Despite those dismal predictions, Barnsley has faced the challenge and invested heavily in regeneration. Much derelict land—in the Dearne valley, for example—has been recovered and access is afforded by the Dearne valley link road, which will eventually join the M1 at junction 36. It is predicted that that development will create 8,600 jobs in the next few years. Barnsley has a great deal of poverty. When the methodology was drawn up after the SSA review in 1993, poverty and unemployment levels were not taken into account.

Some 23 per cent. of dependent children in Barnsley live in households with no adult in employment, compared with a national average of 17 per cent. Deprivation is an obstacle to opportunity. Rather than restricting the local authority's attempts to deal with the problem, the Government should give active assistance. Only one in three households in Barnsley receive a council tax benefit—in other words, there is little opportunity to raise additional finance through the imposition of council tax.

The measures of need in Barnsley clearly show that, in terms of unemployment, poverty and disability, the area requires greater consideration from Government than it

receives through the SSA and the tolerance above SSA. Perhaps the Minister will comment on the supertram project, which the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir I. Patnick) mentioned and which could worsen Barnsley's economic position.

Mr. Illsley: My hon. Friend knows that, if the capital funding for the supertram project this year is not met by some Government allowance—either in terms of SSA or funding—council tax in Barnsley could increase by about £150. Will I press the Minister to say what action the Government will take to prevent supertram funding from falling on the four local authorities, including Barnsley?

Mr. Clapham: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. I have asked the Minister to respond to that issue. Perhaps he will tell us what assistance we can expect from the Government.

Barnsley's needs clearly show that, even if the SSA formula cannot be modified—I doubt that that could occur at this late stage—the Government must provide more financial assistance. Perhaps the Minister could meet the three Members of Parliament from Barnsley to discuss the possibility of introducing a cap allowance. That would help Barnsley metropolitan borough council to tackle the severe problems that it must face in the next few years.

8.8 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to catch your eye. As I have only about 10 minutes in which to speak, I shall not accept any interventions.

The local authority in my constituency, Gloucester county council, is Liberal dominated and nearly 100 per cent. supported by the Labour party. Every year, the Liberals and Labour say that they wish to have a budget of so many millions of pounds more than the previous budget so that existing services might be maintained. That figure is usually entirely unrealistic. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gives them a more "realistic" budget, they claim that they face a cut of so many per cent. That is a bogus way of representing the real financial position.

Gloucester's standard spending assessment this year is £323 million. There is an increase on general services of 2.5 per cent., while the specific increase in spending on education is 3.6 per cent. Any company that could not find some efficiency savings in a budget of £323 million should not be in business. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy has calculated that labour costs account for about 60 per cent. of most local authority costs, and that if each local authority could make a saving on such costs of 5 per cent. the total saving countrywide would be more than £500 million.

I am certain that if a clever firm of management consultants examined Gloucester county council's huge budget it would find savings. Indeed, I know that it would find savings. I am almost certain that it would find many areas in which the council has increased staff.

In the short time that is available to me, I make the plea that the 3.6 per cent. that my right hon. Friend is making available to Gloucester county council for education should go directly to the schools. It would be a disgrace—it would be short-changing our children and their parents—if the extra money did not go straight to schools. I expect that it will do so but I am not certain, because Gloucestershire has one of the highest rates of top slicing of any local authority in the country.

Top slicing is the amount that each local authority withholds for central administration before moneys are made available to schools. I should like Gloucestershire's top slicing to be drastically reduced so that we might push as much money as possible directly into schools.

I spend much time visiting schools in my constituency, where I see a huge amount of dedicated work being undertaken by teachers and by parents helping those teachers. At the same time, I have seen some remarkable new building projects. The other day I visited a brand-new school in Tewkesbury, which had cost £1.5 million. That must be set against the nonsense that we hear from Opposition Members who claim that North sea oil revenue has been squandered. That assertion cannot be true when we have seen new schools, new additions to schools, new hospitals and new additions to hospitals over the past 18 years. It is a misrepresentation of the facts to say that the assets of North sea oil have been squandered.

I return to the issue of increases in council tax. As I said to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) in an intervention, he cannot have it both ways. Will he allow local authorities discretion in deciding by how much they should be able to raise their council tax? It is clear that they will do so if they have that discretion. *The Sunday Times* recently conducted a survey of 180 Labour authorities. Of 80 council leaders questioned—all 180 authorities were up against current capping limits—49 said that they wished to increase their spending over and above the Government's capping limits. It is clear that as much as Ministers relax capping limits, Labour-controlled authorities will spend up to those limits ad infinitum.

Yesterday, I was sitting next to a senior member of the Bristol chamber of trade. He wanted the uniform business rate repatriated to local authorities. I believe that that is the Labour party's policy, if not the policy of the Liberals. I had to remind him—he had entirely forgotten—that when we had local control of business rates we had Labour local authorities pricing businesses out of business. I do not want that to happen again. That is why I am delighted that in the settlement my right hon. Friend has been able to provide help for all businesses. No business should face an increase in UBR over and above the rate of inflation.

Much more important than that, the UBR of many hundreds of thousands of small businesses will be pegged to the same rate as last year. In other words, they will experience a real reduction in their UBR.

Oxfordshire receives the area cost adjustment whereas Gloucestershire does not. That puts Oxfordshire at an advantage of some £20 million. I have suggested that there should be a better tapering of the ACA. There should not be a line on a map that means that one authority gets something and the next-door authority, which faces broadly similar costs, gets nothing.

In answer to a question tabled by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras—the answer appeared in column 85 of *Hansard* on 27 January—we learnt that teachers' labour costs for Gloucestershire amounted to £178 million whereas those same costs for Oxfordshire were £187 million. That goes to prove that labour costs in

[Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]

Oxfordshire are only marginally higher than those in Gloucestershire. I welcome my right hon. Friend's assurance this afternoon that he is continuing to examine ACA weighting within the SSA system to ascertain whether in the longer term there cannot be a fairer distribution method.

I make special pleading on the ACA but I am delighted that the sparsity factor has not been altered. It is clear that we cannot have something in one hand and gain something with the other. It is right that the sparsity factor should be carefully applied to rural constituencies such as my own where it is more expensive to deliver local services.

There are many good provisions in the settlement which time prevents me from mentioning. I merely say that I have every sympathy with the deprived areas that are represented by Labour Members—for example, Barnsley and Newcastle, Central, in the context of the debate—but it is probably true that spending per pupil in Newcastle, Central is about double, if not treble, the spending of Gloucestershire. I am well aware that Gloucestershire has one of the lowest expenditure per head figures of any local authority in the country, yet it still manages to provide a reasonable level of services.

We have heard much from Labour Members about paucity of provision, but many of the constituencies that they represent receive help that is not extended to Gloucestershire. They receive city challenge, sector challenge, the single regeneration budget and European funding in the form of 5b and 2b, for example.

I guess that Labour-controlled authorities are similar to Liberal-controlled Gloucestershire county council when it comes to indebtedness. Nine of the most indebted local authorities are Labour controlled. The same can be said of Liberal-controlled authorities and their indebtedness. When Conservatives last had control of Gloucestershire county council in 1985, it had a debt of £25 million. When I inquired last year what its debt was, I was told that it had risen over the past 10 years to a staggering £135 million. I guess that it now stands at almost £150 million.

That is a staggering cost for the council tax payers of Gloucestershire. They must pay interest on that debt year in and year out. If the Liberals are in charge for another 10 years, I hate to think of the debt with which the children of my constituents will be saddled. The Labour and Liberal parties want to free up capital receipts. If that happens, indebtedness will increase. That will put an even greater burden on our council tax payers in meeting interest payments. Our children will eventually have the burden of repaying that debt, as all debt has eventually to be repaid. My message to council tax payers in Gloucestershire is that they must beware of re-electing Liberal councillors in the county on 1 May. If the Liberals are re-elected, council tax payers will be saddling themselves and their children with increased costs.

8.19 pm

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): Conservative Members' contributions have been intriguing. I have heard all but one of their speeches. They have made many criticisms—the Secretary of State was no exception—of Labour and Liberal-controlled councils. Conservative Members have not asked why there are Labour and Liberal-controlled councils. They are Labour and Liberal controlled because there is a lack of confidence in the Government and in Conservatives at local government level.

The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), the Liberal spokesman, referred to the county council in the area that I represent. We are very sensitive about that, because when he talked about the £10 million cut, he referred to us as Northumbria. The county is called Northumberland. I hope that he accepts that correction. Northumbria is a mythical area: at one time, it was a kingdom that stretched from the Humber to Edinburgh. It is reduced to a county in the north of England, which reflects a thousand years of boundary changes.

Like all right hon. and hon. Members, I have an interest to declare—I have not heard anyone make this declaration yet. We are all council tax payers and users of local authority services in one form or another. As such, we should have a keen interest in the on-going effects of the revenue support grant settlement, which have followed reduction after reduction in expenditure in previous years. We have now reached the point of no return.

Three local authorities provide services in my constituency—Northumberland county council, Wansbeck district council, which are controlled by Labour, and Castle Morpeth borough council, which has a mixture of independent, Conservative and Liberal councillors, although I am never sure which is which. They have all made representations to the Secretary of State with little hope of success. From the figures that the Secretary of State presented, I imagine that most of the other local authorities in England have also made representations with the same amount of success.

Reference was made to local council associations. The Secretary of State specifically said that he had not received representations from local authorities, but he did not say that they were not prepared to make them. Given the Government's life expectancy, there is no point in making representations to them.

Criticism of the Government's policies on funding is universal, and relates to councils with all forms of political control. The Government, in effect, set council tax levels, and leave the local administration to be little more than agents of Whitehall, with front-line responsibility for trying to explain to the residents why they are being asked to pay more for poorer services.

Local authorities have attempted, year on year, to maintain a reasonable level of service—I include all authorities, whatever the political control, in that comment. The long-term effects of the reduction in funding in previous years are now beginning to show through in a range of areas in my constituency, at both county and district level.

Given the time constraints, I shall concentrate on the problems facing my county council, although the limitations are felt in both district authorities in my constituency. One of the biggest problems that Northumberland county council faces is the determination of the sparsity factor. The county is the most sparsely populated shire county in England, yet it is recognised as being only eighth in the sparsity factor element of the SSA. That issue cuts across all the services that the authority provides. The huge rural areas in the north and west of the county create costs in the provision of adequate education, highways, fire and library services, economic development and social services.

The council has tried to maintain good schools in those areas. It is estimated that the cost of educating a child in a rural school is five times higher than in the urban parts of the county, such as my constituency. Although rural schools have small class sizes, the council is determined to keep them open. However, that is at the expense of class sizes in urban areas. Statistics show that the average class size in primary schools is 27 and in secondary schools it is 22, but those figures are distorted by some extremely small class sizes in rural areas, especially in first and middle schools.

I refer to a letter from the chairman of governors of one of the schools in my constituency, to the leader of the county council. It says:

"Dear Mr Swithenbank

I know it saddens you to preside over the end of education in Northumberland"—

that is a strong statement to make in the first place—

"but that will be the impact of the cuts being considered. It is true you will still have a schools system, albeit an underfunded one, but education is more than schools. There are many other opportunities being denied to children just because they live in Northumberland, whether these be in Music and Drama, Outdoor Education or from a lack of practical activities in overcrowded classrooms.

There is no equality of service within Northumberland as long as rural children are educated in a class of 6 while urban pupils are with over 40 others and each is demanding the attention of one teacher. Five years ago, when asked about the closure of small schools, you said the savings were not significant. Last night you said it would require fifty to close—well the saving from 10 closed schools over 5 years is more than that from fifty closures in one year. This may be the price to be paid for living in a rural area but it should not be at the cost to children in urban South East Northumberland."

There is a high price to be paid by schools in the south-east urban part of the county, to maintain schools in the rural areas. As a socialist, I do not disagree with that. We should provide the best education we can for our children, but the price to be paid is becoming too high. *[Interruption.]* Does someone want to intervene? Apparently not.

The council faces problems in other areas. A problem arises from the sparsity factor as it affects the fire service. We have more fire stations than one would expect in a county of its size, but that is necessary because of its large rural areas. If a there is a fire on a rural farm, it may take the fire engine a long time to get there on difficult roads. We are supposed to be classified as a remote rural area under the fire risk categorisation. We spend 25 per cent. above the fire SSA to provide sufficient cover.

The mobile library service is beneficial to rural areas, but it is a high-cost facility. It does not seem to be recognised that a county with a population of about 300,000 and a land area of more than 500,000 hectares requires 4,500 miles of road, because it receives no SSA for highways on the basis of usage and population. Although it has 3 per cent. of national vehicular users on its roads, road users in my area suffer because of that unfair provision.

My county council has genuinely attempted to comply with the reduced expenditure that has been thrust on it. The youth and community service has been cut in the past five years by 48 per cent., road maintenance by 36 per cent., winter road maintenance by 27 per cent., and book provision by 41 per cent.; and in the same period, pupil:teacher ratios have risen by 15 per cent. The reserve balances are now at the all-time low of 1.5 per cent. of net revenue expenditure, which is well below the recommended level.

I and my council claim that not only are the overall revenue support grant arrangements unsatisfactory, but the distribution is out of all proportion to local authorities' needs and responsibilities. The whole system should be radically reviewed.

Conservative Members referred to the area cost adjustment. That also affects my authority. Local government associations strongly advocate that Professor Elliott's recommendations should be closely followed. Professor Elliott made a statement with which I totally agree:

"whilst most discontent has been directed at the ACA, it should be focused more appropriately on the SSA system as a whole."

The present arrangements for the council tax are only a marginal improvement on those for the almost entirely forgotten poll tax. The introduction of the poll tax was a mess, and it looks as if we are heading for the same problems with the present system.

8.29 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Like many other speakers, the hon. Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson) expressed his dissatisfaction not only with the system but with the way in which the revenue support grant is allocated. In my county, there is certainly continuing dissatisfaction with the weighting given to the sparsity factor—to which the hon. Member for Wansbeck referred—and to the area cost adjustment, to which able reference was made by my hon. Friend for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown). In Shropshire, the sparsity factor is now a serious consideration—we do not feel that enough weighting is given to it—but the problem will become even more acute after reorganisation. Once Telford becomes a unitary authority, the rest of the county, far from experiencing sparsity problems, will experience super-sparsity problems.

Let me offer the House a little homespun philosophy. I say to my Front Bench that, regardless of who wins the next general election, the incoming Administration will have to re-examine the structures of local government. There will have to be a further attempt to improve the present system, which, as hon. Members have already pointed out, leaves much to be desired. I am aware that we have had two reorganisations of local government. We have had three local government finance systems: the old rates system was followed by the community charge, which has now been succeeded by the council tax. What we seem never to have done satisfactorily is sit down and decide exactly what we expect local authorities to do. We have not agreed on a division of responsibilities between local government and central Government. I am anxious that there should be a clear-cut division, rather than the continuing confusion that results from central Government's having so much hand in what goes on in local government.

I believe that, sooner or later, Parliament will have to consider making education and social services a direct responsibility of the national taxpayer, leaving all other services as a charge on the council tax payer. The present system is a recipe for failure: as long as it is perpetuated, there will be continual wrangling between local government and central Government. We have seen that

[Mr. Christopher Gill]

again this evening. We must try to sever the umbilical cord between the two, to set local government free and to establish an arrangement under which local authorities fund themselves and all their services, justifying every aspect of their expenditure to their voters. If we are to pay more than lip service to local democracy, we must enable the electorate to understand how local government works, how it is financed and who pays for local services. We must enable voters to judge how well, or how badly, their local councils perform, and to hold their councillors to account for whatever they do.

In Shropshire—and I am sure that the position is mirrored in many other counties—there is currently wrangling about the winter road maintenance expenditure. In former times, no one doubted that that was a local authority function, and that the local authority would decide how much provision to make and how much to spend. Now, when the electorate complain about winter road maintenance in Shropshire, councillors immediately blame the Government for not providing enough revenue support grant. That cuts across all the best traditions of local democracy, and it must end. I do not accept the Whitehall view that the way in which to improve local government is to impose ever-greater limitations and control from the centre.

I know the old argument—used by many in Whitehall and Westminster—that, if such matters are not controlled from the centre, the calibre of local councillors is such that the whole process will run amok. I do not believe it. This is a case of cause and effect: if the authority for discharging such responsibilities is removed from local councillors, the calibre of people who are attracted to local government will continue to spiral downwards.

If we are to have local democracy, there must be clear accountability in local government. It must be plainly demonstrated to the voters that, when they elect councillors, those councillors will be spending council tax payers' money. The financial picture must not be confused by the granting of money from the centre, in accordance with the complicated formula that we are now discussing. If we are to have local democracy and local accountability, the system must be intelligible: the voters must be able to understand it. I stress again the importance of placing authority and responsibility in the same pair of hands.

May I draw my right hon. Friend the Minister's attention to a specific aspect of local government finance affecting my constituency? He will, I am sure, be aware that Shropshire will have no transport programme policy allocation for the 1997-98 financial year. How can that possibly be equitable, given that Shropshire is England's largest inland county? My right hon. Friend also knows that we have been unsuccessful in bidding for capital challenge money. The Whitburn street relief road in Bridgnorth, in my constituency, has been half built, and £250,000 from the district council is promised for its completion. The county council has confirmed that, if there were any money in the TPP allocation, the relief road would be its top priority; but the whole project has now stalled.

We can extend that example. It is appalling that the way in which the money is allocated leads to such waste. Men and women employed in the Department of Transport, in departments at shire halls and in district council offices have no projects to complete, because no money is forthcoming. Surely, if there were any equity or fairness in the system, there would be some money for all local authorities under all headings. The current stop-go arrangement is leading to enormous frustration among the local electorate: schemes that they fully expected to proceed do not. The way in which these things are organised represents a negation of local government and local accountability, as local priorities are either ignored or never fulfilled.

8.39 pm

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): I agree with some of what the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) said, but it is a pity that it has taken him 18 years to discover the truth.

Mr. Gill: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Prentice: No. I have only a few minutes.

Mr. Gill: I simply want to point out—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The conditions in this Chamber are that an hon. Member either gives way or does not and they must be respected.

Mr. Prentice: Ordinarily, I would give way, but I am conscious that many of my colleagues have been in the Chamber all day and will not have an opportunity to make a contribution, so I want to keep my comments brief.

The Conservatives are an endangered species in local government. There are only 13 Conservative councils nationwide. There is only one Conservative county council—Buckinghamshire—and a handful of Conservative London boroughs. There are no Conservative councils in Scotland or in Wales, yet Conservative Members come to the Chamber and thunder their prejudices with nothing behind them. After the general election, the House of Commons will be devoid of many Conservative Members as well.

A story in today's press is testimony to our times. It shows how local government services are fraying at the edges. Hammersmith bridge, which is 110 years old and is located in a region of London that I know well, is being closed indefinitely because it is unsafe.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): It is a Labour council.

Mr. Prentice: The hon. Gentleman says that the bridge is being closed by a Labour council. A total of £130 million is needed to repair all the London bridges, including Westminster bridge. The riparian boroughs made a submission for £44 million, but the Government allocated only £22 million and that is why Hammersmith bridge is closed. West London could seize up because of that. For Conservative Members to try to make cheap party political points beggars belief. The revenue support grant settlement contains no increase at all for highway maintenance.

We never hear about the other services block. One may ask: what on earth is the other services block? It includes things such as food safety. Only a few days ago, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food said in the House that the Government were going to appoint a food

supremo. The other services block, which pays for environmental health officers who inspect greasy spoon cafés throughout Britain, is going to be cut by £3 million.

I have examined the food safety inspection figures for all districts in England. In 1992, 22,414 improvement notices were served; by 1995, 2,314, a tenth of that number, had been served. In my authority of Pendle, in 1992, there were 1,241 visits to cafés and food establishments by environmental health officers, yet, by 1995, there were 728 visits. It is one of the services that does not receive the Ritz treatment, but it is important and should be important to the Secretary of State for the Environment, who famously ordered his daughter to sink her teeth into a hamburger, saying that there was no problem with food safety in Britain, when people were first nervous about BSE. We now have E. coli and listeria. In 1990, there were 90 deaths from food poisoning in Britain; in 1995, there were 202 such deaths.

After the deaths in Wishaw and elsewhere, I shudder to think what the 1996 figures may be. In December, there was an E. coli outbreak in Pendle, yet Conservative Members seem to think that this is amusing and that they can make cuts in food safety, while making glamorous speeches in the Chamber that do not accord with the reality of what is happening outside. Under 40 per cent. of all the food establishments in Blackpool that were subject to food enforcement law were inspected in one year; they should all have been. The figures come from an Audit Commission report, so those matters are not trivial, but important.

In the few minutes left to me, I shall say a word about my own local authority and about Lancashire as a whole. For the fourth year running, Pendle council, which is responsible for the food safety enforcement that I have been discussing, has a standstill budget. It has been allowed to increase its budget by a miserly £2,000 a year and it just cannot cope.

My constituency has the oldest and most decrepit housing in England. Only two inner London boroughs have more housing that was built before the first world war than does Pendle. That housing is falling down. My local authority, which has to cope with all the effects of that—the poor health and the deprivation—has been told for the fourth year in a row that it must deal with a standstill budget. It simply is not good enough.

The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) and my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), the Labour Front-Bench spokesman, mentioned that education is important because it is such a large spending service. We again had a complete distortion from the Secretary of State. He was very economical with the truth because he was trumpeting the education increase—

Mr. Dobson: Miserly.

Mr. Prentice: Indeed. The Secretary of State was trumpeting the education increase of 3.6 per cent. That is totally fictitious. My hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras said that the figure is correct only if the education spending increase is loaded on to council tax payers. If all education authorities throughout Britain had to spend at the SSA level, which is the level that the Government think is right for all the authorities, there would be not an increase next year, but a decrease per pupil of £41. How on earth can we believe anything that the Secretary of State says when he is prepared to dissemble on that gargantuan scale? In Lancashire, we are already spending 7 per cent. above SSA. Three quarters of all local education authorities are already spending above SSA, so the Secretary of State should take that 3.6 per cent. and stuff it up his jumper. It is completely wrong.

I have got to say this on behalf of my county council. Many Members have spoken about the area cost adjustment and I took some comfort from the fact that the Secretary of State has finally seen the light and acknowledged that there is a problem that has to be addressed. The problem will be dealt with not by him, but by my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras. However, it was encouraging to know that, after 18 years, or since it became a problem in 1990, Ministers finally acknowledge what we have been saying for years and years: that it is a problem.

I look at the spot where the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) spoke in the few minutes when he was in the Chamber. He came in, delivered his speech and disappeared again. A primary school child in Essex receives £112 more than a primary school child in Lancashire. In Essex, a secondary school pupil receives £145 per year more than a secondary school pupil in Lancashire. It is little wonder that teachers in my constituency and in Lancashire are up in arms and infuriated about the unfairness of it all. I take comfort from the fact that, before too long, perhaps before the passage of a couple of months, these unfairnesses will be seriously addressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras.

8.48 pm

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): It is a pleasure to have been invited to take part in the debate, but I was astonished by the temerity of the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice)—if he would give me his attention for one second—when he referred to Hammersmith bridge, as the news of its closure was extraordinarily sudden. We were given only a week or two's notice. Hammersmith and Fulham council simply failed to inspect it and everyone has been taken by surprise by its sudden closure. That has considerable effects throughout west London, and it will cause great inconvenience to hundreds of thousands of people, including many of my constituents. He might have been wise to have kept quiet on the subject.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill)—if I may make this point before he leaves the Chamber, which I thought he was about to do—made some most interesting comments on the structure of local government. Of course it must be a compromise because the ideal size of a local authority would be quite different for its different functions. For example, we might want a very small local authority to look after footpaths; we might want a bigger one for rubbish collection; a bigger one again for old people's homes; and an even bigger one than that for education, which would have to cover special overheads such as the employment of education officials expert on the special needs of, for example, handicapped children. However, we cannot have five, six or seven local authorities covering one area, so the size of local authorities, as decided by Parliament, must be a compromise.

[Mr. Toby Jessel]

Education is the most important of all local authority functions. It is also the most expensive. Increasingly, we have handed over powers to schools and their governing bodies while curtailing the corresponding powers of local authorities. One of the arguments for keeping local authorities big has, therefore, diminished. The next time that Parliament reforms the structure of local government—perhaps in five, 10 or 20 years' time—we should move to smaller local authorities, especially in London. The London boroughs typically have populations of 180,000 to 350,000. Therefore, the smallest unit of local government is the size of a fairly large city such as Portsmouth, Coventry, Bradford or Cardiff. That militates against local government being local.

Something else that militates against local government being local is the ward system, where there might be two, three or four councillors to a ward rather than one. That is absolute nonsense. A ward should have only one councillor; that would bring that councillor closer to the electors. It should be one polling district covering a couple of thousand people. We should do away with the wards in towns and cities that have 6,000 people represented by, perhaps, three councillors, who are hardly known to most of the people other than by their party labels.

It is absolutely wrong of hon. Members on the Opposition Benches to want to impose regional government—however suitable that might be for Scotland or Wales—across England, including Greater London. There is no desire for that among the population of the south-east and London, which is the area that I know best. It is ludicrous to consider having a regional government covering Canterbury to Chichester, or stretching across London. The functions of the former Greater London council were gradually whittled away and there is no need to replace that body. To do so would add hugely to the expense for council tax payers, whose position we are considering tonight.

My constituency includes Teddington, all the Hamptons and Whitton. It suffers considerably from the extravagance and waste of money by Richmond upon Thames borough council. That is most blatant with the so-called civic centre—a sort of town hall that the council constructed in York street, Twickenham, about six or seven years ago at a cost of £12 million or £13 million. It would have been perfectly possible to have built, for a very much smaller sum—perhaps £4 million to £6 million—a local authority headquarters with adequate prestige, had the design been less extravagant. It has see-through lifts. It has a big hall in the middle called an atrium, which takes up a substantial amount of space. In the hall there are statues climbing up ropes. The outside comprises several different colours of brick so that the building looks the same as it did before it was rebuilt.

Mr. Bayley *rose—*

Mr. Jessel: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I will not give way as I have only a few minutes left.

The council has been run by the Liberal Democrat party since 1984. In order to build the civic centre, the council borrowed money at a high fixed rate of interest. It was about seven or eight years ago, when interest rates were high. Of course, it was not long before interest rates began to fall, so the unfortunate inhabitants of the London borough of Richmond upon Thames—represented in this place by my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) and myself—were forced, through their council taxes, to pay out for a hire purchase scheme for the civic centre, at a high fixed rate of interest. Local people were therefore unable to take advantage of the fall in interest rates during the early 1990s in response to the world trade recession. It was an unutterably stupid action by the majority of councillors on the council. Most of them could not run a business; most of them could not run a whelk stall.

Not surprisingly, there was a fall in public support and, at the last council elections in 1994—in London the whole of a local authority is elected once every four years, not some each year as is the case outside London—the Liberal Democrats lost six seats in the Twickenham constituency alone, four to the Conservatives in Central Twickenham, South Twickenham and Hampton Wick, and two to Labour in West Twickenham—Labour won seats for the first time in 20 years.

Recently, there have been other extravagances, such as the so-called millennium markers. The council wanted to put 10 tall prongs, every half mile, along one of the most beautiful stretches of the Thames between Kew and Hampton Court, at a cost of £5.5 million. The millennium fund said that it would put up half the money, with the other half having to be found by the councils of Richmond, Hounslow and Kingston. Those councils employed a full-time fundraiser, at council tax payers' expense. Six months passed, but they had raised only £500,000 and had no convincing plan of how to raise the other £2.25 million. Not surprisingly, the millennium fund said that they could not continue the scheme, which then had to be dropped. Meanwhile, they had produced a large amount of expensive promotional material; they have refused to say how much they spent on it.

The council spent a great deal of money on fruitless lawsuits on aircraft noise—which have not resulted in any noise reduction, as they were simply cosmetic. It also installed road humps, some of which had to be removed because they were in the wrong place—such as at Egerton road, Twickenham, outside the Richmond upon Thames tertiary college. Despite all the money that it wastes, the council has the cheek to claim that the Government do not give it enough money.

Richmond is a most unsatisfactory council, and I am not surprised that the Government have determined to clamp down on the amount of money that it will be allowed to spend. The amount of money is being reduced regardless, because, since the passage of the Higher and Further Education Funding Act 1992, the tertiary college—which takes young people at the ages of 16, 17 and 18, which was formerly a local authority function—has been placed under the Further Education Funding Council, which is funded by the Department for Education and Employment. Therefore, that important and expensive sector of public education no longer relies upon council taxes.

I am glad to have taken part in this debate, to draw attention to those matters. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will refer to them in his reply.

8.58 pm

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North–East): I shall not follow the hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) in speaking about sleeping policemen, statues, atriums and

fancy bricks, although there was a serious point in parts of his speech. Once upon a time, local government had much greater control over how it raised money and dealt in the money markets. Perhaps his council would have been saved some of the debt incurred if it had that degree of autonomy today.

I shall start my speech on a note of thanks—although it may not continue throughout my speech—to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment for meeting a delegation from Coventry during this year's standard spending assessment review. We came, as we have for the past four or five years, to talk about specific issues affecting Coventry. We will not necessarily fall out about those issues politically, but they can nevertheless have damaging effects on the SSA and on the grant made to Coventry. He received us courteously, and I hope that the issue that we raised will be taken on board by his officials, if not by himself—as I rather hope that he will not be in office for very much longer.

It was a constructive meeting, and I hope that the exchanges that Coventry has conducted on many matters have been helpful not only to the city but to the Department. There are problems with the SSA—as it is a complicated issue—although not all of them are equally controversial. At the meetings we attempted to raise some relatively non-controversial issues. I hope that the Minister will confirm that he will examine, for example, Coventry's problem with nursery voucher numbers, as it could easily cost us £100,000. According to the response that we have received from the Department's officers, double-counting has occurred, although it was unforeseen and they thought that they were dealing with accurate numbers.

Although we have raised such issues as homelessness year after year, I hope that the Minister will seriously consider whether it should be a factor in the SSA formula. There are so many different methods of assessing homelessness. Moreover, a perverse disincentive can be provided in that local authorities that truly and successfully deal with the problem of homelessness may lose money.

I also hope that the Minister will deal seriously with the issue of whether owner occupation is a genuine measure of deprivation. There are very high levels of rented accommodation in some areas, particularly in parts of the capital, such as Westminster, whereas there are very high levels of owner occupation in Coventry, which does not mean that we are a rich city by comparison. I do not believe that owner occupation provides an adequate measure in determining deprivation. If we were to sort out some of those smaller problems and clear anomalies over time, I am sure that Ministers would not leave themselves and the system open to the type of ridicule poured on them so well by my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson).

At meetings we do not raise the issue of the area cost adjustment, because there is no point in having a political row over it. However, there is no excuse for a 29 per cent. gap in consideration of payments to teachers between the midlands and London, because the actual gap in teachers' salaries between London and the midlands is more like 10 per cent. There is a definite skew against areas outside the south-east, which cost them a great deal of money.

Ministers get annoyed when we mention Westminster and say that it is an irrelevance to mention it. However, we mention it for a very simple reason: it is the most blatant example of the way in which the area cost adjustment is deliberately fiddled—I cannot use any other word to describe what happens. We raise it because it is the most blatant example. Why should we talk about percentages and get into complications when we are trying to spell things out in a way that people understand on this difficult issue?

The Audit Commission's figures show that Westminster is one of the least efficient councils in the country. Its refuse services cost £55 a head; Coventry's cost £12.44. Street cleaning in Westminster costs £36 a head; in Coventry it costs £5.51. Westminster spends £241 per claimant on benefit administration—the most expensive benefit system in the country.

Why is Westminster's council tax so low? We have shown that it has wasted huge sums of money on gerrymandering. It is so incompetent that it cannot get insurance for much of its housing because of the asbestos problems that it has imposed on its tenants. I am reminded of the television programme that investigates interesting topics—"How Do They Do That?" How does Westminster council manage to behave in that way, waste so much money and yet have a council tax that is so low in comparison with Coventry? How do they do that? The answer is simple. Westminster's council tax is so low because it is fiddled. The Department of the Environment does not just turn a blind eye to that fiddling, it actively participates in it.

Westminster has recruited consultants at fantastic costs to make its case, not under the rules in the way that Coventry and other authorities make their case every year, but by putting pressure on Conservative Members and Ministers suggesting what they could do for the council, making the case politically for help to maintain control. If Coventry got Westminster's level of grant, we would hand back a £212 rebate to council tax payers instead of charging them. If we got that much grant, we could employ another 1,496 teachers. If all councils got Westminster's grant, 334 of the 356 councils would charge no council tax, but would pay rebates. That is why we expose Westminster—it is the most blatant fiddle of the standard spending assessment.

I have one other point to make, not about the distribution, but about the total grant. The Secretary of State made great play of his argument that if council taxes go up in May, everybody will know who is to blame—he wants people to believe that it will be the Labour councils, not the Government. In the same speech, he tried to say that he consults local authority associations and does business through them. When it suits him, he puts the blame for decisions on the local authority associations.

The local authority associations say that the Government grant support for councils with education responsibilities has increased this year by 0.4 per cent. For districts, without education responsibilities, the grant has been cut by 3.6 per cent. If that is wrong, I ask the Minister to say so clearly and to justify what he says. The Minister knows the inflation rate faced by local authorities. He therefore knows that he has effectively planned for a £40—6 per cent.—across-the-board council tax increase. That is the situation that, on average,

[Mr. Robert Ainsworth]

will face council tax payers across the country and the responsibility lies fairly and squarely with the Secretary of State and this Government.

9.9 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I want to turn the clock back to what the hon. Member for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg) said at the start of the debate. He said clearly that the difficult decisions that would be taken in Bury as a result of its financial position would be blamed on Bury local authority. He said that the Labour council would be blamed for increasing council tax and cutting services. The hon. Gentleman is not living in the real world.

People know that the Tory Government are to blame for the position of local government; they know what the Tories have done to local government over the past 18 years. Whether they are in Blackpool, Bury, Lancashire generally or anywhere else, they know that the council tax will go up because of what the Government have done. People know that services will be cut because of what the Government have done and they will tell the Government that it is time to go as soon as they get the opportunity to vote at a general election. The Government have kidded the people for far too long and their time is now up. People know the truth.

The hon. Member for Bury, South referred to the importance of education. We all accept that education is the most crucial service provided by local government. However, the Government were misleading and dishonest last year, even about education. They increased the grant for education, but they did not increase the overall revenue support grant by the same level. That meant that if the increase was passed on to schools, as the Government expected, local authorities had to make cuts in their other services. Virtually the same is happening in 1997–98.

It is no good giving increases for education unless they are matched fully throughout the funding for local authorities. As several hon. Members have said, three quarters of local authorities already spend above the level of their standard spending assessment. The Minister looks dismayed when I say that, but it is the reality. He has said that spending is up to local authorities and that the system is flexible. We accept that, but if the Government believe that a good local authority should spend at a certain level, it is time that the SSA reflected that.

The reality is that councils cannot spend above the SSA under every heading so they have to make cuts, whether in social services or in other equally important services. That is the problem with the SSA system. We all know about the difficulties with previous systems, such as the grant-related expenditure assessment, and we know that we have moved to a simpler system. It involves fewer factors and it is easier to work out, but because it is easy, it can sometimes be flawed. I believe that if we are serious about education, we must ensure that the SSA level contains adequate provision for it throughout local government. We all know that the reality is that for 1997–98, the increased provision for education is £20 million less than local authorities are spending this year. That illustrates the problem.

Many hon. Members have referred to the area cost adjustment; I have met the Minister to discuss that and I accept that the figures will be examined again. We all know that the way in which the area cost adjustment was originally to change this year would have been acceptable to some, but not to others. I recognise that it is not easy to change the ACAs, but I believe that if we are to have the ACA system, it must be seen to be fair. The present system is not fair. The difference between Lancashire, Essex, Hampshire and other authorities is not acceptable in terms of education alone; that gives us a major problem.

The Department of Transport admits that this year's allocation of £146 million for local road maintenance is inadequate to comply with the code of practice and citizen's charter commitments. Ofsted reports that standards in more than 5,000 schools have been adversely affected by shortages of books or equipment. Those are just two of the condemnations. After 18 years of Tory Government and despite what they have called, certainly in the past few years, an economic miracle, there are major flaws in local government and an inability to maintain services.

The Association of District Councils points out:

"The local government finance settlement is particularly bad for non-metropolitan districts. Provision for spending and the amount of grant they will receive for 1997–98 will severely restrict district councils' ability to respond to the demands on their services. This extremely poor settlement follows a run of bad settlements in recent years."

That is important. We cannot look at 1997–98 in isolation. We have to consider what the Government have done over many years, causing tremendous problems for local government.

Having been a local councillor, at times I wonder why people serve on Lancashire county council or Burnley borough council as their ability is now so limited. They can only touch things at the edge and that is a major problem.

In 1997–98, 241 shire districts—more than nine out of 10—will receive less grant support than they did in 1996–97. That is appalling. Burnley is concerned about the population figures—a matter that we have pursued with the Minister for several years—which have a major effect. A further drop in the population of 2,670 in the past three years has caused financial problems. In 1992–93 the capping level was £11,886,000. In the coming year it will be £12,109,000. In the same period the SSA has reduced from £11,744,000 to £9,489,000. In 1992–93 Burnley spent 1.2 per cent. above the SSA; it now spends 27.6 per cent. above the SSA. That has occurred with almost no increase in the council's spending over the period. In real terms it represents a reduction in spending of 16 per cent. The council is portrayed as a serious overspender. That is simply not true. It tries to provide good local services for the people of a deprived area.

Finally, let me refer to Westminster. I live in the London borough of Wandsworth, which has not been mentioned tonight. Wandsworth is not a very good provider of local services. The roads and pavements are as full of dog dirt as those in many other local authority areas. The funding that Tory Westminster has received is clearly an outrage. Three authorities—Kent, Lancashire and Essex—could employ 7,000 extra teachers at no extra cost if they received the same as Westminster. Lancashire could employ 7,371 extra teachers. The people of

Burnley, Blackpool and Bury believe that it is wrong. They believe that it is time for the Government to go and the quicker that happens the better.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I call Mr. Peter Atkinson.

Mr. Hardy: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I understood that hon. Members who had only just arrived would have to wait a reasonable time before being called. Some of us have been here all day.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that observation. Had he been a little more observant, he would have checked at what time the hon. Gentleman came in. I can assure him that the Chair did so. As hon. Members will note, I have called two Labour Members in succession.

9.18 pm

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): For the benefit of the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), I was here at the start of the debate. I had a reception for some of my constituents, so I have been absent and I apologise to the House. I am glad briefly to take part in the debate, particularly as the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) is back in his seat as I wanted to congratulate him on his efficiency and economy—two issues that concern us both.

I refer to the efficiency and economy in the hon. Gentleman's speech. I read his speech from 1995 and the one he made last year and they are exactly the same. He has taken it back off the shelf, dusted it down, tweaked it a little and gone on about exactly the same lines as last year. There is nothing new from the Opposition tonight. He mentioned the same old names, such as Runnymede, about which he was very keen to talk, as well as Knowsley and Easington. He made the same mistake in constructing the league table as he did the previous time. He picked one line—the social needs line—out of the many that make up the standard spending assessment. Since he has made the same point for the third year running, we should try to impress on him that awarding money to local government is not done simply on the basis of social need. It is about the delivery of services to all members of the community.

The implication of what the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras says is that people in Runnymede, who are apparently all very affluent, should have less money, poorer quality teachers and education and a less safe fire service than, for instance, Easington. That is nonsensical. Fixing the SSA is entirely about providing service and is a mixture of all sorts of ingredients.

When I had to leave the Chamber earlier, Opposition Members were whining on about Westminster. When I came back, they were whining on about it again. The entire debate appears to have been based on the Opposition saying that Westminster gets too much money and other local authorities do not. The system is vastly more complicated than that. I am rather alarmed that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras does not understand local government finance.

I turn to Labour-controlled Northumberland county council in my constituency, which, like the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, is rather like a record. Every year at this time it launches an amazing public relations campaign about the cuts that it will face. This year it says that it faces £10 million-worth of cuts. Northumberland county council is not facing £10 million-worth of cuts. It sets a wish-list budget, says how much it thinks that it needs, puts a price on it, and when it does not get it from the Government and cannot raise it from the council tax payers, it hollos about a cut.

Every year for the past three years, Northumberland county council has had more money in real terms. If one read the local papers that swallow some of the council's press releases, one would think that it is once again facing doom and gloom. It is again threatening to cut school budgets. Last year, it said that it might have to abolish every free school meal due to budget cuts. This year, it is doing the same.

Mr. Jack Thompson: The hon. Gentleman represents a constituency in Northumberland, as do I. I am sure that he is fully aware that Conservative councillors support the county council's view. His own colleagues in Northumberland do not support his arguments.

Mr. Atkinson: I think that Conservative councillors would support the argument that the claim that there is to be a £10 million cut is bogus. They can add up the figures. I am glad to say that some of the local press are beginning to add up the figures, too, and are realising that the council is using the problems of their budget—I accept that there are problems and shall turn to them later—to play a political game, which damages the county council's credibility and makes it harder for us to address the real problems in Northumberland.

I am happy to make it clear that there are problems with delivering services to a very sparse rural county. Northumberland has the smallest population of any shire county and enormous expanses of some of the least inhabited areas of countryside in the north-east—indeed, in the United Kingdom. Unfortunately, most of its population is tucked away into one small corner of the county, which of course makes it difficult to get the proper sparsity payments out of the system which it needs. I think that most of the Conservative county councillors would accept that.

Instead of running an annual PR stunt to try to blame the Government for purely political reasons, the county council would do very much better to heed the words of the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) that there will be no money coming from Labour, and heed the fact that there will be no more from the Government, and get down to addressing the problems of running services in a very sparse county.

The hon. Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson) may not know that Northumberland has the highest SSA per head of population of any county, receives the biggest grant per head of population of any shire county and has the highest capping level per head of population of any shire county. When representatives from Northumberland come to see Ministers—I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary for receiving an all-party delegation—they should talk seriously about readjusting the budget to deal with elements such as sparsity and the recouping of education fees, another local problem. They should not run stupid campaigns every year in an attempt to persuade council tax payers that this is all the Government's fault.

[Mr. Atkinson]

Northumberland would have vastly more credibility if it did not waste money. The council is about to embark on an utterly unnecessary public inquiry into the Army's plans for the Otterburn training range. Local people want the project, as it will provide them with jobs and will secure the future of the training area. There is unanimous local agreement that the development is a good idea, yet the local authority is running a full-scale public inquiry which will cost Northumberland county council—according to one estimate—almost £1 million. They would do better to use that money for the purposes that the people of Northumberland want.

I appreciate that every local authority has different problems and needs, and that is why we have an SSA system which, inevitably, is not perfect. We need to develop the system, but this must be done after sensible discussion and not with hysterical outbursts claiming that this is all the Government's fault.

9.25 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I shall be brief, as part of the argument that I would have advanced has been presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham). My local authority is in a similar position to that of my hon. Friend, as we too need to know about the position on the supertram, which the Government support.

I am not surprised by the present position. We have had 18 years of Conservative rule, economic incompetence, lost opportunities and other failures. The sheer misjudgment and incompetence that the Conservatives have shown in local government has demonstrated that they are not fit to be in charge. One does not need to look merely at the period of this Administration; during the past 25 years, we have seen two of the most inflationary exercises in Britain's history—the reorganisation of local government in 1974, and the poll tax, which costs up to £20,000 million in administration and related costs.

What grieves me is the slick response that I received from the Secretary of State when I asked him about capital receipts. I asked if we could allow capital receipts to be released to cover the necessary local authority contributions to the single regeneration budget, city challenge and cases of maintenance which would offer serious cost if they were not carried out in the year ahead.

Mr. Curry: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hardy: No. The Minister will have a longer time to speak than I have.

I was making a prudent point. Unemployment costs about £10,000 per person, and it would be sensible if local authorities were allowed to release their capital receipts to allow people to get back to work. I would be glad if the Minister would reassure me on that matter.

I have not "bleated" about the subject of Westminster in this debate, as I first raised what I called "the arithmetic of corruption" about Westminster 10 years ago. That local authority boasts that it does not levy a rate or that it has levied the lowest rate in the land year after year. But people can see the equation that I offered the House when I intervened on the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes). This House may not see it, but the rest of the country does. Conservative Members should understand that the Government have allowed the Tory fleet to sink so that the Tory flagship can remain afloat. That flagship has remained afloat on the basis of an arrangement and a calculation that can only be described as corrupt.

When I got home last week, I read in my parish magazine a piece by the Bishop of Sheffield, who is shortly to retire. The Conservatives in South Yorkshire screamed blue murder. The bishop referred to the prophet Joel, when he said, "Old men dream dreams". He also offered one other quotation, which seems to have offended the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir I. Patnick) and all the other Tories in our county. It was simply this:

"From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs."

If we had gone along that road a little further in the past decade, Britain and local government would be a great deal better off.

9.29 pm

Ms Hilary Armstrong (North-West Durham): I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) managed to speak in the debate. We tried to cut short the winding-up speeches so that as many hon. Members as possible could speak. Most hon. Members have expressed concern about constituency issues. Indeed, many Conservative Members upheld our contention that the allocation system is unfair and needs to be tackled. It is remarkable that, after all this time, and after having constructed and reconstructed the system several times, the Government have still not managed to come up with a system of grant allocation that gets anything like support on both sides of the House.

Many hon. Members have raised issues that arise from the real difficulties facing their local authorities. Many, including my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins)—in a remarkable and powerful speech—and the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill), made important and telling points about the inability of local government to be properly accountable because of the way in which the Government have constructed the local government finance system.

An effective democracy depends on alternative and competing sources of power; yet the Government have centralised power and enfeebled local government to such an extent that commentators say that it is worse than at any time this century. It is small wonder that many councillors feel that they have become little more than an administrative outpost for Government. It is no good the Government complaining that councils blame central Government. Central Government have so constructed the system of local government finance that they tell it how much it can have, what it can spend it on and how to spend it. The country has rumbled that and knows that central Government are taking the decisions and deciding how those decisions will impact in every area.

Local government has the potential to be the engine of regeneration in the locality. It is local rather than central Government that has a clear awareness of the needs and desires of the local community; it is local and not central Government that is best placed to respond flexibly to changing circumstances in the locality; and it is local

rather than central Government that works closely in its area on a daily basis with other public agencies, local businesses and community groups.

As a result of the poll tax fiasco, local government is exceptionally reliant on central Government for its funding. The poll tax fiasco and the nationalisation of the business rate mean that councils are now responsible for raising less than a quarter of what they spend. That is not an accident, but the result of deliberate decisions. Indeed, Sarah Hogg commented in her book:

"More and more Tory MPs thought that the logical solution was for central Government to take over completely."

However, those Members still moan and say that local government continues to recognise that central Government are taking the decisions.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Armstrong: I am coming to the hon. Gentleman. Perhaps I can deal with his intervention then.

The revenue support grant settlement this year places councillors—even the rare Tory councillor—in a straitjacket designed by central Government. Many local politicians do not even have a choice between cutting services and hiking up the council tax, because the settlement forces them to do both. Local people will pay more in tax and get less in service.

The Government have turned their back on giving local people more choice and are trying to use local democracy as a cover for further tax hikes. The Budget figures have revealed that, over the next three years, the gap between what central Government believe that local government should spend and the amount that they will fund will widen by £4 billion. The Government have planned for council tax rises next April of about 6 per cent. That would mean a rise in the average band D council tax of about £40 a year.

Councils have been forced to make difficult choices. To protect school budgets, many councillors have to slash other services, including social services, that are already under strain because of the rising community care costs; at the same time, they have to increase council tax bills by more than inflation. The Government have been rumbled, and people know whom to blame.

The Government said that the distribution was fair. Almost every hon. Member who has spoken in this debate has made it clear that that was not so. The Secretary of State kept trying to say that all the associations accepted the settlement. However, the chairman of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, who also chairs the new Local Government Association, wrote a letter to the Secretary of State on 13 May 1996, so the right hon. Gentleman should have had time to come to terms with what he said.

Sir Jeremy Beecham said that none of the associations was content with the present distribution of SSAs. He said that associations and authorities put in representations each year to try to persuade the Government to change the distribution, but that in the end the decisions were for the Department. It seems that the Secretary of State has a short memory and does not remember what people say to him.

Mr. Gummer: Will the hon. Lady explain why no Labour chairman of any of the associations has ever used the argument of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) and asked for the far-reaching proposals that he has advanced to the House on five separate occasions?

Ms Armstrong: The Secretary of State has already demonstrated this afternoon that he has little credibility, and he is continuing that.

The letter from Sir Jeremy Beecham said that he had pointed out to the Environment Select Committee that some authorities, including Westminster, had benefited from some very strange decisions on SSAs made by the Secretary of State's predecessors. That backs up the arguments of my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). If I were in the Secretary of State's position, I would want to apologise to the House.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Lady has spent her entire speech criticising the present distribution system. Does she recall her interview with the *Local Government Chronicle* on 5 January 1996? She was asked whether she would change the system, and replied:

"Of course we will be looking at it but I would not like to promise major changes at this stage. I know too much about it to be flippant enough to say you can quickly shift it."

Ms Armstrong: I shall certainly deal with that. In his speech, the hon. Gentleman raised various issues that demonstrate that his only information source has been the Tory central office brief. I expected more from him.

There are clear problems with the system. Several hon. Members have raised the problems with the manner in which Westminster council has been awarded its grant. I invite the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) to examine work that I have, from the Library and the Ministry, which demonstrates that the Tory central office brief is leading him up the garden path and that there is serious unfairness. Opposition Members are not naive about the difficulties of getting a fair allocation system, but we are determined to seek one. I am not going to con anyone that it can be done overnight; it has taken the Government years to get to the present unfair position.

In *The Daily Telegraph*, which is not a newspaper that normally supports the Opposition, the independent, slightly right-wing commentator John Grigsby writes:

"The Westminster case does matter because it is so illogical."

He says that it is of

"fundamental importance that justice should not only be done, but should manifestly and undoubtedly seen to be done."

The iniquities of the system are likely to get worse. The deduction of SSA funding because of the introduction of nursery vouchers, which was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), will penalise forward-looking councils that provide nursery education for most or all of their four-year-olds and divert it to authorities that choose to provide fewer places. We have made it clear that the system for allocating local authority funding should be open, transparent and independently verified. That means that it will change.

Several hon. Members tried to say that everything was all right and that local councils had got it wrong. That belies the history of the past 18 years. The gap between what the Government acknowledge councils should spend

[Ms Armstrong]

and the funding that they receive from central Government is widening. The economy has been mismanaged by the Government. They have pursued short-term policies that have failed to equip our economy for the future. It is not surprising, given the record and given the tax rises that the country has had to suffer, that we now know that the Tories are the party of high taxation.

The typical family will have paid £2,120 extra tax since 1992 and will be paying 35 per cent. of its gross income to the Exchequer by the time of the next general election, compared with only 32 per cent. in 1979. Taxation has gone up by 3 per cent. for every taxpayer. Given that record of mismanagement, it is not surprising that the public sector borrowing requirement is expected to be £4 billion higher than was forecast last year. Projected borrowing has been revised up for next year by another £4 billion. There has been £66 billion more public borrowing in this Parliament, which is £66 billion more than the Tories claimed in the pre-1992 general election budget.

More borrowing means a higher debt interest burden. This afternoon, Conservative Members—including the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown)—complained about local authority debt. They believe the Tory central office brief issued by the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford). Let us compare local government debt with that of Tory central Government. Between 1990 and 1996, local authority gross debt per head decreased by 6.2 per cent., while central Government debt exploded by more than 133 per cent. from £2,412 per head to £5,638 per head. Those figures speak for themselves. It is not Labour councils that have squandered the £85 billion in North sea oil revenues or the proceeds of privatisation; it is not local government that has pursued short-term policies at the expense of this country's long-term interests.

This is a dishonest settlement. Council tax payers and service users are paying the price of this Government's economic incompetence and waste. That is why we cannot promise them more money next year. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] The electorate will not be fooled: when services are affected and council tax is increased, the people will know that the Tory Government are to blame. They will know that Tory Members supported the unfair settlement tonight. The people want a general election. The Government are frightened of a general election, but at a general election the people will decide.

9.46 pm

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry): It is perhaps worth recalling the background to this settlement. Interestingly, Opposition Members spoke almost exclusively about redistribution; they did not address the amount available for local government in the public expenditure round. In previous years, the Opposition call was "Spend, spend, spend". Suddenly, the tune has changed: it is now all about redistribution.

The background to the change is that we live in a competitive world marketplace in which no one owes us a favour. Sensible people recognise increasingly that international competition imposes strong constraints. Whether the Opposition like it or not, that means that there will be increasing demands for the private sector to assist with the delivery of public services, as that is a way of securing efficiency and value for money. It means also that we shall have to control the level of public expenditure. Everybody recognises that fact—the Chancellor recognises it and, if we can believe him, so does the shadow Chancellor. That has put the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) in a straitjacket. Instead of his usual rant and incitements to Labour local authorities to increase expenditure, he is under lock and key, and the key has been thrown away.

This is a tough settlement, but it is necessarily tough. It is less tough than the settlements that many Government Departments have had to accept. It is the end of the first stage of a process. Local authorities may set their budgets and, if they do so above the prescribed cap, they may put their case to the Government. We have shown that we will listen to local authority representations when there is an inescapable need to exceed that figure.

Several hon. Members mentioned the area cost adjustment, so let me be clear about it from the start. The Government and the local authority associations have tried for some years to find a way of assessing real labour costs—the total costs of employment—throughout the country. That is an extremely difficult exercise, and it is not easy to translate it into a workable mechanism. The latest Elliott report has provided much additional information, and we shall work with local authorities to try to arrive at a sensible, comprehensible mechanism that will command wide support, which we shall include as soon as possible.

The hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), who got in for a quickie at the end—he is now engaged in conversation—asked about the use of regeneration receipts. Perhaps someone should prod him to get his attention. It is possible for local authorities to use capital receipts specifically in the regeneration process. Speaking from memory, there are four wards in Rotherham that apply themselves to that approach. It is possible to use regeneration receipts alongside private sector money in the process of regeneration.

Mr. Hardy: It is capped.

Mr. Curry: It is not capped. It is not revenue support grant money but money that is realised for investment in regeneration. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will urge his local authority to do that, as I hope that he will urge it to transfer housing stock and to understand that local authorities should be in the business of service, not ownership. The authority should explore the full use of the private finance initiative. Local authorities that are imaginative and want to improve services have a great oppostunity to do so if they get out of the old mindset of what they think local government is in place to do.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras inevitably asked more questions than answers. Off hand, I cannot think of any question that he answered. He said that Labour would follow the expenditure pattern set this year by the Government. But he does not need to do that. If he wanted to, he could get rid of capping overnight. Legislative change is not needed. The capping orders that the House may consider when local authorities set their

budgets will necessarily come after the election. He could say now, "We shall cap nobody. Go ahead boys, do what you want to do." It is not necessary to legislate to do that.

What would be the position in year two? If the hon. Members for Holborn and St. Pancras and for Durham, North-West (Ms Armstrong) are attacking the Government figures on council taxes in the Red Book, and if a Labour Government would maintain the Conservative Government's public expenditure control, the incoming Labour Government will have to agree to an increase in council taxes or cut the revenue support grant, which would cut public funding to local authorities from the centre. What would the Labour Government do? It is an important question. Opposition Members cannot have it both ways. Either a Labour Government will observe the expenditure constraints that have been set or they will throw them overboard. We need to know what the Opposition intend to do.

If the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras is to use capping only as a reserve power—I use the words that he used—where is the saving to come from? If councils are not capped, there will be an increase in expenditure. Of course, the hon. Gentleman must find savings, because if we are to believe the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) the overall total will not change. The hon. Gentleman said that the distribution "will change". He said that he would see changes in the way in which the money will be allocated. He did not say anything about consulting anybody about the changes. Apparently that is not the same as changing the formula. I did not understand where the hon. Gentleman drew his distinction.

If distribution changes, those authorities whose provision increases will be able to spend more. That is a logical necessity. Authorities whose standard spending assessment reduces will still be able to spend at the same level, however, unless they are spending vastly over their SSA. So capping cannot force budget reductions. The effect of a major forced change in grant distribution can mean only an increase in public expenditure, which the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East has said he will not tolerate. If capping is loosened, there will be an even greater increase in expenditure, which the right hon. Gentleman has said he will not tolerate.

We need to know where Labour stands. Is it a theoretical constraint or a practical constraint? Does it apply to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras or is it just for the birds? Where does this leave the Opposition in their claims about public expenditure?

We have heard the litany about Westminster, which is the Opposition's favourite council. We have heard notably about day visitors. Let us say that Westminster receives a grant of about £25 million for day visitors, which is 0.1 per cent. of RSG. What would happen if we opted for a great redistribution of that money? Let us suppose that we opted for County Durham, or the Durham authorities, as recipients of this munificence. It would amount to about £100,000 to be shared between County Durham, which is the county council, the seven districts, Darlington unitary authority and the police authority. It is worth noting who the big winners would be. Let us take Sedgefield, for example? Will it be £1 million or £2 million, £100,000 or £200,000? What will it be? It comes to a little over £20,000. Derwent Water would get £9,000, and Durham city would lose £34,000, because it receives a lot of money from the day visitor calculations. It would not be the only loser. Camden would lose £5.5 million, Tower Hamlets £1 million, Manchester £1.5 million, and even Blackpool, that haven of fresh air and fun, to which the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras did not take his continental tourists—a terrible mistake that will be deeply resented in the town of the party conferences—would lose £150,000.

That is what would happen if the hon. Gentleman did nothing to damp the changes. If he damped the changes, the net benefit would be the square root of tuppence ha'penny. That shows how poverty stricken the Labour party's central proposition is.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the index. Let me tell him what is in the index that he so derides. It is about the proportion of households living in housing that is not self-contained or permanent, the proportion of households in overcrowded accommodation, the proportion living in rented accommodation, the proportion likely to be from ethnic minorities—born outside Britain, Ireland, the European Union, the old Commonwealth or the United States—or the proportion of households in priority need of housing. Those are the indicators of need that we use, and which are so roundly ridiculed and condemned by the Opposition.

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South–East): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman was not present for the whole debate, so I shall not give way to him now.

Mr. Turner: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The Minister said—as he did in the previous debate on local government—that I was not in my place during the debate. I was present during the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for North–West Durham (Ms Armstrong) and during the Minister's winding-up speech, and I wanted him to give way so as to hear about Wolverhampton.

Madam Speaker: I think that that was a point of frustration rather than a point of order.

Mr. Curry: We had the maiden voyage of Labour's new flagship local authority, which appears to be Harlow. In 1996-97, Harlow budgeted 40 per cent. above SSA, and this year it will budget at 43 per cent. above SSA if it is at its cap. Its council tax collection costs per household are £26.79 against a family average of £16.90. Its number of staff per thousand population is 17.5 against a family average of 8.7. Harlow is to efficient local government what J. Paul Getty is to beachcombing. If that is Labour's flagship, heaven help the flotilla and God save the admiral in charge of the fleet.

Hon. Members raised a great many points on the details of the settlements, a number of which related to the new unitary authorities. They will be looking for the efficiencies that we expect will come from bringing services together under one roof. A further tranche of credits will be released later in the year to deal with matters such as redundancy, because local authorities have asked for that.

My hon. Friend the Member for South–West Bedfordshire (Sir D. Madel) and others referred to transitional grant for council tax. I have noted the points that were made. Of course we will consider the needs of

[Mr. Curry]

local authorities that face the particular strains of transition. My hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Sir P. Fry) referred to social services, and his points were extremely well made in a debate in which individual services have figured very little.

The hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Trickett)—who can be sensible when he does not think about it—said that the formula should take account of mine closures. The formula takes account of the number of short-term and long-term unemployed, and of the number of people who receive housing benefit and income support. He made a serious point about weightings for children, but he will know that the idea that everyone should receive the same value is nonsense. How would he weight the needs of a city such as Bradford, which has a high immigrant population, and some areas in South Yorkshire, which have a small immigrant population? It is a question of judgment and detail, and not of fundamental principle.

It must be recognised that the supertram is a fundamentally misconceived project. If Sheffield had accepted some of the offers from the bus operators to carry out a joint ticketing operation at the start, it might have worked rather better. It seems that to go from where no one lives to where no one wants to go is an interminable journey—but there is still a problem to be solved, and I shall be meeting people shortly in that connection.

This is a sensible settlement, and a necessary settlement. The Opposition are talking nothing but hot air, and I commend the settlement to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 311, Noes 269.

Division No. 63] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel G)*
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Bellse, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Egger, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hat'fd)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grummer, John
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howell, David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Sir Cranley

Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Scott, Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfld)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bex'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Richard Ottaway and
Mr. Matthew Carrington.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joseph
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alex *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Davies, Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stret'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill

O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs B *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Robert
Shore, Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Speller, John
Squire, Ms R *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew (Truro)
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Kevin Hughes and
Ms Angela Eagle.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Local Government Finance Report (England) 1997–98 (House of Commons Paper No. 203), which was laid before this House on 27th January, be approved.

MADAM SPEAKER *then put the remaining Questions required to be put at that hour.*

Resolved,

That the Special Grant Report (No. 23) (House of Commons Paper No. 204), which was laid before this House on 27th January, be approved.

That the Limitation of Council Tax and Precepts (Relevant Notional Amounts) Report (England) 1997–98 (House of Commons Paper No. 205), which was laid before this House on 27th January, be approved.—[*Mr. Peter Ainsworth.*]

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

That the draft Industrial Training Levy (Construction Board) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 14th January, be approved.

That the draft Industrial Training Levy (Engineering Construction Board) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 14th January, be approved.—[*Mr. Peter Ainsworth.*]

Question agreed to.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Ordered,

That Mr. Michael Brown be added to the Education and Employment Committee.—[*Mr. Eastham, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*]

West Middlesex University Hospital

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Peter Ainsworth.]*

10.16 pm

Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva (Brentford and Isleworth): Madam Speaker, thank you for this opportunity—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Mr. Deva is speaking. Hon. Members must take their seats.

Mr. Deva: I am grateful for this opportunity to raise an issue affecting the health, care and well-being of a majority of my constituents in Hounslow, Brentford and Isleworth: the future of West Middlesex University hospital. The hospital also serves the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel)—who works very hard on behalf of his constituents, and whom I am pleased to see in the Chamber for this debate—and of the hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Keen), who is not here because he is indisposed, although he has sent his apologies.

The West Middlesex University hospital, in Isleworth, is a key acute hospital in west London. It serves a local population of more than 310,000 people and plays a vital role for Heathrow airport, not least in offering speedy access to hospital facilities in emergencies. After much careful planning by the hospital NHS trust, the hospital is now preparing for a major redevelopment, which will allow it to respond to the health care demands of the local community well into the 21st century.

There are always many people involved in such a project, but it is right that I should place on record my congratulations to Mrs. Jane Kelly, the chairman of the trust, and to Mr. John de Braux, the chief executive, on everything that they have done to bring the project to its current state of readiness. They have kept me fully involved in the preparations for the proposal as it has developed, for which I am also very grateful. They were ably supported by members of the NHS trust board and all the staff groups at the hospital—the consultants, the junior doctors, the nurses and the ancillary staff, all of whom are united in their support for the proposal, which bodes well for the future.

Three key features distinguish the project. The first is that the West Middlesex's plans allow for redevelopment with no disruption to existing facilities—which is important for patients to know. Secondly, the project has the merit of delivering improved health care services more efficiently. Thirdly, the proposal's flexibility will permit the hospital to alter its operations according to changing demand. I hope that, as a result of those factors, the Minister will be able to give an assurance that all necessary support will be given to help that vital redevelopment programme to proceed as contracts are drawn up and commitments obtained over the next few months.

A few statistics will help to demonstrate the ever-growing need for the high-level care that the West Middlesex University hospital provides. In 1995-96, the hospital provided care for more than 60,000 accident and emergency attendances, resulting in nearly 15,000 admissions. The accident and emergency unit is one of the busiest in west London. Last year alone, over 7,000 more patients attended the West Middlesex accident and emergency department. The value of the service provided by the accident and emergency department has become all the more apparent because of the rationalisation at other hospitals in the area.

Last year, West Middlesex University hospital cared for more than 124,000 out-patients, as well as 16,000 planned admissions. It has also been caring for the future of the community, delivering more than 2,000 babies—an average of five babies a day. Not only has it delivered the babies, but it has provided what have been recognised as some of the best maternity services in the country. In addition, mental health services, renal dialysis and endoscopy services are all part of the health care provisions on site. In short, the West Middlesex is wholly capable of providing the high-quality health care that is so desperately needed and greatly valued by the community that it serves.

The existing buildings reflect their 19th century origin. All the patient care is provided by a dedicated staff from many dilapidated and outdated buildings, sprawled across a 20-acre site. Originally built for a workhouse and infirmary, many of the buildings are in poor physical condition and are no longer suitable for the provision of acute care to modern standards. The fact that such care is provided from those outdated Victorian buildings speaks volumes for the staff.

There is a backlog of £28 million-worth of maintenance work, which is needed simply to bring the fabric of the building up to modern standards. It would be far better to spend the money on a new hospital, rather than trying to patch up old, out-of-date buildings.

One example of the inconvenience arising from the situation at the most basic level of patient care is that, because of the site layout, critically ill patients requiring admission frequently spend 15 minutes or more in electric ambulances while being transferred to wards, operating theatres or intensive care units. Excellent care is provided by dedicated staff, but everyone could do without such inconveniences.

The Minister knows that plans are well under way for the hospital site to be redeveloped, with modern facilities of exactly the kind that the community needs. Once approval has been given, there is every possibility that a new hospital can be up and running, serving the people of my constituency and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham and the hon. Member for Feltham and Heston as early as 1999 or 2000.

Approval of the project would provide the community with a new purpose-built hospital. The benefits would be seen in improved patient care, better value for taxpayers' money, much needed increased accident and emergency capacity, improved facilities for coronary and high-dependency care and wards designed to offer high-quality, single-sex accommodation—an issue that has been in the press recently. In short, it would be a flagship national health hospital for the 21st century, with the flexibility needed for expansion.

The West Middlesex University Hospital NHS trust has already shown its foresight and effectiveness by putting into operation privately financed projects that have led to improved patient services. Last September, for example, the West Middlesex announced a ground-breaking arrangement for the provision of hospital pathology

[Mr. Deva]

services in collaboration with SmithKline Beecham. The hospital's new endoscopy unit is another clear example of the management of a privately financed project already in place and working well.

Both projects are ideal models of the way in which the private sector can deliver high-quality services in the public sector, an initiative that has been spearheaded by the Government and is now generally endorsed as the way to the future. Latterly, the idea has even been taken up by some Labour Members.

I note with some concern, however, that my Labour opponent in Brentford and Isleworth still cannot bring herself to support the scheme. She says that she wants a new hospital, but that she is not sure about the private finance initiative. That is an example of her usual fence-sitting; she has nothing to say and no policies, just smiles for the cameras with Tony. If she is waiting for her Labour shadow Chancellor to pay for the development, she and the voters of Brentford and Isleworth will wait for a very long time.

The shadow Chancellor has now accepted the Government's Budget plans, so no more money will be forthcoming. I suggest that my Labour opponent comes off the fence and supports the West Middlesex, its management and staff, all of whom want the private finance initiative project to go ahead. If she found time to visit the West Middlesex University hospital, she could hear that opinion from everyone involved. I do not mean that she should just pop into the hospital to see her Hospital Alert cronies. She could meet the management of the hospital, see the plans for herself and talk to staff groups, none of which she has done so far.

Based on all its experience, the West Middlesex University hospital is extremely confident of its ability to bring about the many benefits that the proposed redevelopment promises. While hands-on patient care will remain exclusively with the national health doctors, nurses and therapists, the consortium will be able to tender for the management and non-clinical functions on site, subject to the normal rules on market testing.

Surplus land will be sold for the development of 350 new homes and all the proceeds will be used to defray the costs of building the new hospital. The West Middlesex University Hospital NHS trust has now completed a careful review of the options for taking the redevelopment forward and it is confident that the £50 million privately financed option will provide significantly greater benefits than those associated with the £11 million Treasury-funded proposal for a partial refit, which was on offer 18 months ago.

It is also agreed that the PFI proposal is considerably better than the only other option, which is to do nothing. Even the do-nothing approach would require considerable expenditure on a backlog of maintenance, just to deliver health care in a safe and acceptable environment. At this point, it is worth stating the obvious; the hospital must develop to survive. It will not be possible for the high standards of care, which everyone rightly expects, to continue in the long term under the present arrangements. Action must be taken if local health care demands are to be met and if services are to improve.

I was grateful to receive in December, as a result of my previous lobbying, a letter from the Minister in which he noted his understanding of the urgency of the situation and the need for new facilities in Brentford and Isleworth, which the project will make possible. The PFI option being pursued by the trust has all the strengths of value for money and risk transfer benefits that one could expect. Discussion on those points is under way with the private finance unit.

The consortium is led by Health Care Development Advisory Ltd., Taylor Woodrow plc and Siemens plc, which have significant experience in PFI projects. The proposal is sound. It will provide better health care and it will give value for taxpayers' money within the framework of accepted public policy.

There is now a growing sense of urgency about the need for a firm commitment and approval for the project to secure the future of the hospital. I know that the Minister will understand the difficulties of planning for the future of health care provision without a clear idea of when that future will be decided. In an atmosphere of uncertainty, any community concerns can be played on by the unscrupulous. The West Middlesex plan may not be the largest or best known of the PFI projects currently under review, but it is exactly the type of project that is designed to deliver the highest standards of health care which the Government have tried to promote. I know that the hospital will greatly welcome the Minister's acknowledgement of the importance of the project and I hope that he will support its development into a finished and approved scheme as soon as possible.

10.29 pm

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva) on his initiative and success in winning the ballot for tonight's debate on West Middlesex University hospital. He is second to none in his zeal and energy in fighting for all his constituents.

Many of my constituents use the West Middlesex University hospital. It is only one mile from the Twickenham border and is linked by long-established bus routes, so there is a regular flow across health district boundaries from Twickenham, Teddington, the Hamptons and Whitton to the West Middlesex University hospital.

On 21 January, during the debate on the national health service, I intervened in the speech by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and asked him to

"comment on the private finance initiative in relation to West Middlesex University hospital, which is a matter of eager and enthusiastic interest to my hon. Friend and me."

I asked him whether he could

"give us any encouragement on that matter, which is important for our constituents so that the existing, old hospital"—

which is 100 years old—"can be replaced". My right hon. Friend replied that I was right to raise my constituents' concerns about the West Middlesex University hospital. He said:

"it is one of the many schemes that local managers are preparing to meet real local need with health authority support and that the Government are determined to see carried through to projects that modernise the capital stock—

that is the buildings—

"of the health service. I can give him every encouragement that the Government are determined to carry that through."—[*Official Report*, 21 January 1997; Vol. 288, c. 764.]

On 5 November 1996, in answer to a parliamentary question, the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam), who will reply to the debate, told me that:

"the trust and consortium that are behind the scheme are now meeting twice a week to give it maximum impetus. I hope that it will proceed at full speed."—[*Official Report*, 5 November 1996; Vol. 285, c. 1029.]

The hospital urgently needs replacing. On that, I feel as strongly as my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth, as do my constituents. The hospital comprises a large number of deteriorating buildings spread across too wide an area. It has high medical and academic standards and there is great esprit de corps among the staff, but when the buildings are so old it is more difficult to recruit first-class doctors, nurses and other staff. It is not an attractive building to work in. The problem is exacerbated by the pressure from other parts of west London due to changes at Queen Mary's University hospital, Roehampton and Ashford hospital.

The scheme would produce a brand new national health service hospital on an existing site. It would be built on land owned by the national health service and the building would be leased back to the West Middlesex University Hospital NHS trust for 60 years. The hospital would have to find another lump sum, or perhaps after 60 years the new building would again be out of date and would again have to be replaced.

The scheme would mean that hands-on care for national health service patients remained free at the point of service and it is important that it should go ahead without delay. Any hitch in the negotiations would put the whole scheme in jeopardy. There could even be a hung Parliament after the forthcoming general election. That could lead to uncertainty and perhaps a temporary decline in the economy, which might slow down capital projects. We do not know what might happen. I realise that my hon. Friend cannot give a firm undertaking now, but if the scheme could be contracted within the next few weeks, my constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth would have it in the bag, and that is what we dare to hope for.

10.33 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam): I am pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva). I congratulate him on securing time to debate the development of the West Middlesex University hospital, which provides crucial services to his constituents. I am aware of his unceasing efforts in pressing the case for improved hospital services in his area. I know that he has left no stone unturned in his efforts to see that West Middlesex University hospital has suitable modern facilities. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) feels equally strongly and has been equally unceasing in his efforts to secure better facilities for his constituents.

I have listened carefully to the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth. I know very well the inadequacies of the buildings that form the West Middlesex University hospital. Both my hon. Friends made that fair point very strongly. I can understand local concerns to ensure that everything possible is done to bring to fruition proposals for a new hospital development.

The provision of health care buildings well suited to the delivery of modern health care and their upkeep and maintenance is a major undertaking. The national health service capital building programme is the largest of its kind in the world. More than 750 schemes, each costing more than £1 million, have been completed over the past 10 years. This year, about £1 billion of taxpayers' money will be spent on modernising and improving health buildings and about £500 million will be spent on maintenance. Further projects are at various stages of planning, design and construction.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth will be aware, the proposed redevelopment of West Middlesex University hospital is one of a number of capital schemes being tested for the private finance initiative in the NHS. I am pleased to note that the number of schemes exploring PFI possibilities are increasing. One hundred and fifty schemes, with a total capital value of approximately £2 billion, are testing private finance options at the moment. Those include 22 major schemes worth more than £10 million each. To date, 71 projects have been approved, with a capital value of £626 million. Of those, 43 schemes, of a total capital value of £317 million, have passed contract signature stage.

By vigorously pursuing PFI options that represent value for money, not only can more capital assets be made available, but the NHS can devote more resources to patient care. With the private sector being responsible for providing buildings, the NHS is free to make clinical decisions that are in the best interests of patients.

I am sorry to hear that the Labour opponent of my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth appears to be opposed to the development. My hon. Friend is entirely right to say that the PFI is the way in which to make progress in providing modern health care facilities. As he says, the comparable public sector scheme was smaller and less comprehensive than the scheme now in front of us. As he is well aware, the amount of available public sector finance is strictly limited.

The PFI enables a good scheme, such as the one for West Middlesex University hospital, to jump outside the queue for limited public sector finance and be judged on its merits, and thereby bring to fruition all the hopes of the clinicians and people of Brentford and Isleworth and Twickenham much more quickly than would otherwise be possible. That point seems to be missed by so many Opposition Members, who cavil and whinge about PFI projects.

Despite operating from relatively poor buildings, West Middlesex University Hospital NHS trust provides a full range of excellent health services to the considerable credit of the 1,200 or so doctors, nurses and other staff employed by the trust. The trust provided about 160,000 patient treatments in 1995-96, and my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth will be pleased to know that waiting times have reduced substantially. No one has had to wait more than 18 months for an operation and the total number of patients waiting has dropped from 3,641 in September 1995 to 2,693 in September 1996. More evidence of good performance is to be found in the NHS performance tables. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I too have an interest in the West Middlesex University hospital.

[Mr. Jim Cousins]

I am trying to follow the Minister's arguments extremely closely, but I am being distracted considerably by a private conversation in the corner of the Chamber. I wonder whether you could bring that to the attention of the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick).

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): I am sure that the hon. Member's point has been noted.

Mr. Horam: The hospital achieved a significant improvement in the percentage of patients seen within 30 minutes of an out-patient appointment time. I wholly agree with my hon. Friends the Members for Brentford and Isleworth and for Twickenham when they say that first-class medicine is being conducted in what are clearly out-of-date facilities. There is no doubt that something must be done to improve them.

I now refer to the scheme itself. My hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth made a point in passing about the excellent maternity facilities at West Middlesex, and referred to the fact that five babies a day are born at the hospital. He and my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham know that there will be a transfer of maternity and children's services from Ashford hospital to West Middlesex and St Peter's hospitals. This will lead to an increase—more than five babies a day will now be born—in the number of patients referred to the West Middlesex University hospital.

The additional demands on the hospital in terms of a rise in accident and emergency attendances—an increase of 13 per cent. in 1995—and bed-blocking problems has created pressure on the hospital infrastructure, particularly on in-patient admissions. The proposed redevelopment will address these issues, as well as the problems with the existing hospital. It is important not only from the point of view of existing facilities, but in terms of the future demands on the hospital to which we will move new facilities.

The West Middlesex University hospital comprises a large number of deteriorating buildings—some over 100 years old—spread across a wide area. Some of the buildings are no longer suitable for the provision of acute care to modern standards. As a result of the dispersed nature of the hospital, the trust has to use—as my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth said—electrically powered vehicles to transport patients across the site. That is astonishing in the modern age.

The planned redevelopment represents a rationalisation of an extremely inefficient acute site. The scheme originally proposed in the outline business case was a small redevelopment of the surgical and accident and emergency specialties which was constrained by the availability of public funding. This scheme was given outline approval by North Thames regional health authority in 1994.

The Treasury-funded scheme is being tested against a more extensive private finance initiative proposal. The private finance partner has put forward an innovative, although much more capital-intensive, scheme involving the rationalisation of a much greater proportion of the trust's estate. It involves the development of three separate health care buildings to provide ambulatory care, medical in-patient facilities and surgical in-patient facilities. The Marjorie Warren unit built in the 1960s would be the only existing building to remain on the site. The PFI proposal is the preferred option of the trust board.

The PFI option allows for greater efficiencies in the use of both clinical and non-clinical manpower which were not envisaged in the original outline business case. The key features of the scheme are: a new NHS hospital on the existing site; a new accident and emergency department, with increased capacity and room for expansion if necessary; a flexible design, allowing bed numbers to rise or fall according to need—this is very important in looking at the planning of modern health care facilities, and flexibility is built into the scheme; one central entrance; and the fact that it will be built on NHS land and leased back to the hospital for up to 60 years.

The scheme also provides opportunities to reduce further the trust's revenue spend year on year, which will be invested in health provision elsewhere in the health authority's area. At this point in time—before analysis of the full business case has taken place and before further negotiations between the trust and the consortia have occurred—it is difficult, as my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham acknowledged, to be precise in relation to a figure. However, the results are expected to be worthwhile. The health authority supports the principle of the scheme.

The trust has tested for PFI and has chosen a Taylor Woodrow-led consortium as its preferred partner. The trust is now working with Taylor Woodrow to deliver a final draft of the full business case and detailed contracts to North Thames regional office, although there are a number of contractual issues still outstanding. A draft business case has been submitted to the regional office in the last few days. This represents the first opportunity the regional office will have to examine the privately financed proposal in detail in terms of value for money and affordability to the NHS.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth said that he wanted me to assure him that the Government would give all necessary support to the scheme, and I can do so. There will be no delay in examining the scheme, and we will give it the attention that it requires to allow it to proceed as fast as it can. He knows that there is a lot of work to be done and that our contractual negotiations have to be completed. We must see the full business case, and the consortiums and the trust have to come forward with a scheme that the health authority can afford. All these hurdles have to be jumped, but I can assure him that we shall give it all the support necessary. The scheme is making good progress, and I will do all that I can to ensure that the excellent progress continues in the interest of providing good health care in modern facilities to the people of Brentford, Isleworth and the surrounding area.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at sixteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 4 February 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

KING'S COLLEGE LONDON BILL *[Lords]*
(*By Order*)

Order for Third Reading read.

To be read the Third time on Tuesday 11 February.

LEVER PARK BILL (*By Order*)

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Tuesday 11 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

House Building Industry

1. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the level of activity in the housebuilding industry [12500]

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Gummer): The housebuilding industry is benefiting from strong recovery in the wider housing market. Private housing starts in the three months to December 1996 were up 33 per cent. on the same period a year ago.

Mr. Winterton: Given that planning delays have been a major factor in the inactivity of the housebuilding sector, will my right hon. Friend proceed as rapidly as possible to implement the proposals that he recently announced to remove inefficiency and, in some cases, deliberate delays in the planning process? Does he accept that action must be taken if we are to achieve the strategic demand of 4.4 million houses over the next 20 years?

Mr. Gummer: I very much welcome my hon. Friend's support for our proposals, and certainly I shall seek to implement them as fast as possible. He will know that now is a particularly favourable moment in his own constituency, as information from Macclesfield shows that private starts were up 63 per cent. in the past quarter, year on year. I very much hope to be able to expedite the proposals in the sense that he requires.

Mr. Mackinlay: While the upturn in housebuilding is good news, it also reflects the previous deep depression, in which—during the stewardship of this Tory Government—the housebuilding industry looked like Armageddon, with bankruptcies and people being put out of work, simply because there was no demand for houses. There was no demand because people lacked confidence, as they were unemployed and unable to purchase new homes. Is it not time that the Government realised that they have presided over a massive failure of the house building industry, which has meant the impoverishment and homelessness of countless families?

Mr. Gummer: That is rich coming from the party that voted against the right to buy; the party that has done everything possible to stop people buying their own houses; and the party that has new tax proposals up its sleeve—should it come into power—which would hit every home owner in the country. The hon. Gentleman is unbelievable, as usual.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the most important influences on the level of house building is the level of interest rates? Has he contemplated what would happen to interest rate levels and to the house building industry if we were ever to have a Government who were determined to spend an extra £30 billion?

Mr. Gummer: Low interest rates and low inflation are the result of the Government's extremely good financial stewardship. The Labour party is committed to signing the European social chapter, which would increase unemployment. It is also committed to supporting a series of measures that would increase interest rates and put Britain back in the position that it was under the previous Labour Government—as the laughing stock of Europe, instead of as the leader of Europe.

Mr. Sutcliffe: How will housing needs be met? Housing association grants have been cut, and, because of political dogma, the Government will not allow councils to build houses. So how will the Government achieve the 4.4-million target in new houses by the turn of the century? Who will build those houses when the Government will not give local authorities the opportunity to do so?

Mr. Gummer: Of course, the only reason that all would need to be social housing is if there were a Labour Government pushing down people's ability to buy their own houses. So the hon. Gentleman will have to explain why his party has now announced that—in the next two years, which is what we have been discussing—it would not provide any more money for social housing. He had better ask those questions of the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), who has clearly shot him out of the water.

Stockton City Challenge

2. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *437*, if he will announce his decision on the future of Stockton city challenge high street redevelopment scheme. [12501]

The Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency (Mr. Robert B. Jones): The orders and applications for this scheme are now before my right

hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, for decision. They have raised some complex issues, but good progress is being made and the decisions will be issued as soon as it is practicable to do so.

Mr. Devlin: Given that it is a year since the public inquiry ended and that the whole of the town centre scheme in Stockton has been left in limbo because his officials have been sitting on it for so long, will my hon. Friend now deal with the matter as an urgent priority and disregard the representations that are obviously being received from Chesterfield Properties, which has a vested interest in wrecking the scheme?

Mr. Jones: I fully recognise that my hon. Friend has been leading a vigorous campaign to get the scheme approved; he has certainly left neither my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment nor my hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport in any doubt as to the importance of the scheme to Stockton. As he said, however, there is a legal challenge to the scheme, and it would be extremely unwise to make a decision that could not stand up in law.

House Conditions (East Lancashire)

3. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many houses in east Lancashire (a) are unfit for habitation and (b) require repairs to bring them up to a habitable standard. [12502]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison): At the most recent estimate, there were approximately 48,800 houses statutorily unfit in east Lancashire.

Mr. Prentice: Does the Minister appreciate that 67 per cent. of properties in Pendle were built before 1919, which is the highest percentage of any local authority in England outside inner London? Does he further appreciate that 25,000 properties there are in need of repair and that 5,400 are unfit? Ministers presumably want people to live in warm and comfortable homes, so why have Conservative policies been such a failure in north-east Lancashire?

Mr. Clappison: The hon. Gentleman is right inasmuch as east Lancashire has one of the highest proportions of older properties in the country, which is a particular problem. According to the most recent analysis of the English house condition survey, the number of unfit properties in the country as a whole has fallen by about 10 per cent. The hon. Gentleman's local authority will no doubt want to deal with its particular problems by taking advantage of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 strategically to use the renovation grants that the Government provide to—*[Interruption.]*

I am hearing sedentary comments from the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford). The implication of what he is saying and the implication of the hon. Gentleman's question is that they are pleading for additional public expenditure and the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), who is sitting next to the hon. Member for Greenwich, has his own ideas about increases in taxation which could bring that about. The fact must be faced—this is a clear plea for extra public expenditure.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Is my hon. Friend aware that the number of single pensioners—they are the most vulnerable people—who live in unfit dwellings fell by 10 per cent. between 1986 and 1991? Is not that an important improvement in the conditions of our elderly population?

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. It is indeed good news that pensioners' housing conditions have improved. Pensioners will no doubt want to take advantage of the more generous home repairs assistance under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.

Homelessness

4. **Mr. Touhig:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many households were accepted as homeless by local authorities in England in 1996; and what was the equivalent figure for 1979. [12503]

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry): Households that have been found accommodation by local authorities after being accepted as statutorily homeless numbered 55,530 in 1979 and 120,810 in 1995. Detailed changes—uncontroversial changes—to the reporting system were made in 1980 and 1982.

Mr. Touhig: However much the Minister tries to fudge the figures, he cannot escape the harsh fact that homelessness has more than doubled under this Government. Will he therefore accept that the fact that his party has failed to deal with this problem, which affects the most vulnerable in society, is the strongest argument for a change of Government?

Mr. Curry: It is curious to be accused of fudging the figures when I have just given two extremely precise figures. The hon. Gentleman ought to listen and use a little common sense. Homelessness is falling and there are measures in place to deal with it. He should also be cautious in assuming that homelessness and other social ills which result from, for example, the falling apart of families, the break-up of partnerships and many social trends of which he or I might or might not approve, can all be remedied by the Government. It takes only a little common sense to realise that the Government can do some things, but that sometimes we have to react just like everyone else—our reaction is comprehensive, effective and working.

Mr. David Nicholson: My right hon. Friend will be aware that there is a widespread welcome for the success of the rough sleepers initiative and its extension outside London to other centres. However, the success of the initiative is limited when it has to deal with homeless people who suffer from drug or alcohol dependency or mental illness. Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that his Department is working with other Departments, including the Home Office and the Department of Social Security, to ensure that the

problems of homelessness and public begging are tackled by co-ordinated policies that get to the root of the matter?

Mr. Curry: I agree with my hon. Friend that, when we come to deal with the hard core of rough sleepers—it is a hard core; we have reduced the numbers significantly—we come across problems of mental health and of drink and drugs. Those are not problems to which the Opposition's simplistic answer, "Put a roof over his or her head," applies. A great deal of care is needed. A home is often the last thing that people in such circumstances need, because an enormous amount of work needs to be done before they have the competence even to contemplate looking after themselves. We need a co-ordinated approach to the problems. The rough sleepers initiative, now in its seventh year, adopts such an approach. It is a remarkable example of co-operation between the Government and the voluntary sector.

Air Pollution

5. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received regarding air pollution. [12504]

Mr. Gummer: My Department has received 420 representations from members of the public, business, local authorities and other bodies, in response to consultation on the draft national strategy for air quality, which the Government are preparing in accordance with the Environment Act 1995.

Mr. Soley: Bearing in mind the fact that one in seven children suffer from asthma, which is thought to be aggravated—and even occasionally caused—by air pollution, and given that nobody believes that the Government have coherent policies on transport or air pollution, what hope does the Secretary of State offer to those children and their parents?

Mr. Gummer: I am surprised by the hon. Gentleman's final comments. We have a national air quality strategy and have arranged a common strategy with the rest of the European Union. We are seen as the leader in Europe on this. I have committed myself to getting rid of summer and winter smog within 10 years, and shall spend much of my time working on that. Our policies are the best in Europe. We are continuing along those lines with an integrated transport strategy, which the hon. Gentleman knows about. On environmental issues, the Labour party knows so little and cares so little that it cannot even produce a coherent question.

Mr. Evennett: I welcome what my right hon. Friend has done to improve air quality and to monitor the effects of pollution. Is he aware that, in my part of south-east London, there are still considerable air pollution problems? Will he continue to look into those problems and examine the results of the monitoring that is taking place in Bexley?

Mr. Gummer: Certainly. As my hon. Friend knows, we are working closely with local authorities. I am happy to consider the specific problems of the London borough of Bexley. Air quality is improving. We have high standards to attain, which we are determined to reach. We are recognised by the rest of the world as being well ahead of most other countries.

Mr. Meacher: How can the Secretary of State pretend that he is being serious about his so-called air quality strategy when it fails to set any standards for before 2005, when even then it fails to set any statutory standards for PM10s—by far the most dangerous particles—when it allows monitoring away from the areas of greatest traffic density and when he has provided no powers or money to local authorities to implement it? For all those who have suffered from the doubling in recent years of air pollution-caused asthma, is not the strategy just another pathetic Tory pre-election scam?

Mr. Gummer: I know that the hon. Gentleman is coming from a long distance back, as the Opposition have done nothing about the environment. It seems that even less will be done now, as the hon. Gentleman has not even read his brief properly. He does not appear to know that we have provided local authorities with money and powers and that we are working with them to carry out our national air strategy. Nor does he seem to understand that we hosted a conference of northern European nations to work out a common air quality strategy that we now lead. No doubt the hon. Gentleman will suggest that we should spend more money and propose a whole series of new taxes to pay for that. The Government have achieved the necessary results. We are leading the rest of Europe—something that the hon. Gentleman could never understand or achieve.

Mr. Tredinnick: Will my right hon. Friend discuss with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport the key problem of vehicle exhaust emissions? Is he aware that only 40,000 vehicles were tested last year and 6 per cent. were found to be above the limit? Particularly in respect of the M1, which carries the heaviest traffic, does he agree that that is a completely inadequate number, and that the Vehicle Inspectorate needs to test many more vehicles in order to cut down the toxic fumes from which we all suffer on motorway journeys?

Mr. Gummer: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right to say that we need to concentrate more on that. We are taking part in the negotiations on the auto-oil programme so that it will be a success throughout Europe. As my hon. Friend knows, half the pollution in Britain comes from the rest of Europe and we export half our pollution to Europe. We need a common policy, and we are determined to achieve it.

Local Government Finance

6. **Mr. Pope:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with the local authority associations on standard spending assessments. [12505]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): We have discussions with the local authority associations on standard spending assessments several times throughout the year.

Mr. Pope: Can the Minister confirm that, following this year's financial settlement, the Government are responsible for forcing up council tax bills by more than 6 per cent.? Will he further confirm that, if Hyndburn council received the same assistance from the Government as Westminster, it would be able to give every band D council tax payer a rebate of £572? Is it not the case that we have to pay more so that Tory Westminster can pay less?

Sir Paul Beresford: I am disappointed that the hon. Gentleman, who I thought had some understanding of standard spending assessments, has taken a line that fell flat on its face last night. Let me put it the other way round. If the flagship Labour authority of Harlow was as efficient as Westminster, relative to its SSA, its band D council tax would be £10, saving local people some £180 this year. In other words, the local authorities should get their act together.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: When my right hon. Friend met councillors from the north-east of England recently and they asked him for increased SSAs and greater Government grants, did they discuss the funding of the North of England Assembly of Local Authorities? Did they tell him about the increasing burden that that authority was placing on them, and did they say that it was advertising for a new director at a salary of £60,000 a year with the duty of promoting regional government in the north-east of England? Is it not a shameful waste of public money? Is not regional government deeply unpopular in the north of England, as people know that it means heavier local taxes and jobs for the boys?

Sir Paul Beresford: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Funnily enough, the councillors forgot to mention that. We heard much pleading—there was a little of that last night. Taxpayers and council tax payers, through the SSA, have to carry an extra burden of bureaucracy that will gum up the works even more than the regional authority manages to do now.

Mr. Rendel: The Secretary of State has leaned heavily on what he describes as local government association support for his decisions on SSAs. When will the Government carry out official Conservative party policy to abolish capping which, unlike the right hon. Gentleman's policies, is supported by local government associations?

Sir Paul Beresford: I find it intriguing to be told what is official Conservative party policy. The hon. Gentleman should recognise that, while he is free with other people's money, the Government are not.

Mr. Congdon: Does my hon. Friend agree that the representations from local authorities would carry more weight if they got their house in order by managing their resources properly, and in particular embracing compulsory competitive tendering? What further action will he take to prevent local authorities from trying to deter the private sector from making bids and when they make the lowest bids, doing everything in their power to find excuses to give the contract to their own in-house direct services organisation?

Sir Paul Beresford: My hon. Friend is right. He was a member of a local authority that went down that road to the benefit of the people of Croydon. New orders were laid at the end of last month to achieve exactly what he has mentioned.

Downland Protection

8. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to protect the downland (a) near Eastbourne and (b) elsewhere. [12507]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We fully recognise the importance of the chalk downland in Sussex and elsewhere. The Sussex downs are designated as an area of outstanding natural beauty and further protection is given to important sites through designation as national nature reserves and sites of special scientific interest. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has also established the environmentally sensitive areas scheme, which protects downland landscapes, including an extensive area of the Sussex downs.

Mr. Waterson: When my hon. Friend reviews the role of the Sussex Downs conservation board, will he seriously consider the possibility of extending its powers to give it, for example, the power to call in planning applications? Will he also look closely at the suggestion of putting the Eastbourne downland under the control of an independent charitable trust, so that it can be removed from political control and interference once and for all?

Mr. Jones: My hon. Friend has fought a vigorous battle to protect downland in his constituency—sometimes against his Liberal-controlled local authority, which seems to want to develop on the downland. When we receive the advice due from the Countryside Commission, we shall make absolutely certain that we consider all the options, including the sensible ones that my hon. Friend has put forward.

Mr. Sheerman: Can the Minister confirm that industrial waste is being spread on downland? Is he aware that 1 per cent. of Britain's waste is spread on the land, and that there is no efficient method of checking the quality of the waste or how dangerous it can be to the long-term prospects for agriculture? Will he consider an auditing system that works, talk to ADAS about it, and implement it quickly?

Mr. Jones: Without the detail of the hon. Gentleman's complaint, it is obviously very difficult to comment. I am happy to look at the circumstances that he describes. Then we can no doubt consider whether any action is necessary.

Fire Services (Essex)

9. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the calculation of the element allowed for fire services in the standard spending assessments for Essex. [12509]

Mr. Curry: As I announced last week, the fire element of the standard spending assessment for Essex is £35.1 million for 1997-98—an increase of 4.6 per cent. on the same element for 1996-97, and higher than the national average of 4.2 per cent.

Mr. Amess: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is widespread concern throughout Essex at the way in which the Labour and Liberal-controlled Essex county council is trying to reorganise local fire services? Does he regret that some local politicians are unfairly trying to blame the Government for that? Does he recognise that local residents under no circumstances want Leigh-on-Sea fire station to be closed?

Mr. Curry: Essex county council has done very well over successive years from changes in SSAs. Indeed, it has had significant additional funds. The fact is that the county can increase its budget by £19.5 million. The fire element increase is £1.5 million. None of that is hypothecated. If it chooses to do so, it could give priority to its fire service. The decision not to do so would be entirely that of local councillors.

Mr. Olner: While the Minister is considering the problems in Essex, will he turn his mind to the problems in Warwickshire—

Madam Speaker: Order. Not today, thank you. Perhaps tomorrow.

Uniform Business Rate

11. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the impact of the uniform business rate on small businesses. [12511]

Mr. Gummer: Rates place a disproportionate burden on small businesses. For that reason, we have announced that rate bills for small business premises will not rise in 1997-98. We are looking at what other steps can be taken further to address this problem.

Mr. Whittingdale: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the burden of business rates bears particularly heavily not only on small businesses but on high-street retailers, who are trying to compete with out-of-town superstores? Is he aware that the Government's announcement that they are intending to redistribute the burden is particularly welcome to small shops such as those in Maldon high street? Will he assure us that he will introduce such measures as soon as possible after the general election?

Mr. Gummer: I can certainly give the assurance that, if we can find a more satisfactory and equitable way of doing these things, we shall do so as rapidly as possible. I am sure that my hon. Friend would like to extend what he said to the fact that village shops can now get the special mandatory relief—mandatory relief that Liberal Members voted against. They did not want local shops to get that relief as of right, but wanted to leave it in the hands of Liberal councils, which very often do not provide that relief.

Mr. Pike: Does the Secretary of State accept that we all recognise the importance of small business, but that, when he says that about the part of the poll tax legislation which refers to non-domestic rates, it really shows how that flagship legislation was flawed in both sections—in respect of non-domestic rates and of the poll tax—and shows what a disaster the Government have been since 1987?

Mr. Gummer: I must point out that the hon. Gentleman represents a party that used to set enormously high business rates and drove businesses out of its areas. For example, he will remember that, before we changed the rules, shopkeepers in Newcastle upon Tyne paid three times as much per square foot as people in Westminster, in Oxford street. That is what it meant to have a Labour council and Labour rates in those days—thank goodness we put that right.

Mr. Dover: Does the Minister accept that, in fact, probably the large majority of small businesses pay no uniform business rates, because they operate from residential homes? Is it not time that the Government considered scrapping all business rating for small businesses, in view of the arbitrary lines that separate those who pay and those who do not?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend must accept that, wherever one draws those lines, one has such difficulties. I have suggested that we need to get the proportional weight of the business rate correct, which is why we are looking carefully, particularly at small businesses, to ensure that we can do what is best.

Social Housing

12. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the number of new lettings for social needs which will be available in (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99 and (iii) 1999–2000. [12512]

Mr. Clappison: We estimate 148,000.

Mr. Gunnell: That is a rather higher figure than I had anticipated, but why is it that, when there is such a huge level of unmet social need, the Government have allowed social needs housing starts to fall to the lowest level since the second world war? I opened some of those units completed in Leeds only a week ago. Will the Minister ensure that creative partnerships, like that between Leeds city council and its five housing associations, can continue? Will he ensure that more money is made available for social housing, because we have the lowest number of social starts and it is time that the Government paid attention to it?

Mr. Clappison: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that we have our estimates of housing need, and that we are on target to create between 58,000 and 60,000 new lettings over the decade as a whole, which is in line with our estimate of need. We are doing so in a variety of ways and, as the hon. Gentleman acknowledged by his use of the example of Leeds, we are drawing in a great deal of private finance—we estimate £1.7 billion over the next three years. The hon. Gentleman asks for more money to meet needs over and beyond those that we have defined,

so I regard his question as yet another plea for more public expenditure, which is in contradiction of Labour Front Benchers' apparently pre-ordained desire to stay within pre-ordained spending limits and breaches their spending commitments—once again, more public spending.

Mr. Dobson: The Minister's answer, in effect, only promises more of the same, which we all know is inadequate. Why will not the Government agree to the release of the takings from the right-to-buy sale of council houses, so that they can be invested in building new houses and improving old ones? That would create jobs in the building industry and provide new homes; and it would create new jobs in the building supply industry, whether they be for people making carpets in Halifax and Brighouse, people making electrical fittings in Basildon, or people making doors and windows in Keighley?

Mr. Clappison: The hon. Gentleman's policy will not work because, as he well knows, many of the areas with the greatest housing need, such as Birmingham, Newcastle, Hackney and Southwark, have no housing receipts to spend, whereas areas with less housing need, such as West Dorset and Malvern Hills, have the receipts. He has never explained how he will transfer the receipts from one to another.

The next problem that the hon. Gentleman faces is the fact that every pound spent from the capital receipts represents additional public spending.

Mr. Dobson *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Clappison: No amount of fudging can disguise that fact; the hon. Gentleman's proposal amounts to more public spending, which would have to be paid for, as the hon. Gentleman's Front-Bench colleague, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), wants, through more taxation—taxation of allowances, and more and more taxation.

Local Government Finance (Kent)

13. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the 1997–98 financial settlement for Kent county council. [12513]

Sir Paul Beresford: Kent's overall standard spending assessment increased by 2.2 per cent.—just short of £22 million. Within that, the element relating to education increased by 3.5 per cent., and that relating to fire by 5 per cent. I think that my hon. Friend will agree that that is a very fair settlement.

Mr. Arnold: My hon. Friend will know that the people of Kent were delighted to receive an extra £22 million for this year—an increase that takes the spending of Kent county council beyond £1 billion. Does he share the dismay of people throughout Kent at the fact that the Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition proposes to cut massive sums from the budgets of our schools, our fire service and our social services, and to decimate adult education, the youth service and many other services in Kent?

Sir Paul Beresford: I should have thought that my hon. Friend would be used to that by now. It is what we call the bleeding stump syndrome—chop off something vital and wave it around to frighten the public.

Mr. Allen: Will the Minister point out to the outgoing hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold), as well as to the hon. Members for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) and for Dover (Mr. Shaw), that all Kent's Tories trooped through the Lobby last night to impose the local government settlement on Kent? It is that settlement, not Kent county council, that will force council tax payers in Gravesham to find another 20 per cent. of the cost of their local services, and voters in Dartford to find another 30 per cent., while the Tories' cronies in Westminster pay only 10 per cent. Will the Minister urge Kent's Tory Members, in their few remaining weeks in this place, to do what Chris Pond will do in Gravesham, Howard Stoate will do in Dartford and Gwyn Prosser will do in Dover, and speak up for Kent in this place, instead of constantly denigrating it?

Sir Paul Beresford: That is a double-handed blow. On the one hand we have the bleeding stump, and on the other hand, the hon. Member is counting chickens long before they are hatched.

Sir Roger Moate: Does not the fact remain that Kent has received an extra £22 million, that Labour shadow Ministers are saying that there is no more money available anyway, and that it is Liberal and Labour councillors who are shutting our fire stations, cutting our library services and closing our youth services? The sooner we get them out on 1 May, the sooner we shall be able to ensure that those closures and cuts do not happen.

Sir Paul Beresford: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. If he had been in our shoes at the Department, he would have seen Labour authority after Labour authority coming to complain, wanting more central Government funding, more local funding and council tax, the transfer of the business rate into their hands, and the removal of the compulsory aspect of compulsory competitive tendering. This is not a new tax; it is the same council tax but many times greater.

Metropolitan Green Belt

15. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his policy to protect the metropolitan green belt. [12515]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I have consistently made clear my commitment to green belts, including the metropolitan green belt. The revised version of planning policy guidance note 2 on green belts, published in 1995, reaffirms the strict control over development in green belts and maintains the presumption against inappropriate development.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I thank my hon. Friend for that statement. Does he agree that the creation of green belts, especially the metropolitan green belts, has been one of the outstanding successes of our town and country planning system? Will he confirm that the pressure to develop in such places is at its greatest near the inner boundaries of the green belts and take this opportunity to iterate that none of the estimated 4.4 million more dwellings needed in the next 20 years are planned to be sited on green belt land?

Mr. Jones: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, who, as a former president of the London Green Belt Council, provided able leadership for the movement to protect the green belt in the capital—as does the current president, my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Sir M. Shersby). He is right about the pressures on the green belt, which we will resist, but if he wants to know who is on the side of the green belt and who is not, he need only look across his county boundary into Hertfordshire, where the Conservatives proposed that no new housing should be built in the green belt, but were voted down by Labour and Liberal councillors who wanted housing concentrated there.

Mr. Hardy: I accept the Minister's reply to the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman), but will he make it clear that the Government will not be inclined to approve applications for opencast mining and mineral extraction in the green belt, especially where there is bitter opposition by local communities?

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman knows that every application must be looked at on its merits, but—as I have just said—the strong presumption against inappropriate development in the green belt has led us to turn down many applications in the past.

Local Authority Housing (Transfers)

16. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authorities have transferred their housing stock to new landlords. [12516]

Mr. Curry: Fifty-three local authorities have transferred more than 230,000 homes, generating more than £3.7 billion of private investment. I announced at the end of last month the 1997 programme, in which a further 17 authorities will transfer all or part of their housing. The programme includes some 55,000 homes and will generate another £350 million in capital receipts.

Dr. Spink: Has it not been proved beyond question that tenants in deprived and rundown local authority housing estates are far better served in every way by non-profit-making landlords? Will my hon. Friend denounce my local council housing committee, which will not speak to my local housing tenants' association?

Mr. Curry: We have sufficient evidence on transfers to know that tenants like them and that they work in their interests. In addition, tenants have to vote for them. Local authorities should be more interested in service and less in ownership. The case for local authority home ownership is long past, and we must look towards a more sensible arrangement.

Mr. Raynsford: Does the Minister accept that, while there may be a case in certain circumstances for transfers of stock to increase investment, they will not create any new homes? Will he admit to the House—as his hon. Friend the Under-Secretary did in an earlier answer—that the Government have abandoned the target that he gave to the Select Committee only a year ago of 60,000 new lettings? The Government cannot achieve that figure, they have broken yet another promise and they have sold out and betrayed the homeless and the badly housed in this country.

Mr. Curry: That is a piece of nonsense. The hon. Gentleman should accept that there is an extremely good case for transfers—his own local authority is one of our transfer authorities, and is trying to transfer houses on the Charlton triangle in Greenwich. Instead of being mealy-mouthed about this, he should recognise that, unless he is willing to pour large public sums into housing—his hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) may be, the shadow Chancellor says that he will not and he himself says that he would like to, but does not know how—he should concentrate on doing what is possible, which is improving the conditions of those who live in council houses, and liberating them from local authority control.

Local Government Finance

17. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce the conclusions of the standard spending assessment consultations with local authorities. [12517]

Sir Paul Beresford: On 27 January last.

Mr. Brown: May I take this opportunity to thank my hon. Friend and his colleagues at the Department for the transitional relief provisions that they were able to make for North Lincolnshire? Will he confirm that there is no need for any local authority to make any cuts in education, providing that it spends sensibly? Will he set out the opportunities that exist for local authorities to make further savings in administration costs?

Sir Paul Beresford: I think that my hon. Friend is well aware of them. In fact, there was a debate on his local authorities in the House on exactly that point. They accept, even though they protest and screech and scream, that they have a special advantage—as they are now authorities governing all local government services—that would allow them to make much greater efficiency savings than they appear willing to do.

Mr. Turner: If the Minister had visited Wolverhampton and met members of my local authority, they would have told him that the Government have imposed very serious cuts—real-terms cuts—on all standard spending assessment blocks, and that we in Wolverhampton have the worst revenue grant settlement of the 36 metropolitan districts.

Sir Paul Beresford: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should reflect that I was leader of a local authority when its SSA was cut by 25 per cent. but that it has the best services in London.

Mr. Turner: I am talking about Wolverhampton.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman's question related to Wolverhampton. However, it is 3.15 pm. Prime Minister's Questions.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Davidson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 February. [12530]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Davidson: Will the Prime Minister give a clear, unequivocal commitment that he will allow the Wirral, South by-election to proceed?

The Prime Minister: The Wirral, South by-election is proceeding.

Q2. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 February. [12531]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Rowe: The Lib-Lab coalition that runs Kent county council has said that it requires a grant increase of no less than 10 per cent. merely to stand still. Does the Prime Minister know of any other councils that are making a similarly absurd demand?

The Prime Minister: I do not yet know what other absurd demands may come, but I have no doubt that the natural appetite for spending of so many Labour and Liberal-controlled local authorities will mean that there are quite a number of substantially above inflation demands for increased council tax. When the shadow Chancellor talks about Labour's plans for public spending, he clearly does not talk for the Labour local councils, which spend and spend and must then tax and tax.

Mr. Blair: In respect of the Ofsted report, does the Prime Minister agree that the inspectors found much to praise and many competent and hard-working teachers, but that they also found severe problems in literacy, numeracy and, in particular, with a significant minority of head teachers? Given the central importance of leadership by a head in a school, does he agree that it is sensible at least to consider making the new national competence qualification a requirement for all new and aspiring head teachers, so that, over time, this weakness can be remedied to the benefit of our children?

The Prime Minister: I agree with a great deal of what the right hon. Gentleman said. Undoubtedly there has been an improvement in the past year—that is clear from Mr. Woodhead's report, and I am delighted to see that. It shows that the quality of teaching is satisfactory or better in the majority of schools, and I am pleased about that. I particularly congratulate those schools singled out for special praise by the chief inspector on the basis of the inspection evidence. I believe that they will provide a real example.

As the right hon. Gentleman said, the professional qualification for headship will be available nationally from September. It will equip aspiring heads with the skills necessary to lead and manage a school and it may, over time, be desirable to make it a requirement. I would like to see how it works in the short term, but I certainly would not rule that out.

Mr. Gale: I am sure that my right hon. Friend shares my desire that transport safety standards across and under the channel should improve. Does he agree, however, that proposals from Brussels to make cross-channel ferries list the names and addresses of every man, woman and child travelling backwards and forwards on day trips is a bureaucratic nonsense and wholly unnecessary? Will he resist it, please?

The Prime Minister: I agree, both about taking whatever action is necessary to assure safety and about ensuring that action is not taken that will not help on safety grounds but will simply add to costs, the price of tickets and bureaucracy.

Q3. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 February. [12532]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. and learned Gentleman to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Janner: Has the Prime Minister seen the findings of the Employment Policy Institute, which show that some 4 million people in this country are seeking work? In those circumstances, will he use his speech in Brussels tonight to explain to our European partners why the Government's so-called unemployment figures are rigged, inaccurate and deliberately misleading, and that the only people in this country who deserve to be unemployed are the clapped-out, stale and fag-end Government?

The Prime Minister: The hon. and learned Gentleman gives me the opportunity to tell the House that unemployment in his constituency has fallen by 39 per cent. In due course, perhaps, the Labour candidate will add one to the figure at the general election. In reality, unemployment in this country is 6.7 per cent. and falling, compared with more than 4 million in Germany, 3 million in France and nearly 3 million in Italy. Indeed, 18.5 million people are unemployed in the European Union, and we have created more jobs in this country in recent years than the rest of the European Union added together. I shall send the hon. and learned Gentleman a copy of the speech that I shall make this evening, so that in future he may be better informed.

Mr. MacGregor: As rail privatisation completes its final stages, does the Prime Minister agree that it already demonstrates substantial benefits for both passengers and taxpayers? Is not its success one of the main reasons why the Labour party, which bitterly opposed rail privatisation through all its parliamentary stages, as it did with nearly every other privatisation, is all at sea over its policy?

The Prime Minister: It is undoubtedly the case that the Labour party has not supported a single privatisation until it has proved to be a success, at which point it pays lip service to it. Under Labour, none of the privatisations

would have taken place. It certainly bitterly attacked rail privatisation, which has now increased investment, increased rolling stock, improved services, provided extra service and saved the taxpayer a substantial amount. *[Interruption.]* It is, in short, a success, and no doubt that is why the Labour party wishes to shout it down.

Q4. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 February. [12533]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. MacShane: Is the Prime Minister aware that his Chancellor is proposing so to increase air passenger duty that a family of four will pay an extra £80 on a family holiday? How does he justify that increased tax on children and family holidays?

The Prime Minister: It will be interesting to see which of Labour's expenditure proposals it will ditch to keep within the spending and tax plans that the shadow Chancellor has apparently endorsed. Is it not remarkable that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has had from the shadow Chancellor the most remarkable endorsement of his economic policy that any Chancellor has ever received? On every single tax and spending decision, this year and next, the shadow Chancellor agrees that my right hon. and learned Friend is infallible.

Sir Peter Tapsell: May I put it to my right hon. Friend that there is no such thing as a stable currency, except for relatively short periods, and that any political party that sought to base its policies on such a misconception would merely demonstrate its complete ignorance of the way in which foreign exchange markets operate in practice?

The Prime Minister: With the growth in importance of exchange markets and the growth in currency passing daily across exchange markets, my hon. Friend's point is undeniable.

Q5. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 February. [12534]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Loyden: On several occasions, and again today, the Prime Minister has told the House that the economic policies pursued by his Government have been responsible for inward investment and job creation in Britain. How does he square that claim with the fact that 1,300 jobs at Ford on Merseyside, as well as many others, are threatened? Is it not time that the Prime Minister woke up to the fact that jobs are being lost daily throughout the country? As far as I know—I have checked with the Library—Merseyside is still part of Britain.

The Prime Minister: It is Conservative policy to keep every part of the United Kingdom within the United Kingdom. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not support policies that might force an important part of the United Kingdom out of the United Kingdom.

Of course I am concerned about the implications of the job losses at Ford as a result of the rationalisation of its business in the United Kingdom and abroad. However, the hon. Gentleman must recognise that, despite those job losses, unemployment has fallen by 130,000 in the past two months.

Mr. Skinner: Fiddled figures, and 4 million out of work.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) seeks to deny the reality of falling unemployment. He lives in his own dream world, where he may best be left. The reality is that unemployment is falling throughout the United Kingdom. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) will know that people from areas such as Merseyside, where Ford has withdrawn its jobs, have been in touch with my right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry to see what assistance may be provided.

Mr. William Powell: Will my right hon. Friend make available three days of Government time next week to give the whole House the opportunity to discuss a Government motion congratulating the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on his candour in admitting that the Opposition have ample scope for huge tax increases? Such a debate would also allow the House to discuss Opposition Members' widespread hopes and expectations that there will be a £30 billion increase in public expenditure, even though that is denied by Labour Front Benchers. Does my right hon. Friend believe that we should discuss the Opposition's extraordinary agreement to Government economic targets as laid down by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer?

The Prime Minister: I am not sure that I can immediately offer three days for debate, but we would certainly require three days to explain the distinction between the remarks of the hon. Member for Oldham, West and those of the shadow Chancellor. It was an outburst of candour from the hon. Member for Oldham, West and also from the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown), the Opposition Deputy Chief Whip, who presumably has some idea of Labour's tax and spending policies. I cannot promise a three-day debate, but I can promise to mention that point on every necessary occasion.

Q6. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 February. [12535]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hain: How does the Prime Minister reconcile his assurance to the chairman of the Japanese equivalent of the CBI that he supports a single currency and would take Britain into it, with his assurance to the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) that he opposes a single currency and would block British entry? Which of those views—personally expressed by him—is correct, or are they both "infallible"?

The Prime Minister: No, they are both incorrect.

Q7. **Sir Ivan Lawrence:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 February. [12536]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. and learned Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Will my right hon. Friend congratulate a firm in my constituency, Technic Holdings, which is now the world leader in manufacturing tyre re-treads? [*Laughter.*] Will he note the laughter from Opposition Members about a firm that has increased its work force from four to 450 in nine years, and that uses 70 men to produce the tyres that 300 men are needed to produce in its German competitor, which it has now seen off? Its managing director and chairman have given three reasons for its success: first, the excellence of its workers; secondly, the enterprise culture created by the Government; and, thirdly, the throttling effect of Euro-legislation and German state taxes.

The Prime Minister: My hon. and learned Friend illustrates clearly where the new jobs are coming from. No doubt the hon. Member for Bolsover would say that those fresh jobs created in my hon. and learned Friend's constituency were fiddled jobs, but they are real jobs. They are jobs that would not have been created but for the Government's policies.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In column *452* of yesterday's *Hansard*, in the reply to my written question, it appears that I suffered injuries that were shown in police photographs taken on 13 September; that the allegations of assault upon me were referred to the Cambridgeshire constabulary on 14 September; and that my solicitors were informed that the Crown Prosecution Service was to take no action about those allegations.

I was in Cambridgeshire on that day. I cannot remember what my alibi was, but I was not at Whitemoor prison. That is a bad example of a misprint. I do not know whether I am being paranoid, but, since the printing of *Hansard* has been privatised, my questions have been lost and there have been absurd failures in sub-editing and proofreading. Can something be done to protect us from the evils of privatisation?

Madam Speaker: I appreciate the point of order raised by the hon. Gentleman. He has a right to complain, and to make a second complaint in a short space of time about the printing or non-printing of *Hansard*.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I am making a ruling—do you mind?

Mr. Faulds: I am sorry, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I should think so.

Accuracy in the printing of *Hansard* is crucial to the work of this House. I have yet again instructed the printers to pay more careful attention to the detail of printing. A corrigendum will be printed tomorrow, but that does not resolve what has happened today. I reject and deprecate the inaccuracies in *Hansard*, which are all too frequent these days.

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I wish to draw your attention to a press release entitled "News from Scottish Labour." Its headline is "Public spending watchdog to inquire into Tory ad blitz on vouchers". It goes on to say:

"Shadow Secretary of State, George Robertson MP today announced that the Hon Robert Sheldon, chairman of the powerful all party House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, will be raising the Scottish Office advertising campaign on nursery vouchers with the Comptroller Auditor General, Sir John Bourne, when he meets him tomorrow.

The issue of a £800,000 advertising campaign just before a general election was raised with Mr. Sheldon by George Robertson yesterday, who questioned whether this was a proper use of public money."

The press release continues:

"Mr. Robertson said . . . 'Ministers may be operating within technical government rules, but the fact that they will piggyback Tory posters on taxpayer funded advertisements shows what a shabby exercise all this is.'"

The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) has received a letter from Sir Robin Butler. I shall quote parts of it—

Hon. Members: Order.

Madam Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman wants me to examine written material, I think that I ought to have an opportunity to do so. He ought to send it to my office. I cannot comment on something that the hon. Gentleman is reading on the Floor of the House. What is the point of order for me?

Mr. Walker: I have no hesitation in coming to the point of order, because I believe it to be fundamental and important to the Chamber. You know, Madam Speaker, how deeply I care about the way in which things are done in the Chamber.

Is it in order for a Front Bencher to put out a press release about the possible action of the Chairman of a Select Committee in regard to matters that may or may not be discussed at a meeting with the Comptroller and Auditor General, Sir John Bourn? Is that not a hijack of the procedures of the House—as if the Public Accounts Committee were part of the Labour election machine, as per the headlines in the press release?

Madam Speaker: I should like very much, if I may, to have the material that the hon. Gentleman has. I shall want to look into it very carefully. It certainly concerns the activities of the House—I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman about that.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I know that it is said that Prime Minister's Question Time generates more heat than light—but am I having a heart attack, or could it be the light at the end of the tunnel? The luminosity in the Chamber seems to have been significantly increased, to the extent that I now realise how ugly Conservative Members are. Some of us like to skulk in the dark at the back of the Chamber. Were you consulted about the change, Madam Speaker, and can we have an opportunity to say something about it?

Madam Speaker: I thought that it was very illuminating to have improved lighting in the Chamber. I heartily endorse it. For a while, I thought that it was because I had cleaned my spectacles rather carefully this morning.

Mr. Faulds *rose—*

Madam Speaker: It cannot be a point of order with which I have already dealt.

Mr. Faulds: I am quickly devising a response, Madam Speaker—but, while I do so, may I say that I urge my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) to lurk in dark corners more often, and not to assert his ugly profile so publicly and frequently?

On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You may not be aware—but I know that you study *Hansard* assiduously—that there was a gross misrepresentation a couple of weeks ago of a question of mine in business

[Mr. Faulds]

questions. I took it up with the Editor of the *Official Report*, who was extremely responsive, and issued a corrigendum the next day—or a couple of days later—but did regret that there were so many frequent occurrences of this misrepresentation of what the House actually said.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman must be careful to recognise the difference between *Hansard* reporting and printing. The original point of order to me, and others earlier, were about the printing. This is not about our *Hansard* reporters in the Press Gallery; it is about the printing that hon. Members are concerned, and I take that on board.

Mr. Faulds: But it was a different point of order, in that case.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman might have made it clearer.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(4) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

That the Occupational Pension Schemes (Winding Up) Regulations 1996 (S.I., 1996, No. 3126) and the Advanced Television Services Regulations 1996 (S.I., 1996, No. 3151) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mrs. Lait.]*

Question agreed to.

NORTHERN IRELAND GRAND COMMITTEE:

That the Matter of the Public Expenditure Plans for Northern Ireland for 1997–98—1999–2000, being a Matter relating exclusively to Northern Ireland, be referred to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee for its consideration.—*[Mrs. Lait.]*

Question agreed to.

Statute Law Balancing (Limit on Maximum Quantity)

3.39 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to oblige Ministers of the Crown, when proposing either to implement any proposal under the European Community Treaties for legislation by the Council of Ministers or to introduce any bill or statutory instrument, simultaneously to propose the repeal of at least a similar quantity of existing legislation to that which they propose to implement or to introduce.

The Bill seeks to halt the growth in the number of pages of statute law. The idea is nothing new. It comes from ancient Greece. In his play "The Frogs", Aristophanes tells how Dionysius, overcome by the plight of Athens, ventured to Hades to find a poet best suited to save the city. He was asked to judge a contest between Euripides and Aeschylus using a giant set of scales to weigh up the qualitative pros and cons of each line of poetry. Two and half thousand years later, we use an equivalent test every day. Cost-benefit analysis has become a common tool of government, and the extension of compliance cost assessments has made the weighing-up process easier and more precise.

Today, we consider only the qualitative aspect of legislation—what we do in the Chamber. No one gives a thought to the total quantity of law that has been passed. Since 1979, we have produced 220,000 pages of additional legislation. In the 235 years between 1715 and 1950, we passed 298 volumes of Acts of Parliament. In just 45 years since 1950, we have added a further 112 volumes of legislation.

I wonder whether we would have fared just a little better if less legislation had been passed, as it often damages competitiveness, affects our enterprise culture and restricts individual freedoms. It is therefore not a moment too soon to find a way in which to halt the never-ending expansion of the statute book.

Some people will argue that we live in an increasingly complex society, and that it is inevitable that there will be more and more legislation. Others say that the harmonisation of Europe has resulted in more European directives, but many of those new laws are unnecessary, and dozens already on the statute book have lost their importance and relevance.

The Government have valiantly tried to do something about the problem by attempting to push back the insidious growth of statute law, but even their deregulation initiative has run into problems, what with the laborious process of passing deregulation orders via a Select Committee and of trying to push Brussels to repeal outmoded directives originating there. Some success can be claimed in limiting the cost of the implementation of new directives in Britain, but gold plating still lurks in some Ministries. Unlike King Canute, Ministers with responsibility for deregulation have temporarily stemmed the tide, but they have been unable to reverse it.

I seek leave to introduce the Bill because we can reverse the tide. One way is to cut the time that the House sits. There is clearly a correlation between the amount of time we spend in Parliament and the amount of law we churn out. If we sat less, inevitably we would pass fewer laws. In 1950, we sat for just over four months; by 1995, we were sitting for more than

five months. Perhaps the Jopling reforms will prove a blessing in disguise by reducing the number of hours that the House sits, and thereby providing fewer opportunities to pass laws.

There is a second way: to use sunset clauses, which automatically lapse unless reinstated. However, the simplest approach, which I favour, is to place a limit on the total weight of the law. I take 1 January 1997 as my baseline. If a new Bill is passed by Parliament, an Act of equivalent weight or a mixture of Acts and statutory instruments must be repealed. Unless that is done, the new Bill would automatically come to a halt, and would not receive its First Reading. That is the most effective way to curb the growth of unnecessary and unwanted legislation.

The approach is well illustrated by Sir Edward Marsh, Sir Winston Churchill's private secretary, who had many paintings. When the walls of his flat were full, he hit upon a simple solution—that he would buy another painting only if he could sell or give away a painting from his existing collection. That is what we must do with our stock of legislation, and my test is not wall space but weight.

Any hon. Member proposing to introduce a Bill must first identify statutes of equal weight to be repealed, and I suggest that the judge could be the Deputy Prime Minister. He would sit at his desk with a set of scales that had been issued by the Clerk of Works. A Minister who wanted new legislation would have to appear before the Deputy Prime Minister with his new Bill and those that he wished to repeal. Only if the scales balanced would the new Bill be eligible for qualitative merit tests in the House.

Clearly, the quantitative test would call for a radical change in the culture of Westminster and Whitehall, since the whole raison d'etre of the civil service is to create new laws, introduce new regulations and enforce new rules rather than wade through existing legislation to see what can be thrown out. Balancing old legislation against new is simple, and that simplicity should commend itself to the House.

Passing laws has always been seen by all hon. Members as a panacea for all ills. When new problems come to light, the cry goes up, "Pass a law," in the belief that a solution will automatically follow. Often, that is not the case; and changing the law makes for other problems. If leave is granted to bring in the Bill, we shall have to adjust our approach. Even a private Member's Bill could be introduced only if existing private Members' or private legislation of the equivalent weight balanced it on the Deputy Prime Minister's scales. Knee-jerk reactions to local or national tragedies would no longer qualify on their own unless existing laws could be found to cancel them.

As things are, we are just piling new laws on top of old, similar to the layers of history that are exposed in an archaeological dig. The Bill would result in wider implications being considered when legislation is proposed. Of course worthwhile and important Bills could still go through Parliament, but with the added bonus of cutting out the dead wood on the statute book at the same time.

I seek leave in a somewhat light-hearted vein to underline a serious point. I used the weighing process as a metaphor to highlight a situation which few Members realise exists. As I have said, there have been 220,000 pages of additional legislation since 1970. Red tape, bureaucracy and over-regulation are long-term threats to our nation's competitiveness and they restrict our individual freedoms. We must be much more vigilant and more vigorous in tackling this issue.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Anthony Steen, Mr. Michael Alison, Sir John Cope, Sir Peter Emery, Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith, Sir Sydney Chapman, Sir Anthony Durant, Sir Anthony Grant, Sir Michael Neubert, Sir Donald Thompson, Sir Gerard Vaughan and Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory.

STATUTE LAW BALANCING (LIMIT ON MAXIMUM QUANTITY)

Mr. Anthony Steen accordingly presented a Bill to oblige Ministers of the Crown, when proposing either to implement any proposal under the European Community Treaties for legislation by the Council of Ministers or to introduce any bill or statutory instrument, simultaneously to propose the repeal of at least a similar quantity of existing legislation to that which they propose to implement or to introduce.: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 14 February, and to be printed [Bill 93].

Orders of the Day

Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New clause 1

AGGRAVATED OFFENCE OF LANDLORD FRAUD

'. Where a person is found guilty of an offence or offences under section 111A of the Social Security Administration Act 1992, as inserted by section 13 above, and the offence is or the offences are in respect of—

(a) more than one claimant for benefit, and

(b) benefits paid in respect of persons resident in accommodation owned, managed or controlled by him,

he shall be liable, on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding twelve years or to a fine or to both, and in determining the level of any fine imposed, the court shall have regard to the sums dishonestly obtained by him.'.—*[Mr. McLeish.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

3.49 pm

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following: Government amendments Nos. 5 to 7.

Mr. McLeish: The Bill provides for careful examination of landlords' activities in housing benefit fraud, and new clause 1 would create a new offence of aggravated landlord fraud. We think that such an offence is necessary, because the Government have not yet been sufficiently tough on such fraud. In Committee, we discussed at great length the extent of the problem, and some of the points are worth repeating in the House.

We are currently spending almost £11 billion on housing benefit, a sum which has grown dramatically since 1979. In 1979, we spent £440 million, at 1995–96 prices, whereas, in 1996-97, we spend more than £5.5 billion for private tenants. For local authority tenants, the amount has grown from £1.7 billion, in 1978–79, to £5.2 billion, in 1996–97. We are therefore talking about an enormous amount of public expenditure, and that is the first important context in which we should consider the new clause.

The second context is that the scale of fraud is considerable. There is possibly a consensus that £1 billion of our annual £11 billion expenditure on housing benefit is being defrauded, although some people have suggested that the figure may be much higher. Although there is some controversy surrounding the £2 billion fraud figure that has been suggested and mentioned in some Social Security Select Committee decisions, that may be the upper level of housing benefit fraud.

Nevertheless—no matter whether the figure is £0.5 billion, £1 billion or £2 billion—fraud costs an enormous sum of money, and the House and the Government, of whichever colour, must take it seriously. We have tabled new clause 1 because of the scale of the problem.

In Committee, the Government were sympathetic to a request for a landlord register, and we agreed that Ministers should go away and formulate a new clause dealing with some of the issues that we raised and then return to the Committee. Consequently, we withdrew our new clause dealing with a landlord register. The Government accepted that suggestion, which represent progress, which we welcome. Now the Government have an opportunity to pass a second test, on the matter of an offence of aggravated landlord fraud.

The Minister said in Committee that the Bill already contained provisions to deal with that offence, but we do not accept that it does. The Bill is clearly focused on landlords and claimants, but far too much emphasis has been placed on claimants and not enough on landlords. Therefore, we want to strengthen the Bill's provisions, particularly those dealing with landlords. We also want to show landlords and the public that we are serious about the annual multi-million-pound fraud. In both the substance and the spirit of legislation, it is important that we send a powerful message to landlords, and especially to those in the private sector, that the House will not tolerate fraud, especially current levels of fraud.

In new clause 1, we suggest that a person involved in aggravated landlord fraud

"shall be liable, on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding twelve years or to a fine or to both, and"—

of course—

"in determining the level of any fine imposed, the court shall have regard to the sums dishonestly obtained by him"

or her.

We think that the type of offence that we are considering deserves the punishment we are suggesting, because there are different levels of landlord fraud. One landlord may have a few properties or a few tenants and be defrauding the system, perhaps in collusion with one or more of his tenants. There is then a gradation in criminal activity, however, in which some landlords in our cities are committing organised big-time fraud. We will simply be sending the wrong message if the Bill does not include a specific offence of landlord fraud.

The new clause also deals with multiple fraud. It provides a tough prison term, but defrauding the state is a serious offence. Most of the London local authorities that have been at the sharp end of this serious crime suggested that the Bill needed to be strengthened even more, and we agree. We find it difficult to understand why the Government will not accept the further strengthening that Labour is offering now, just as we did in Committee.

The Government have often talked about being tough on fraud—we support and applaud their attitude—but we have to match the rhetoric and fine words with tough action to show that we not only deplore what is happening but intend to root out the worst excesses of fraud by landlords.

In the past few years, the amount of housing benefit going to the private sector has risen to the point where it will overtake that paid to public sector tenants. Indeed, over the next two years, perhaps another £800 million will be added to the private sector rent allowance housing benefit. That is a staggering sum.

The Government should accept our proposal with good will. We want to toughen the Bill and strengthen the attack on fraudulent landlords. By accepting new clause 1,

the Government will do just that, and will send a powerful message to landlords who are currently defrauding the housing benefit system.

Mr. Chris Davies (Littleborough and Saddleworth): I warmly welcome the new clause, and urge the Government to accept it. Since 1988, there has been a 350 per cent. increase in the housing benefit paid to the private sector. As the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) said, the opportunities for fraud have increased considerably, and it is estimated that between £1 billion and £2 billion is disappearing into the pockets of fraudulent landlords.

Fraudulent landlords are getting rich at the expense of the taxpayer. They are doing so in various ways: some simply continue to claim for a tenant who has moved on, while some create fictitious tenants in order to claim housing benefit. Others who own several properties form a conspiracy, and set out to defraud local authorities by arranging for fictitious tenants—or, indeed, real tenants using fictitious names—to move so rapidly from one of their properties to another that it is impossible for the local authority agents to pursue them effectively.

One problem is that local authorities are so strapped for cash that they may not prosecute even when they know that fraud has taken place. Gathering the evidence required for a successful prosecution puts a strain on their manpower. Too often, when a landlord has been detected committing a fraud, all that happens is that the payment is stopped and the landlord goes unpunished. The penalties introduced in the new clause would concentrate the minds of local authorities and of the landlords who seek to defraud the taxpayer.

The Government claim to be tough on crime, and the new clause simply apes the Government's own sentiments by introducing penalties to curb a problem that we all recognise as one of the utmost seriousness.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Oliver Heald): A claimant or a landlord can be guilty of this offence. The new clause deals only with the sentence. How can it be right to lay down a sentence of 12 years for landlords involved in organised fraud and one of seven years for claimants involved in a series of organised attacks on the benefit system? That is nothing but ludicrous.

Mr. Davies: With respect, we are dealing only with one new clause, which is aimed at landlords. Whether the matter should also be addressed in other ways is for the Minister to determine. It is for him to take the opportunity to table amendments at the appropriate time. If the Government wish to be tough on crime, they have an opportunity to demonstrate it.

4 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I should like to set the new clause in context. It is an extraordinary turn of events for the Minister to find himself in his current position. It must appear to the outside world that he is softer on crime by landlords than on crime by claimants.

Mr. Heald: The Bill contains eight solid measures to tackle landlord fraud. Is the hon. Gentleman denying that?

Mr. Field: No, I am not denying that. I await with anticipation the Minister's speech, in which I hope that he will put forward cogent arguments as to why the Government do not accept the new clause. I was merely warning him that, if he fails to do so, he will stand in the dock appearing to the public to have two standards—one for claimants and a gentler one for landlords, as the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Davies) has just said.

The debate has taken a surprising turn. When the Select Committee on Social Security began its investigations into fraud, it had two clear objectives. The first was to find ways of protecting the largest of public budgets from people who make fraudulent claims, either accidentally or on a more organised basis. It seemed to us inconceivable that the budget was not under attack. The second objective was to try to build a consensus in the House—such a consensus exists in the country—on fighting fraud. It appeared to us that the easiest way to build a consensus was to seek redress for the abuses by claimants and landlords.

One of the positive results of the report is the unanimity that has developed in the House on tackling social security fraud. Indeed, listening to what Ministers say, it becomes clear that the debate has so changed that Labour is now calling for tougher measures than those that the Government propose. That is the crux of the new clause. To answer the case cogently made by my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) and the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth, the Government must explain what measures in the Bill will fulfil the objectives of the new clause. If they fail to provide such an explanation, they will appear to voters to have two standards.

It would not be surprising if a large number of people thought that. Until the new consensus emerged in the House, it was all too easy for the Government to put over the message that fraud was a claimant issue, allowing people to think subliminally that it was a Labour problem, because Labour supporters were perpetrating the fraud. The Select Committee report suggested a more even-handed approach to the issue.

Labour has certainly adopted such an approach. We are as serious about rooting out individual abuse by claimants as about giving the authorities the most effective powers possible to counter landlord fraud. I wait with interest to find out how the Government will deal with that.

Let me pick up another issue that was touched upon earlier in the debate. Have we become more effective in trying to prevent social security fraud, and do we always pursue those who perpetrate it? In other words, do we have a system of incentives that encourages local authorities not only to prevent fraud, but actively to prosecute those who commit fraud and publicly bring them to justice? Many Opposition Members are worried that, although the present structure of incentives and penalties seeks to prevent fraudulent claims—that is important—local authorities do not always have the resources to prosecute those who perpetrate large-scale fraud.

[Mr. Field]

I hope that the Minister will not join the Secretary of State in skating on thin ice and trying to get away with double standards to counter fraud. At present, we are prepared to throw the book at fraudulent claimants, but we tend to be much more careful in respect of landlords.

It may be true that fraudulent claimants get away with more money, but that is questionable. Nevertheless, there is no question that the largest individual acts of fraud are perpetrated by landlords, as it is much easier for them.

Mr. Heald: The hon. Gentleman should recognise that the offence that the Bill addresses is the same whether it is perpetrated by a landlord or a claimant. The new clause proposes that the sentence for a landlord should be 12 years rather than seven years. How does the hon. Gentleman square that with a difficulty that regularly arises when organised gangs who are not landlords attempt to attack the benefits system? Their criminality is just as serious as that of fraudulent landlords. In those circumstances, why should there not be equality?

Mr. Field: Indeed there should be equality. It is not too late for the Minister to table a manuscript amendment to that effect. We are anxious to make a distinction between fraud committed by individuals and that which is seriously organised by groups of people. The public are most concerned about that.

As I have said, it would be inconceivable if the largest budgets were not under attack by organised crime, yet many people make a distinction between that category of social security fraud and fraud that is committed by individuals. It is not that the public approve of that fraud, but it is quite clear that certain individuals commit fraud because their position in the labour market has been transformed in the past 10 years by the Government's massive extension of means-tested assistance.

Many such people keep quiet about the change in their circumstances because of the reduction in their personal income during that period. Although that is wrong and needs to be stopped, it is clearly different from the problem that the new clause seeks to address—landlord fraud and the groups of claimants to whom the Minister referred, who determinedly commit fraud against the public purse.

I sit down with considerable excitement. I hope to hear not only that the Government intend to accept our new clause, but whether they will table a manuscript amendment seeking to single out groups who are organising fraud in a similar way to landlords, and treat them the same as fraudulent landlords.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): I came into the debate to speak on subsequent amendments that excited me, but having listened to the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) express his excitement about waiting for my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to get to his feet, I have become excited about how much new Labour has permeated the thoughts not only of the hon. Gentleman, who is one of the most knowledgable Members on social security matters, but the Liberal Democrats. It is extraordinary to see the web that is being woven. I am sure that Opposition Members are acting in an honourable way, but it is nonetheless an extraordinary way.

The Labour party has traditionally been against landlords. Socialists would always be attacking them. Labour is obviously trying to put down a marker for when it goes back to being old Labour and returns to its socialist roots. It is trying to set a trap for the Government, so that it will be able to claim on the hustings and in its election manifesto that it is the tough party on law and order. Opposition Members know very well that the new clause will not be accepted.

Mr. Field: The biggest landlords in the country are local authorities. The Opposition are as clear about preventing fraud among them as they are about preventing it among landlords in the private sector. There are no double standards on the Opposition Benches. It is interesting how standards are developing on the Conservative Benches. If we wait long enough before the excitement of the Under-Secretary's reply, we will no doubt see new Conservatism.

Mr. Bruce: One might have to wait an awful long time for new Conservatism. Conservatism is, of course, a very basic approach, to which we have been sticking through thick and thin, despite the Labour party trying to out-Conservative the Conservative party.

I was trying to expound what came through clearly from Opposition Members' speeches. Labour and Liberal Democrat Members are saying, "Here we have a wonderful opportunity through the new clause"—even if it is not voted on—"to say that we are the really tough group of people." Perhaps even the Ulster Unionists will be making such a claim, although I am sure that they are much too sensible to jump on the bandwagon.

I am glad to say that all of us in the House are very pleased to see the clampdown on fraud. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will be able to tell us whether other offences, such as conspiracies to defraud, would put very large fraud into a category outside the Bill's remit.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): In case my hon. Friend is misinterpreted, I should point out that, whereas the Labour Front Benchers and the Liberal Democrats are all over the place on the issue, the hon. Member for South Antrim (Mr. Forsythe), who serves on the Social Security Committee, knows precisely what he is talking about. He brings a great deal of wisdom and expertise to the Committee.

Mr. Bruce: I am grateful for the trailer for the hon. Gentleman's speech. I was very careful not to put him on one side of the web or the other. I am sure that he will speak for himself, and very ably.

We can clearly see the web that is being constructed. Labour Members are taking what they believe is a wonderful opportunity to say that they are tougher on crime than the Conservatives. One can see that entering

their election manifestos immediately. I am tempted to suggest to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary that he accepts the new clause.

Mr. Field: Ah, that is what we want.

Mr. Bruce: With a big smile on his face, the hon. Gentleman says that that is what Labour wants, but is that really sensible?

As many hon. Members know, I quite often speak about prisons—I am often invited on to television programmes to talk about the situation in them. There are two prisons in my constituency, and we might be getting a third. Labour and Liberal Democrat Members constantly tell me that long prison sentences do not work, and that the Government should be trying other measures.

If the new clause had been tabled by the Government, a Labour party spokesman would no doubt have told us about the wonders of community service orders in dealing with multiple fraud. Such is the nonsense that comes up. I really stood up to speak so that, when we see the election manifestos, people will be able to go to *Hansard*, and so understand what the Opposition were up to.

4.15 pm

Mr. Clifford Forsythe (South Antrim): I sat through the Committee stage of the Bill, and well remember the debate there on this matter. I recall a suggestion from Opposition Members that they would leave the clause until it came to the Floor of the House, so as to give the Minister the opportunity to think the matter over and perhaps bring forward something acceptable to the Opposition.

Knowing the Bill, I have listened to the Minister and heard his point that people should not be treated differently, and that, if there is a penalty for doing something that is wrong, it should apply to everyone equally. Of course, there is the difficulty that the Minister himself raised when speaking about organised gangs.

If the Minister takes the view that those who are carrying out organised crimes should perhaps be treated differently, that could be extended to landlords, because, if they commit that sort of crime, it is arguable that a distinction should be made. While those who are receiving benefit personally might do something wrong through force of circumstances, it is arguable that, although the action is wrong, an allowance could be made because of the circumstances; whereas the Minister might consider that those who deliberately set out in an organised way to defraud the taxpayer should be treated differently.

Mr. Heald: My point is that measures in respect of conspiracy to defraud and offences under the Theft Act 1968 are adequate to deal with such cases, and that the offence we are debating has its own special place in the scheme of things.

Mr. Forsythe: I understand that, perhaps in a way that differs from the understanding of others on the Opposition Benches. I understand that the Government, and especially Ministers in the Department of Society Security, are anxious to reduce fraud in the system, and I praise them for that. What is debatable is whether the system that they are now introducing is sufficient.

Contrary to what the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) said, I, as a member of a Committee, make up my mind on the basis of the debate, the argument and my instincts as to whether legislation is correct and will do what is it supposed to do. I do not want to frighten the Minister, but I shall listen carefully to what he says. I do not make up my mind beforehand.

Mr. Ian Bruce: I am listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman. I had not intended to paint him into a corner with other Opposition Members, but he seems to be going down the same route.

Let us imagine a case of organised fraud in which a massive fraud was organised by claimants—by people who were not landlords—who inveigled many landlords into taking part. If all the participants were prosecuted under the same Act, would it not be strange that the individual little landlords would be likely to receive a much higher sentence than the persons—the claimants—who did the massive organisation?

Mr. Forsythe: I think that the hon. Gentleman has misunderstood, or perhaps he has a preconceived notion of the road that I am going down. However, I think that the Minister understands exactly what I am saying. I am patiently trying to put the two sides of the argument and achieve a balance. I have not made up my mind, and I have not yet recommended to my hon. Friends how we should vote. But I shall listen carefully to the Minister.

I am a member of the Select Committee on Social Security, and I have listened to the evidence, as have others among my hon. Friends, so I shall be most interested to hear what the Minister has to say. The recommendation I make to my hon. Friends will be based on that, and on what has already been said.

Mr. Heald: We have heard distinguished comments by my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) and by the hon. Member for South Antrim (Mr. Forsythe), and interesting and helpful comments by others who have spoken. We have also heard the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) putting the case for the Opposition.

However, I must start by saying that the new clause is really simply another attempt by Opposition Members to suggest that the Government and the Bill are in some way soft on landlord fraud. They are not. The reverse is true. Initiatives already in place, together with the measures in the Bill, amount to a 10-point plan to crack down on landlord fraud—

Mr. Frank Field: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Heald: I should like to make a little progress first.

Mr. Field: On that precise point?

Mr. Heald: All right, then.

Mr. Field: The Minister has misread the situation. We relied on the people in the field who are countering

[Mr. Field]

fraud, both to help us choose the subject of our inquiry and to guide that inquiry. We did not come to the subject with views; we were not experts on it. The Bill follows many of the report's recommendations, and we are grateful for the Government's response. Those very people, who helped us to shape our inquiry and our report, suggested that we should investigate the area, and it is they who now suggest that the new clause is necessary. It is not a great game put up by the Opposition; it comes from the people who put us on to the issue in the first place.

Mr. Heald: As you will have noticed, Madam Speaker, I was in the process of criticising the Labour Front-Bench spokesman rather than the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). I am always complimentary about the Select Committee, because of the complimentary remarks that it in turn has made about my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his efforts in this context.

The 10-point plan contains new powers of entry for local authority investigators, which will enable them to enter landlords' business premises and to make inquiries about any person believed to be a benefit claimant or recipient. That new power will help in the fight against landlord fraud.

There are also new powers, where the local authority has grounds for suspecting impropriety or fraud, to require a landlord or agent receiving direct payments to give information about all the properties that he owns and controls. That is another strong measure in the battle against landlord fraud.

Thirdly, the new provision for the recovery of overpayments will discourage the type of fraud in which a landlord continues to receive benefit after a claimant has left the premises. It will do that by allowing for overpayment recoveries of benefit in respect of one tenant to be made from benefit paid direct to a landlord in respect of his other tenants. That is another strong measure in the battle against landlord fraud.

The ability of local authorities to exchange information should make multiple claims, which represent one of the most common landlord frauds, much more difficult.

The fifth measure will mean that crooked landlords will no longer be able to sit at home and use the postal redirection service to receive their ill-gotten gains. New powers in the Bill will enable the post office to return such post to the local authority that sent it, thus saving the taxpayer from landlord fraud.

The new benefit fraud inspectorate, using the powers provided in the Bill, will assist local authorities by making recommendations to improve their anti-fraud performance, which will include measures to tackle landlord fraud. The seventh measure is the new offence of dishonest representation or failure to disclose, which is intended to be used against serious fraudsters including landlords.

In addition, we announced in Committee that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State intends to bring forward proposals for regulations as soon as practicable to enable local authorities to refuse or to terminate direct payments when an authority has reasonable grounds for doubting that the recipient—including a landlord—is a "fit and proper person". The Department of Social Security will make clear in guidance to local authorities that they do not have to make direct payments to landlords unless claimants are substantially in arrears with their rent. The new measures give local authorities powerful new tools to tighten up on crooked landlords and to combat serious frauds.

The eighth point is that the Government have made available £1 million in start-up money for the London organised fraud investigation team, which is designed to tackle serious landlord fraud in London. The team became operational in December 1996.

The ninth measure is the national roll-out of the housing benefit matching service, run by the Department. This began in November 1996, and is expected to be complete by 1998. It is able to match one local authority's housing benefit data with that held by other authorities, and with DSS benefit data. Discrepancies which point to suspect claims—including false representations by landlords—will be referred for investigation.

Where local authorities have information about landlords—for instance, those who have made false representations—this can be disclosed to other local authorities for the purposes of the prevention or detection of benefit fraud and checking the accuracy of housing benefit information under the new section 122E of the Social Security Administration Act 1992, which clause 3 introduces. This will help to stop multiple claims by landlords.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): The Minister has been describing a number of initiatives involving data management that are already under way. Are those measures legitimate under existing law, or will the Bill put them on a sound basis ex post facto?

Mr. Heald: The existing data matching measures used by the Department are all covered by the legal regime under the Data Protection Act 1988, and meet the terms of the European convention on human rights. The external data matching we carry out at present is limited to cases where there is evidence of fraud, and, in those circumstances, it is covered by the appropriate legislation. We are not approving something retrospectively, although the new powers will, of course, take us further in the data matching direction—something that the Select Committee recommended, and with which we agree.

Under the anti-fraud incentive scheme—the tenth measure—local authorities receive significant additional subsidy when they successfully tackle all types of benefit fraud—including fraud by landlords. Moreover, local authorities were awarded a further £6 million this year to finance a variety of anti-fraud projects. It is sometimes said that there is not enough Government money to help with these tasks, but local authorities earned £27.8 million in 1995–96 in additional subsidy for successfully tackling fraud. It is estimated that that figure will be higher this year. When looked at together, the measures produce a substantial package to deal with landlord fraud.

New clause 1 is a new variation on a familiar theme. In Committee, the Opposition sought to introduce an additional offence, which was intended to target

dishonest behaviour by landlords in connection with multiple claims to housing benefit and council tax benefit, with a maximum penalty of ten years imprisonment. The Committee rejected that proposal. Yet we now have before us a new clause that seeks to top that by introducing a maximum of twelve years for certain types of landlord fraud.

I am pleased that, in tabling the new clause, the Opposition appear to have accepted my explanation that the offence in clause 13 applies equally to a landlord as to a claimant, and they no longer suggest that there should be a separate offence. I am disappointed that they continue to argue that landlord fraud is somehow inherently more serious than all other types of benefit fraud, including that committed by professional organised criminals.

The real question is whether a separate, more severe sentence is needed for landlords. As I said in Committee, the new offence in clause 13 is not the only basis for prosecuting landlords who commit serious fraud. They can also be prosecuted—and are in appropriate cases—under the Theft Act 1968 and for conspiracy. Conspiracy to defraud and a Theft Act offence both carry a maximum penalty of 10 years' imprisonment.

4.30 pm

I fail to see any justification for a maximum penalty of 12 years directed specifically at landlords. Landlord fraud is serious, particularly when it involves abuse of a position of trust, but 12 years is a higher penalty than that for many serious offences against the person, such as indecent assault, cruelty to children, causing death by dangerous driving, or causing death while under the influence of drink or drugs.

As I said in Committee, existing fraud offences for which there is a 10-year maximum sentence may involve multi-million-pound frauds or a particularly vulnerable victim, such as an old lady callously defrauded out of her life savings; yet new clause 1 would make a landlord who committed a serious fraud, but on a smaller scale and without aggravating circumstances, liable to 12 years in prison just because he was a landlord. The Opposition have failed to make a convincing case to show the need for such a severe maximum sentence.

The Court of Appeal has considered the range of sentences which it and the courts feel are appropriate for serious dishonesty in the benefits field, involving large sums of money and an element of breach of trust. Its guideline, which is established as a benchmark, is six years' imprisonment for contested trials in those circumstances. Above that benchmark, the courts have headroom to pass even more serious sentences in more serious cases. However, it is hard to see what a landlord acting as a landlord would have to do to merit a sentence of 12 years, which is double the benchmark.

In summary, landlord fraud is serious. The Bill introduces a range of practical measures that will help local authorities to investigate fraudulent landlords and bring them to justice. Landlords can be prosecuted under a range of tough offences, carrying maximum sentences of up to seven years under social security legislation and up to 10 years under the Theft Act 1968 and common law conspiracy. A separate, even more severe, sentence is just window dressing.

I shall now briefly explain the Government amendments. Clause 13 creates a new offence of dishonest representation for obtaining benefit. It covers dishonestly making a false representation, and dishonestly producing or furnishing false information, or causing or allowing another person to do so.

Social security frauds can continue for a long, time and involve very many false declarations. In the past, we have relied on specimen charges to reflect that criminality. However, in 1996, in the case of R *v.* Clark, the Court of Appeal ruled out that approach. The implication for social security fraud is that the court would be able to sentence only on the basis of the specimen offences, each of which relates to only one period of two weeks, instead of being able to take into account the individual's full criminality in relation to benefit fraud. This is totally inappropriate where a fraudster is a landlord or a professional criminal, and hundreds of payments may be involved.

We therefore need an offence—as serious as those under the Theft Act 1968—for those cases in which dishonest obtaining of benefit over a period is a direct consequence of a single false statement or failure to notify changes of circumstances, so that we can avoid having to charge for each girocheque obtained. This is intended to relate the entire dishonest overpayment to the person's initial false statement.

That new offence is intended to be, in effect, what may be regarded as a continuing offence: an offence that covers the continuing period of dishonest behaviour. The inclusion of the offence of dishonest failure to report a change of circumstances is intended to enable the offence to relate to the full overpayment consequences arising from the failure to report, instead of relying on a series of false representations thereafter to the effect that no change had taken place.

Clause 13 also makes it an offence for someone dishonestly to cause or allow another person to fail to notify a change of circumstances which regulations under the Social Security Administration Act 1992 require them to notify.

I hope that I have not trespassed on the House's good will in outlining those details, but it is important to have the reasons for the change clearly stated on the record.

The purpose of amendments Nos. 5 and 6 is to clear up any possible ambiguity in the reference to "him" in this subsection by making it clear that the "him" referred to is, in all cases, the person who is required by regulations to report the change of circumstances.

Clause 14 extends the existing provisions in section 112 of the Act to include the offence of failure, without reasonable excuse, to report a change of circumstances which regulations require to be reported. It will also be an offence for someone knowingly to cause or to allow another person to fail to notify such a change of circumstances.

Amendment No. 7 introduces a further test. The offence of "failing to notify" is being introduced to enforce the existing duty on beneficiaries to disclose a change of circumstances. Much social security fraud arises from omissions rather than acts of commission. That duty is laid on both claimants and, in certain circumstances, third parties.

The provision will catch, where appropriate, automated credit transfer cases where no declarations are made at the point when payments are received and where a landlord

[Mr. Heald]

receiving direct payments of housing benefit fails in his duty to notify the local authority of a change. Such cases cannot easily be prosecuted under current legislation.

As I explained to the Committee, it is not the intention that failures to notify caused by a genuine mistake should be treated as cases of fraud and prosecuted. In a case where a person is genuinely unaware of the relevance of a change of circumstances, the intention is that the safeguard of "reasonable excuse" would apply, and that, ultimately, the courts would decide what that constituted. Additionally, the legislation would operate within the framework of the Department's prosecution policy, which is to prosecute only where prosecutions are clearly in the public interest.

We therefore believe that the defence of "reasonable excuse" provides all the safeguards needed, should proceedings be brought. Nevertheless, concerns were expressed in Committee, especially by the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), about the scope of the offence, particularly where it could be the underlying alleged offence for an offer of an administrative penalty under clause 15.

In practice, we would not expect a prosecution or an administrative penalty offer in a case where the claimant genuinely did not know that a change of circumstances needed to be reported. However, having reflected on the points made in Committee, the Government consider that it would increase confidence in the prosecution and penalty arrangements if the offence were amended to underline the policy intention.

The amendment therefore introduces an additional safeguard by adding to the offence of failing to notify the same test as applies elsewhere in section 112—that the person knows that he is required to notify the change of circumstances. That will ensure that only fraudsters can be offered penalties, and people who have simply made a mistake cannot be brought into the penalty regime. I hope that the amendment will allay the fears that were expressed.

I propose to retain the test of "reasonable excuse", for the reasons that I explained when the matter was discussed in Committee. I want to exclude, for example, someone who had had to go to hospital and had not notified the change, even though he knew that he should have made that notification.

Like the more serious offence in clause 13, clause 14 contains a reference to a third party causing or allowing another person to fail to notify a change of circumstances. As I explained in the introduction to the amendment to clause 13, there may be a possible ambiguity in the reference to "him". Amendment No. 7, therefore, in addition to introducing a test of knowledge, clears up that ambiguity by making it clear that the "him" referred to is, in all cases, the person who is required by regulations to report the change of circumstances.

In summary, therefore, I ask the House to reject new clause 1 and to accept Government amendments Nos. 5, 6 and 7.

Mr. McLeish: I am disappointed by the Government's response to new clause 1. In a sense, they have had three tests. First, we asked them to review the direct payments system and allow local authorities to stop direct payments to landlords if fraud was suspected. They refused to accept that suggestion. Secondly, in Committee we proposed the creation of a landlord register. They accepted the merits of that proposal, and came back with their own new clause.

Now we find that they will fail at the final hurdle, because this new clause has been concocted for the benefit of no one; it has been proposed so that this Parliament can say to landlords, "We shall simply not accept what you have been doing, and will crack down firmly with this new offence of landlord fraud." If the Government do not accept new clause 1, they are sending the wrong message to the country. That is why we hope that, as Conservative Members have suggested, there will be a consensus on being tough on the matter.

It is not right to say that organised criminal landlord fraud is exactly the same as an individual claimant defrauding the system. Both are fundamentally and utterly wrong, but the difference is the scale of fraud and the volume of expenditure involved in the case of private housing landlords. That is the key reason that we want the new clause to be accepted.

The Government have had their opportunity, but they have failed to accept new clause 1. We shall therefore divide the House.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 244, Noes 297.

Division No. 64] **[4.40 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashton, Joseph
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil

Gilbert, Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Sally Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Gerald
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stret'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Marlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Robert
Shore, Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms R *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Greg Pope and
Mr. John Cummings.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Atkinson, David *(Bourn'th E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Body, Sir Richard
Boscor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hat'fd)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, John
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*

Horam, John
Howard, Michael
Howell, David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Scott, Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs Gillian
Shephard, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfld)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bexh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bowen Wells and
Mr. Sebastian Coe.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 2

CODE OF PRACTICE ON PRIVACY

'—(1) The Secretary of State shall prepare a Code of Practice on the use and processing of personal data for purposes associated with the provisions of this Act or any enactment amended by this Act.

(2) A copy of any Code of Practice prepared under the provisions of this section shall be laid before Parliament.

(3) Before he lays before Parliament a copy of any Code of Practice prepared under the provisions of this section, it shall be the duty of the Secretary of State to publish a draft of that Code and consider any representations made to him about that draft by—

(a) the Data Protection Registrar, and

(b) any other person or body,

and he may modify that draft accordingly.

(4) A Code of Practice prepared under the provisions of this section shall not come into effect until it has been approved by resolution of each House of Parliament and issued by the Secretary of State.

(5) The Secretary of State may from time to time revise the whole or any part of a Code of Practice issued under the provisions of this section, and the provisions of subsections (1) to (4) above shall apply to any such revision, with appropriate modifications.

(6) It shall be the duty of the Data Protection Registrar to keep under review compliance with any Code of Practice issued under the provisions of this section, and in pursuance of this duty he shall have power to require the provision of any information necessary to him in the discharge of this duty.

(7) Where the Registrar considers that the provisions of any Code of Practice issued under this section have been breached, then such a breach will be deemed to be a breach of the data protection principle or principles to which that part of the Code relates.

(8) The Secretary of State shall lay before Parliament annually a report on the monitoring of compliance with any Code of Practice issued under the provisions of this section.

(9) In this section, "data protection principles", "Data Protection Registrar", "personal data", "processing" and related expressions have the same meaning as in the Data Protection Act 1984.'—*[Mr. McLeish.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the clause be read a Second time.—*[Mr. McLeish.]*

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): It is necessary to provide a clear legal basis for the use and disclosure of information. I remind the House that we are discussing information that has been collected for one purpose but will be used for another. Such data may be supplied by statute to the Inland Revenue or by a person who is claiming benefit. People provide the information voluntarily because they believe that they are entitled to claim benefit.

We have a duty to protect both kinds of information, but we have a particular and pressing duty to safeguard information that must be disclosed according to Government requirements. The Bill proposes to use the information supplied by disclosing it to other Departments

and local authorities in order to detect fraud. The Opposition support that objective, but the Bill contains wide powers for data matching activities that may be carried out in two ways: first, by checking an individual's details with other databases—for example, by checking whether an address supplied is valid or income details remain the same—and, secondly, by performing a side-by-side comparison of two or more large databases to detect trends, anomalies and potential duplicates.

It is possible to compile a comprehensive picture of an individual, and to identify likes, purchase habits and credit behaviour. Alternatively, the information may be used to detect similarities and differences between data that are collected for different purposes—for example, someone may be collecting social security and paying income tax. The information may be used both as a commercial tool and as a weapon in the fight against fraud.

With the proposed privatisation of many Department of Social Security functions, many data will end up in the hands of private operators. The two remaining bidders for Project Accord—the centralised computer project in the Department—are American, and one is registered in Liechtenstein. There is no guarantee that work will not be exported to another country to take advantage of cheap wages. The Department of Social Security is accountable to Parliament, but that partner would be far removed from it.

New clause 2 does not contain any proposals that the Government have not already acknowledged. In their Green Paper, "Government.direct", the Government state specifically that people want their interests to be protected. The document says:

"people want to be assured that their interests—such as their reputations, their finances, their entitlements and their prospects in life—are properly safeguarded. Information about them must not be misused, wrongly disclosed, accidentally revealed or fraudulently obtained . . . New methods of service delivery outlined in this Green paper will be developed in accordance with the requirements of the UK's international data protection obligations."

It also promises that the Government will consult the Data Protection Registrar so that the collection, use and disclosure of data can comply with the necessary requirements and meet the necessary standards of protection. It goes on to give an assurance that the commitment to consultation on all those issues will apply equally once the European Community data protection directive is in force.

The Opposition want the Government to do what they have said they want and intend to do in "Government.direct". I have quoted the Government's own words—but they are empty promises unless the Government can ensure that public concerns are met. Labour proposes that the Government achieve that aim through the provision of a code of practice to regulate the way in which information is used and disclosed.

Mr. Heald: The problem with new clause 2 is that it applies to only a limited area of government, so we would end up with a piecemeal approach to data protection rather than the seamless provision that everyone wants. Consultations are taking place on the European data protection directive and the "Government.direct" Green Paper. That is surely the proper place to deal with those issues.

Mrs. Campbell: The Minister is correct to say that we shall soon require new legislation to bring the EC data protection directive into force. It will apply only to data that are specifically guarded by EC legislation, and it will not apply across government as a whole. There will be a time lag before that directive is implemented in the United Kingdom, so we shall require some protection in the interim. Our proposal has been suggested by the Data Protection Registrar herself, to protect the interests of individuals in the meantime.

If we consider the possible abuses, it is clear what problems may arise. I am sure that the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) felt angry and betrayed when the details of his unpaid Visa bill were made public. Similarly, members of the royal family were embarrassed and dismayed when it was revealed that a private telephone conversation had been recorded.

It is clear that, when the technology was invented, such activity was not intended to happen. We must guard against the unexpected and the harmful. Intrusion into private lives could become commonplace if regulation is not put in place. The stakes are high. I urge the Government to think twice before being cavalier about privacy.

5 pm

We propose a code of practice, but we do not set out what should be in it. There should be full public consultation, and the Data Protection Registrar's advice should be sought. The code of practice may need to be reviewed regularly, as technologies change rapidly, security requirements differ over time as criminals discover new techniques for defrauding the system, and international treaties may change our obligations. Flexibility is required. The new clause would provide for a code of practice, which should be drawn up after consultation and introduced by regulation.

The Minister referred to the EC data protection directive. We do not yet know what form of domestic legislation will transpose that directive into United Kingdom law. The statutory code that we propose should serve to ensure that decisions that are made on the basis of automated, data-matching exercises are not in breach of article 15, which gives individuals the right not to be subject to an automated individual decision, although there may be exemptions. As a person who has suffered damage as a result of a breach of the data protection principles can claim compensation, it is important that the Secretary of State takes note of that. He should now establish procedures that would avoid that problem.

Our proposal is by no means unusual. In Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United States and Germany, data matching by government is subjected to independent scrutiny. Individuals who are identified in "hits" as a result of data matching must have a chance to make representations.

I hope that the Minister will accept the new clause, or at least agree to introduce a clause of his own when the Bill goes to the other place. Our proposal follows the advice given to the Secretary of State by the Data Protection Registrar in a letter dated 10 January. If the Minister will not safeguard personal privacy by a code of practice, I hope that he will spell out in his reply precisely what he will do instead.

Mr. Ian Bruce: I shall comment briefly on the excellent provisions in the Bill, and explain why I believe that the new clause, although worthy, should not be accepted.

[Mr. Ian Bruce]

Hon. Members will have heard me talk about the European informatics market group, which has an unfortunate acronym—it sounds like something completely different unless one listens carefully. That all-party group considers issues such as data protection. It was set up because of an unfortunate EC draft directive that probably would have destroyed the whole of the informatics market in the United Kingdom. The hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) raises her eyebrows, but she will be pleased to know that the current draft directive, which is doing the rounds in Europe, is more to the United Kingdom's liking and to the liking of the European informatics market group, which has taken sensible advice.

The United Kingdom civil service has almost the most enviable record of any civil service in the world on keeping people's personal data secret and secure. It may not have such an enviable record on keeping the Government's secrets secure—especially when draft information is being sent between Departments—but we should be proud of what the Inland Revenue, the Department of Social Security and housing benefit offices in our town halls have already achieved. The codes of practice they work to are exemplary.

We are considering whether it is right or wrong to allow information that is collected for one purpose to be used in matching to discover whether criminals—I emphasise that—are trying to rip off the system and steal taxpayers' money. No hon. Member who has read the reports of the Social Security Committee can be in any doubt that we should use whatever technology is available to check that we are making best use of public money, and that we are not being ripped off.

The Opposition propose that, instead of having discrete information in discrete Government Departments, we should establish a special code of practice with a special form of policing to cover the exchange of such discrete information between Departments. That is an unnecessary leap.

The Data Protection Registrar has made many proposals. Many aspects of our data protection registration are nonsense. We can prosecute people if they do not register to operate and keep data—if they have not informed the registrar—but once they have registered, there is not a lot that the registrar can do to them. It is important for the registrar to lay down principles. We should not have a bureaucratic system. We should ensure that remedies are available to people who are damaged because data on them have been passed on when they should not have been. We should examine that aspect of the problem.

It is long past time that we had this exchange of information. Many hon. Members will know that I ran an employment agency in Yorkshire for about 12 years. Towards the end of that time, the Department of Social Security found out that a temporary member of staff had more than one job. In fact, that individual had five jobs and was claiming unemployment benefit and social security. The Department knocked on our door and said, "This person has been claiming and has also been working for you." I said that I could provide the necessary details, because we had told the Inland Revenue and the Contributions Agency that that person was working for me. I was amazed that that information had not immediately been passed to the Department of Employment so that it could check the details.

When the investigator asked whether we could give him a list of all the people who had been working for us in the past six months, I said, "No problem," and provided him with a complete list. We found that a third of the people who were registered in our agency were working for us, being paid by us, paying taxes and national insurance—and receiving unemployment benefit.

The first thing that amazed me was the time that it had taken the Department of Social Security to ask us for information. We were only too happy to co-operate: we were taxpayers, and we wanted to ensure that people were "signed off" before coming to work for us. Following the successful outcome of our passing information to the Department, however, I was even more amazed when it did not contact us again.

I strongly believe that data matching should be available to Departments that are trying to establish whether people are ripping off the system. It is very simple; it is a case of churning through data, using high-powered computers, and trying to find a match. Records involving people who are not in any way suspicious are ignored. No person examines the records: certain information is thrown up that looks a little suspicious—perhaps 50 people, all supposedly living at the same address, claiming housing benefit, or perhaps 30 people with different names claiming unemployment benefit in a one-bedroom flat. A large number of people may be found to have the same date of birth, and to be living in the same place. I am sure hon. Members will agree that that is the kind of information that we want to find.

The hon. Member for Cambridge made an impassioned plea for data to be treated properly. She should accept that this country has a good record on ensuring that personal data are kept in an appropriate way. Most people would be amazed to learn that information they give to one Department is not shared with others. Most honest citizens would probably consider sharing entirely normal and natural; it is because the crooks know that it is not that they have been getting away with murder for years.

I oppose the new clause.

Mr. Chris Davies: I do not believe that any hon. Member can wish to do other than end benefit fraud. Money should, of course, reach those who are most in need, and not be siphoned off by people who are out for private gain, and defraud taxpayers and other claimants for their personal advantage. People should not, however, be able to take advantage of the bureaucratic obstacles that may exist now in order to play one Department off against another. We support the widening of powers to ensure that data can be cross-referenced to enable crooks and fraudsters to be caught out.

As long as the powers in the Bill are used as they are intended to be used, there will be no problem. The question is, how do we ensure that that happens? How do we prevent civil servants with access to information from going on fishing expeditions to find out—for reasons of curiosity, devilment or desire for personal gain—the private details of other citizens? The details may be those of a personal acquaintance: a neighbour, perhaps, or an ex-wife's new partner.

One thing is certain. The House cannot rely on the good behaviour of every civil servant; that is expecting too much of human nature. As sure as eggs is eggs, there will be cases of abuse.

I listened with interest to the comments of the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce). He spoke of the specific information that would be available, giving us to believe that it would be possible to gain access only to that information; but a National Audit Commission report published in March 1995 noted 655 reported incidents of computer hacking among civil servants—staff who were exceeding their authority by using passwords to obtain information about members of the public which they intended to disclose, or did disclose, to outsiders. That happened two years ago.

Mr. Bruce: It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman should raise the subject of computer hacking. Does he accept that someone who opens a filing cabinet and examines a piece of information in that cabinet can get away with it very easily, but that someone who hacks into a computer leaves an audit trail? Many people say that a computer is less secure than a filing cabinet, but I would contend that it is much more secure.

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman misses the point. He may be correct in saying that it is possible for computer hacking to be detected—if, that is, someone is aware that it is taking place, and bothers to go and check. There is clearly a huge difference between access to one filing cabinet in one Department and the ability to touch a computer keyboard and gain access to a full range of Government information on the screen. The technology that is now at our disposal, and the sheer amount of information on private citizens that is stored in Government offices, create an opportunity for the fostering of Orwellian conditions.

As Liberty has pointed out in the past few days, there is a danger that human rights may be violated if the Bill is passed in its present form. The House must remember that it has an obligation not only to protect taxpayers from fraud, but to protect and safeguard the liberties of all individuals, along with their privacy. It must give them the right to ensure that that privacy is not invaded without specific and lawful reason.

5.15 pm

In an intervention, the Minister said that powers would shortly be introduced to ensure that access to information was properly controlled, but I, for one, do not feel happy about supporting proposals now on the assumption—only the assumption—that safeguards will be introduced later. In the past few weeks, the official Opposition's approach to the Police Bill has demonstrated all too clearly that they do not share the approach of Liberal Democrats and, I believe, Liberty to the defence of civil liberties. That does not make us feel confident that the safeguards mentioned by the Minister are likely to be introduced if the official Opposition become a Government later this year.

None the less, I support the proposals for a code of practice, which go some way towards meeting my concerns. I ask hon. Members to remember that we have a duty to set standards that are, in this respect, at least as tough as those applying in other democracies, and that we should not forsake that duty.

Mr. Alan Howarth: In contemplating the Bill, we face a dilemma. We are all committed to introducing measures and powers to prevent and expose fraud, but, equally, we should all be committed to safeguarding civil rights, and, in particular, the right to privacy that is enshrined in article 8 of the European convention on human rights. We must strike a balance. That involves a difficult judgment, but I believe that the introduction of the code of practice proposed in new clause 2 would help us to strike the right balance. At present, such a balance is grievously lacking.

Last week, I asked the Secretary of State a question about this matter, and his response was not discouraging. I hope that the Minister will be able to tell us today that it is indeed the Government's intention to introduce a code of practice—but we must wait and see what he says.

In the meantime, hon. Members are doubtless aware of the legal opinion with which Liberty was provided by Mr. Richard Drabble QC and Dinah Rose, who clearly consider that the Bill fails to constrain powers within the exceptions that are set out in the second paragraph of article 8 of the European convention—the exceptional circumstances in which intrusion into privacy can be justified. They doubt whether the powers that would be exercised under the Bill could be regarded as being in accordance with the law; in the sense that the Bill creates such large discretion, and omits so comprehensively to provide safeguards, that it would not be possible for the citizen to regulate his conduct with sufficient precision—to use the terminology of legal opinion. They question whether the Bill, and the actions that could be taken under it, would be proportionate.

Of course there is a pressing social need to address the problem of fraud, but it remains at the very least highly doubtful that such far-ranging powers should be taken and exercised by the Government and their agencies, invading the privacy of the individual citizen through data matching. The opinion's authors deplore the absence of an effective remedy, to which the citizen should be entitled under article 13 of the convention when there is abuse of his privacy. They say that, before someone's personal records are divulged to others, there should at least be grounds for suspicion or, at any rate, inaccuracies and inconsistencies should already have been demonstrated. Of course, the Government will contend that, until they have the data matching powers, it will not be possible to demonstrate the inaccuracies and the inconsistencies, as is necessary in the effort to deal with fraud, so we are clearly faced with a conundrum.

What the House cannot be in doubt about is that the Bill provides for a large extension of state powers. It amends section 122 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 so that the Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise and other Departments may pass on information to the Secretary of State. He may pass on information to local authorities and their contractors, who may pass it on to each other—not to mention access to the Royal Mail's database for redirection of mail. We are therefore talking of a vast increase in the scope for data matching and of the use of extended powers not just for purposes of prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of fraud, but to enable greater accuracy to be achieved in records.

Then there is the catch-all phrase:

"any other matter relating to social security".

The Department of Social Security already has powers to obtain information from other Departments when it investigates fraud, but, if the Bill is passed in its present

[Mr. Alan Howarth]

form, the Department will have powers to embark on wholesale trawling of increasingly large databases. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) said, that must at least be contrary to the 1981 European convention on data processing, which stipulates that data compiled for one purpose should not be used for another.

Safeguards need to be introduced. We need legislation to incorporate the new European data protection directive. We also need privacy legislation. We should incorporate the European convention on human rights into our domestic law and, following satisfactory public debate, introduce a Bill of Rights in Britain.

In response to my intervention, the Minister said that the Bill was not needed to legitimise existing data matching, but I understand that, since April 1995, the Department has cross-checked certain benefit payments, looking for inconsistencies and multiple claims. The London fraud initiative is already under way. Existing legal powers must be being stretched to their ultimate, if not being overstepped. We should be careful and sensitive about civil liberties. The Police Bill has been mentioned, and I think that we are all conscious of this issue's delicacy.

There was a story in the press recently—I think last Sunday—about benefit spies joining police road checks. It said that fraud investigators and the Benefits Agency were interrogating people who were stopped by police in routine roadside checks and that, last year, up to 10,000 vehicles were checked. Benefits Agency staff were alongside the police as they did that.

Liberty reports that some people who were questioned were not told of their right to stay silent. That must worry us all. There is always the temptation for big government and officialdom to step beyond where they should go in the exercise of their powers, using excessive zeal, and jeopardising civil liberties. That is why it is particularly important for the code of practice to be incorporated into the Bill.

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Gentleman seems to be supporting the Bill but saying things that would preclude its being passed. May I give him an example? The original data protection directive said to people who wanted to mail a person information that was unrelated to the fact that they had the person's name and address from another source that they first had to mail the person and say, "Am I allowed to mail you something?" but, by doing that, they would have broken the law in the first place. That is the way we can go if we take it absolutely at face value that no one is allowed to cross-check information that is given to the Government.

Mr. Howarth: I think that the hon. Gentleman misunderstands me. I am not suggesting that there should not be data matching. I argue that data matching should be circumscribed by powers that enable the citizen to be protected. Limitations on data matching should be set out in a code of practice, which can evolve over time to match best practice internationally, and match agreements that we enter into. We would have flexibility within what I hope would be an absolutely resolute desire to strike the balance that we need between the civil rights of the individual citizen, particularly the citizen's right to privacy, and the Government's obvious duty to do what they can to stamp out fraud. I am arguing not for an absolute in one direction or the other, but for maximum care.

I hope that, in the exercise of whatever powers the Government take through the Bill, they will always be anxious to do what they can to minimise intrusion into privacy by using, for example, privacy enhancing technology such as encryption and "pseudonymisation", ensuring that names of individuals about whom data may be revealed are known to the minimum number of officials and only in circumstances when that can be absolutely justified.

In Committee, I quoted from DSS research report No. 56 on "Confidentiality: the public view"—the Department-commissioned report by Mr. Alan Hedges. Its findings should warn Ministers that public opinion is sensitive in this matter, and they must be extremely careful in deciding what powers to take—and certainly in the exercise of those powers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge described how legislative practice in other countries has moved well ahead of ours. By the autumn of next year, we shall have to legislate to incorporate into our law the new European directive. That will inevitably provide a new legislative context for the Bill's operation, but, as we do not have that safeguard in place, it is all the more important, as she has said, that the code of practice should be incorporated.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I support the new clause, which provides for a code of practice on privacy. First, it does not adversely impact on data matching for anti-fraud activity. All it does is ensure that such activities comply with a code of practice that is approved by the Data Protection Registrar.

I tabled a parliamentary question on the Bill to the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security. His answer stated:

"The registrar wrote to my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, on 10 January about the scope of the disclosure of information powers contained in the Bill, advocating the introduction of a statutory code of practice for DSS datamatching activities."—[*Official Report*, 27 January 1997; Vol. 289, c. *108*.]

Therefore, the registrar clearly supports the new clause's purpose.

Liberty's opinion has already been quoted to the House. Its press release, published on 31 January, said:

"Liberty today published a legal opinion from two leading lawyers, one of whom is a Queen's Counsel, which states that the "Datamatching" provisions of the fraud Bill breach the right to privacy contained in the European Convention on Human Rights."

Liberty stated:

"The opinion is by Richard Drabble QC and Dinah Rose who are experts in social security and the law of the European Convention on Human Rights and advise the government on such matters."

A code of practice would help to prevent Ministers from breaching our international obligations under recommendation R(86)1 of the Council of Europe convention. Although the United Kingdom has opted out of the provisions of paragraphs 1.2, 3.3 and 5 of the recommendation, it has not derogated from paragraph 4.3, which states:

"Personal data should not be communicated outside the framework of social security for other than social security purposes except with the informed consent of the person concerned or in accordance with other guarantees laid down by domestic law."

The importance of paragraph 4.3 is that, if other uses occur, guarantees must be laid down in domestic law.

5.30 pm

Clause 1 replaces section 122 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992, and clause 1(4) shows that personal data can be lawfully supplied to other organisations. There is no statutory guarantee offering the protection that the recommendation proposes. A code of practice would supply such a guarantee.

My second reason for supporting a code of practice is that the legislation has the potential to negate most of the Data Protection Act 1988. As the House knows, that has eight principles, and the Bill could negate all of them. I shall refer to a couple of those. The first principle states:

"The information to be contained in personal data shall be obtained and personal data shall be processed, fairly and lawfully."

Clause 1(4) makes lawful certain disclosures of detail from the Inland Revenue to the Department of Social Security and vice versa. Later clauses legalise disclosures to local authorities and vice versa. The Data Protection Registrar has no remit under the lawfulness arm of the first principle, as any processing with respect to the exchange of personal data is made lawful by the Bill. Similarly, the fairness arm of the principle, which requires a data subject to be notified of any non-obvious use and disclosure, is also negated. The new law, as represented by the Bill, overrides it.

If the use or disclosure of personal data is required by law, it can be used or disclosed "in any event". The "fairly obtained or processed" provision is overridden, which means that any use or disclosure under the legislation can lawfully be kept secret and data subjects need not be informed of it. The fourth principle states:

"Personal data held for any purpose or purposes shall be adequate, relevant and not excessive in relation to that purpose or those purposes."

As I said in Committee, any hon. Member who loses his job after the election—many Conservatives will lose theirs—and makes a social security claim can be data-matched for ever under the Bill. That is an excessive provision. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) said, clause 1 legitimises the disclosure of personal data, not just about offences relating to social security but

"for use in checking the accuracy of information relating to benefits, contributions or national insurance numbers or to any other matter relating to social security and (where appropriate) amending or supplementing such information."

That is a broad provision, and it makes a mockery of the principle that data should not be used excessively.

The Government have the potential to negate all the data protection principles. In almost all other fields, if the Data Protection Registrar wishes to enforce compliance with the data protection principles, she serves an enforcement notice on data users in the knowledge that failure to comply with it is a criminal offence. However, under section 38(2) of the Data Protection Act, a Government Department cannot be prosecuted. If Departments cannot be prosecuted, enforcement notices cannot be enforced, and serving them is irrelevant. As a result, the Data Protection Registrar is impotent in terms of enforcing the principles.

That is a worst case scenario, but, as we are dealing with fundamental privacy matters, we need to give the registrar an effective role in correcting abuses. There should be a statutory code of practice which brings in the registrar, and it should relate to the data protection principles and privacy considerations. If the DSS decides to act in an underhand way, the registrar could make her views known to Parliament, and it could take account of her warnings. Such a code of practice should hold no fears for the DSS. However, we cannot leave the potential for gross neglect of the data protection principles by the DSS to chance, thereby trampling on the privacy rights of individuals. A statutory code of practice on privacy is necessary.

Mr. Heald: My hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) made an excellent point when he said that this country should be proud of the way in which the security of personal data has been protected for many years by Government Departments.

There are stringent rules governing the way in which the Department records and uses such information. It is available only to officials on a "need-to-know" basis. There are random management checks to ensure that access has been properly authorised, and there is also audit trail analysis. Officials are conscious of the need to hold and process data securely, not least because, each time an official logs on to the system, he is reminded of the fact that every access must be authorised and that unauthorised use is a serious disciplinary offence. Some staff in the Department have been disciplined and some have been dismissed within the past year for breaches of the rules. However, there have been very few breaches, because there have been few instances of officials and staff not following the rules that we have laid down.

All computer processing is registered under the Data Protection Act 1988, and officials are in regular contact with the Data Protection Registrar. Any unlawful disclosure of information is an offence and, occasionally, prosecutions are pursued. The Department's record on handling personal data by computer is exemplary in terms of security, confidentiality and conformity with data protection principles and other requirements of the Act.

As the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) said, since July 1995 we have been data matching between different computer systems. That has been carried out by a small team of highly skilled officials working in secure conditions on a single site. Detailed criteria are set, any matched data must be relevant to the benefit, and discrepancy is investigated only where it raises a suspicion of fraud. In the Office of the Data Protection Registrar, the registrar is aware of that service and of the action that is taken to protect data.

The same rigorous principles of confidentiality and security will be applied to the Bill: only relevant data will be supplied by the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise, and about emigration, immigration, nationality and prisoners; it will be held in secure conditions by a small number of specially appointed officials; and data that are consistent with data we already hold will not need to be further disclosed within the Department. Moreover, the Department's use of that data will be registered in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1988, and—once they come into force—with the requirements of the European Union data protection directive.

Like all other data users, local authorities are bound by the requirements of the Act and other legislative requirements to ensure confidentiality and proper

[Mr. Heald]

handling of data. They, too, have a good compliance record. The Office of the Data Protection Registrar has produced guidance for local authorities—which is endorsed by both the DSS and local authority associations and issued to all local authorities—and it will be updated once the Bill receives Royal Assent.

As drafted, new clause 2 presents the House with a very wide proposal. It would apply to all current processing performed by the Department of Social Security and range across other Departments—not only the DSS—and it would be unsystematic. It would also extend the operation of the Data Protection Act 1988. Any breach of a code of practice would be deemed to be a breach of the data protection principles, even if it were not. Moreover, the Data Protection Registrar's role would be greatly expanded, and she would have to review compliance with the code of practice. That would be unnecessary because, as I have explained, our policy is to co-operate with her. I think that she would agree with that. Her annual reports and those of her predecessors show that it is not the DSS but other data users that cause concern.

Hon. Members may believe that the Data Protection Registrar should have a right to obtain information from any data user, but that is a general issue to which, no doubt, the House will return when it considers the Government's proposals for the implementation of the EU data protection directive.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Will the Minister give way on that point?

Mr. Heald: I think that I am about to deal with the point that the hon. Gentleman wishes to make. Perhaps I can go on, and we can then discover whether his question has been answered.

Other concerns are specific to the new powers introduced by the Bill. We are in touch with the Data Protection Registrar on the use of personal data within the Department, and she has suggested to us some ideas on additional safeguards which could apply to data matching. Although the Government are unconvinced at the moment by the case for a code of practice—as it would not add any practical measures to safeguard personal data, and risks blurring the clear provisions of the Data Protection Act 1988 and the Secretary of State's accountability to the House for compliance with it—the Government will consider further the points made by hon. Members in this debate and, if she wishes, discuss them further with the Data Protection Registrar; that offer has been made.

I do not doubt that similar concerns will be raised when the Bill is considered in another place, and there will undoubtedly be further opportunities for debate then. The Government are unconvinced of the case for a code of practice, but will reflect on the points made in this debate.

I should also mention the point on Liberty's opinion. In framing the Bill, it was of course vital that the proposals complied with the provisions of the European convention on human rights. The issue would be tested only in the context of an individual case being pursued. However, when we were developing the proposals, we considered all the issues of lawfulness and prescribed the law in a very tight and careful manner. We believe that there is no question of there being any breach of our obligations. I realise that hon. Members are as concerned as we are to protect the interests of individuals, and I can assure them that the Bill's provisions are not the thin end of any wedge.

The powers we propose have been framed to allow relevant information to be provided by other Departments to the DSS, and the purposes for doing so have been explained clearly in the Bill. There is no question of curious civil servants being able to trawl through information to investigate friends and neighbours. There are very tight procedures for such activity, and clear measures for discipline and prosecution are available, should it occur. I do not think that it is necessary for me to say more on that issue, unless the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon would like to pursue it.

Mr. Howarth: I am grateful to the Minister.

Many administrative functions have of course now been contracted out to private sector organisations. I am not sure how confident he can be that the very strict rules, informal code and ethics—which he rightly says he insists on in the Department—will be observed by private sector agencies. As matters now stand, the Data Protection Registrar does not have a power to audit; she can only respond to complaints. Does the Minister really consider that sufficient, considering the scale of the operation?

Mr. Heald: I think that the package of current safeguards, which I have outlined, are adequate. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Hedges report. It is worth remembering that one of its key findings was that the public want information to be sufficiently available for the efficient conduct of their own affairs, and for confidentiality not to act as a shield for serious wrongdoing. That is also the Government's view. Having outlined the Government's case on new clause 2, I hope that the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) will be prepared to withdraw the motion.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 258, Noes 300.

Division No. 65] **[5.45 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene	Boateng, Paul
Ainger, Nick	Bradley, Keith
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*	Bray, Dr Jeremy
Allen, Graham	Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*	Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*	Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary	Burden, Richard
Ashdown, Paddy	Byers, Stephen
Ashton, Joseph	Cabom, Richard
Austin-Walker, John	Callaghan, Jim
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Barnes, Harry	Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Barron, Kevin	Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Battle, John	Campbell-Savours, D N
Bayley, Hugh	Canavan, Dennis
Beckett, Mrs Margaret	Cann, Jamie
Begg, Roy	Chisholm, Malcolm
Beith, A J	Clapham, Michael
Bell, Stuart	Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Benn, Tony	Clelland, David
Bennett, Andrew F	Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Bermingham, Gerald	Coffey, Ms Ann
Berry, Roger	Cohen, Harry
Betts, Clive	Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Blunkett, David	Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*

Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Davies, Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Sally Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stret'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Robert
Shore, Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Speller, John
Squire, Ms R *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Joe Benton and
Mr. Eric Clarke.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth (Rushcliffe)
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael

Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, John
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howell, David *(Guild'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Scott, Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bex'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'd)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bowen Wells and
Mr. Sebastian Coe.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 3

SUPPLY OF INFORMATION AND IDENTIFICATION OF ENTITLEMENT TO BENEFIT

'. Regulations made under this section may prescribe circumstances in which—

(a) information held by any authority under any provisions of this Act, or any other Act amended by this Act, may be used to identify persons who are entitled to receive benefit, for the purposes of determining that entitlement; and

(b) information supplied under the provisions of this Act or any other Act amended by this Act for the purposes of ascertaining benefit entitlement may be used by an authority or by the Secretary of State for the purposes of verifying another benefit claim.

(2) Regulations under this section shall be by statutory instrument, which shall be laid before Parliament in draft and which shall be subject to approval by resolution of each House before being made.'.—*[Mr. Denham.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

6 pm

Mr. John Denham (Southampton, Itchen): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause reflects the clear principles that Labour consistently advocated in Committee: we must be tough on fraud, tough on cheats and tough on crooked landlords, not only because fraud and theft are wrong, but because each pound taken away in fraud could have been used to help those who are entitled. The welfare system should deliver help only to those who need it, but we must ensure that it does indeed deliver that help.

Some of the powers in the Bill to tackle benefit fraud could also be used to help to identify and encourage claims from and payments to those who are entitled. The

Bill rightly contains far-reaching powers, but Labour Members have difficulty understanding the Government's objections to using similar techniques to help people to receive the benefits to which they are entitled. The new clause would do that. It would make clear the ability to pass information from one Department to another and between Departments and local authorities, to help to identify people who have an entitlement to benefit.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating my local newspaper, the *Cambridge Evening News*, on its benefits take-up campaign? Its front-page story on 27 January featured Mr. and Mrs. Gibson, who were able to claim several thousand pounds of entitlement that they had not known about.

Mr. Denham: I have no hesitation in applauding that initiative in Cambridge and those in many other areas. My local authority's benefits take-up week was responsible for identifying a further £80,000 of unclaimed benefit. I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that there is a sharp contrast between such local initiatives and the Government's record.

The new clause would make clear the ability of Departments and local authorities to share information to help to identify people with an entitlement to benefit and, under carefully controlled circumstances set by the Secretary of State, would make some claims for benefit simpler by specifying that information accepted as valid by one agency, perhaps a local authority housing benefit department, could be accepted as valid by, for example, the Benefits Agency, for another benefit.

It is an historical accident that the welfare system is divided into so many units that do not communicate with one another. If history had been different, this debate might not have been necessary. A seamless, unified benefits system could have been created, capable of delivering a person's entire entitlement in one exercise. We do not have such a system, but there is a case for identifying circumstances in which that would be a desirable way forward. The new clause would help with that.

We should be clear about the problems that need to be tackled. One million pensioners do not receive the income support to which they are entitled—that figure represents a sharp rise on the previous estimate of 700,000—and go without an average of £14 a week, not for one or two weeks or for one or two months, but year in, year out. They remain in poverty because of their lack of income. We are talking not about missing out for a few weeks, as someone on another benefit might, but about permanent poverty.

The Government have not bothered to find out who those pensioners are, but we can make an informed guess that they are like other poorer pensioners: they are old, they are alone, they are women and they are widows. We should not ignore their plight. We know that, if they do not get income support, they will not get cold weather payments. One million pensioners in Britain lose out on that entitlement and on the reassurance of help with heating bills. We know what happens: high fuel bills mean that many pensioners do not turn up their heating during periods of intense cold, such as the weather that we had in December and January.

Mr. Heald: Who brought in the cold weather payments system?

Mr. Denham: The 1 million pensioners do not benefit from a system that does not work. There were 127 separate events triggering cold weather payments during December and January, but those pensioners did not benefit. This country carries the shame of an extra 30,000 to 50,000 deaths a year because of the cold, but the Government's response is confused, uncaring, ineffective and increasingly mean. What do the Government say when faced with evidence that their income support system is failing 40 per cent. of the people whom it is meant to reach? The Secretary of State said in his Politeia lecture last year:

"Our policies promise security to the least well-off pensioners."

They do not—not when they fail 40 per cent. of the poorest pensioners. The Secretary of State says that people do not claim because they choose not to. If that is true, why did the number of people not claiming increase by 300,000 in one year?

The Under-Secretary is more direct. He told the Standing Committee considering the Bill:

"we do not know why certain pensioners do not take up income support".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 5 December 1996; c. 44.]

That was honest, but the Government should know. They say that they want people to claim. The Minister told the Committee:

"We all accept that it is important that pensioners who are entitled to income support should be given every encouragement and all the information that they need to claim it."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 5 December 1996; c. 62.]

The system is failing 40 per cent. of those entitled, and Government spending on publicity is being reduced.

The Government seem content to see the poorest pensioners in poverty and happy to go on creating the stigma that deters claimants. I do not believe that the problem is simply one of people choosing not to claim. I believe that the stigma puts people off, because income support is seen as charity, not as a right that goes a small way towards returning some of the taxes and national insurance paid over the years.

The forms are complex, and people are worried about misclaiming inadvertently and being labelled scroungers, or worse. Elderly people are often proud, and have every reason to be, but that does not mean that we should not ensure that they are offered what they are entitled to in the most acceptable and easiest form.

I commend the role played by Age Concern, Help the Aged and many local councils and voluntary agencies in raising awareness about benefits. They have shown that, with the right approach, information and help, people will claim; but still income support is failing 40 per cent. of the poorest pensioners.

A different approach is possible. Labour Members have said that we want to move towards a pension entitlement that is simpler to claim, with more access points and presented without the stigma of income support. One valuable tool to help to identify potential beneficiaries would be finding ways of using information that people have already freely given. The new clause would make that possible.

It is often assumed that pensioners who do not claim income support are outside the system, and that no one knows about them or has any idea who they are. That is not true. A considerable number of those missing out on

[Mr. Denham]

benefits are receiving other benefits, or are in contact with other agencies, such as the local authority social services department.

Entitlement could be established at a wide variety of predictable trigger points: retirement age; reaching 75 years; reaching 80 years; a spouse going into care or into hospital; care assessment for domiciliary care; a move to sheltered housing; a claim for attendance allowance; a claim for disability living allowance; becoming registered as blind; the death of a spouse; or making an application for housing or council tax benefits. Those trigger points could be brought together to identify and encourage take-up.

The new clause would allow the development of some parts of such a system. For example, it would allow the passing of information from the Contributions Agency to local authorities and between agencies and the Benefits Agency. It would allow the Secretary of State to set out the circumstances in which that could happen. There are good reasons for that approach, including the proper protection of privacy and the proper protection of public finances. However, it is clear that more could be done for pensioners who claim some benefits but not others.

Under the new clause, people who receive council tax benefit, for example, could have their entitlement to income support identified. They would be offered the chance to claim, and payment would be made on the simplest possible basis.

According to what the Minister said in Committee, fewer than half the local authorities are in a position to tell pensioners about possible entitlement to income support. Notification is likely to be vague and unspecific, and the individual will still have to comply with a lengthy claims procedure, possibly duplicating the procedure for claiming council tax or housing benefit.

The first part of the new clause would enable local authorities to identify a potential claimant and calculate the value of the claim, in many cases using existing information. Only a little additional information might be required. The local authority could follow up the claim or pass it to the Benefits Agency.

The second part of the new clause would allow the information verification procedures adopted by one benefit-paying body to be accepted for benefit payment, under circumstances set out by the Secretary of State. That would avoid the need for the same information to be assessed by two separate bodies for the same purpose—paying benefit. In practice, that might require a system of local service agreements between the Benefits Agency and the local authority about the information required to calculate benefit.

Under the new clause, people eligible for one benefit—a pensioner receiving council tax benefit, for example—could have their entitlement to another benefit, such as income support, calculated. They could then be offered payment, which would be triggered simply by their saying yes, which would obviate the need for a further claim.

The new clause would go a significant way towards assisting the poorest pensioners who are missing out on their entitlement.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: New clause 3 has at its heart a simple proposal that sounds attractive. It was mentioned by the hon. Members for Peckham (Ms Harman) and for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) on Second Reading. It sounds simple: there would seem to be no reason why the method used to catch people who seek to defraud the system should not be used in the other direction.

There is an overlap between this debate and the previous one. We should consider what the new clause would mean in practice rather than take it at face value. In practice, it would invade people's privacy in quite some detail.

Some people may not want to claim benefit, although I accept that some people may be unaware of their entitlement. That is why the Government continue to run a succession of benefit take-up campaigns, some of which have been very successful. Some people, however, might resent the idea that the state was looking at all the details of their private lives and had decided to inform them that they might be entitled to benefit and that they should make a claim; they would resent that intrusion into their private lives.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman has discussed his concerns with the Data Protection Registrar. It appears from my conversations with her that she would insist on certain safeguards, but she is happy with the principle of data matching for such benign purposes.

Mr. Hughes: That is extremely good of the Data Protection Registrar. Funnily enough, however, I was not referring to her. Although she may consider it perfectly right to do so under the regulations, she cannot possibly speak on behalf of pensioners and other potential claimants. The hon. Lady has raised an irrelevant point.

As my hon. Friend the Minister said at the end of the debate on Second Reading—although I missed the first few seconds of the speech by the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), I do not think that he addressed this point—some people would be identified as potential claimants, but would not be entitled to benefit.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): I am stunned by the hon. Gentleman's line of argument. Can he provide examples of elderly people—or anyone on a tiny disposable income, living in real poverty—having objected because the Government had tried to force money on them?

Mr. Hughes: I am sure that some people would not object, but others might. Some elderly people are very proud and might object to the state taking an overview of their lives.

6.15 pm

Mr. Heald: Does my hon. Friend agree that one category that includes substantial numbers consists of people who live with their families, are supported by them and choose not to claim benefit?

Mr. Hughes: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I do not wish to delay the House long, but there are two points to be made about the new clause. First, many pensioners would find its provisions grossly intrusive into their private lives; secondly, the information gleaned might be inaccurate and some people would be informed that they

were entitled to further benefit when that was not the case. Unless those points can be answered, new clause 3 should not be added to the Bill. I shall certainly oppose it.

Mr. Chris Davies: In supporting new clause 3, I should like to take up what I understand to be the Government's argument in opposing it, which is simply that it would be impractical and would not achieve their objective. If that is the case—and some Opposition Members believe that the Government's objective is not to increase public expenditure, even to help the most needy in society—why does the Minister not simply look at the wording of the new clause? It is well intentioned, relatively harmless and unlikely to cause any problems if the Minister were to accept it. The possible benefit to be gained is that more than a million pensioners might have the opportunity to secure some of the money to which the House believes them to be entitled.

I ask the Minister to reject the argument put forward by the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) that pensioners are reluctant to accept what is rightfully theirs, and I ask him to recognise that, although the new clause may be flawed and technically it may not be possible to implement it at present, perhaps in a few months or years there may be some advantage to be gained. Even if the advantages are minimal, at least by accepting the new clause the Minister will have swept away the criticisms of Opposition Members who suspect that he may have ulterior motives.

Mr. Heald: The hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Davies) has made some interesting comments. It is an odd principle that we should simply take a punt on the new clause, whether or not it works. We heard a detailed account of the Opposition's approach from the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), but my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) really hit the nail on the head when he addressed many of the difficulties in that approach.

New clause 3 attempts to enable benefit entitlements to be identified, assessed and checked without the involvement of the individual concerned, using information already held or gathered under the provisions of the Bill. Unfortunately, it would not work, and it would take us no further forward. In fact, it would do little more than raise people's hopes when they are not entitled to benefit.

I explained in Committee the measures that are in place to make the public aware of the benefits that are available. Everyone has the choice whether or not to claim benefit; the important point is that help is there for those who need it. Assessment of entitlement to benefit is a complex procedure and not something that can be achieved without having all the relevant information available; yet by proposing that entitlement should be determined using just the information already held, that is exactly what the new clause would result in.

In respect of information in Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise records, data matching would be ineffective from a benefit take-up perspective. The Inland Revenue holds information only about taxpayers and those claiming repayments of tax; it does not hold information about non-taxable income counted for benefit purposes such as income from premium bonds, tax-exempt special savings accounts and national savings certificates or earnings from part-time employment. Similarly, Customs and Excise holds information relating only to people and businesses registered for VAT, but not those with turnovers below the VAT threshold. Other details, such as information about non-dependants and other household members, are also relevant for benefit entitlement purposes but cannot be obtained from the Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise or any Government Department.

Mrs. Anne Campbell *rose—*

Mr. Heald: That brings me to the subject of local government, about which the hon. Lady may wish to ask me.

Our guidance to local authorities encourages them to take action to make all claimants who appear to have a potential entitlement to income support aware that help may be available to them from the Benefits Agency. Many local authorities have software available to automate that. With regard to income support records, a service level agreement between the Benefits Agency and local authorities allows for information to be exchanged, and that will continue. Income support claim forms contain a form inviting the income support claimant to claim housing benefit and/or council tax benefit.

Mrs. Campbell: Does the Minister agree that many pensioners who claim council tax benefit are entitled to income support but do not claim it even though they have been told by their local authority that they may be entitled to it? His proposals do not deal with that. That is precisely what my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) is trying to overcome.

Mr. Heald: I recognise the hon. Lady's concern, but the difficulty is that, although it is quite right to make all pensioners and individuals who are entitled to benefit aware of their entitlements—and such help is quite properly available—it is for the individual to decide whether they wish to claim benefit.

The Government's view is that to undertake a means-testing exercise behind people's backs and without their permission, which would also not be accurate, is the wrong way forward. Making pensioners aware, through information made available by the Government through leafleting, sending information to various information points, visiting pensioner groups and co-ordinating the sort of pensioner awareness campaign that has recently been running in conjunction with Help the Aged and other elderly people's groups is the better way forward.

With regard to income support rules, if the income support claimant does not indicate that he or she wishes to claim housing benefit or council tax benefit and does not complete the claim form that we issue, I do not believe that it is right for him or her to be pursued or for us to insist that they make a claim. This is a free country, as the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) said in a different context, and we must accept that there may be reasons why individuals genuinely do not want to claim.

Mr. Flynn: What reasons?

Mr. Heald: I think that I gave an example earlier.

Mr. Flynn: It is ludicrous to say—and no evidence of it has been given—that pensioners are not claiming benefits because they do not want the money. It would be extraordinary if that were so. We know that the reason is that they are ignorant of available allowances. The awareness campaign would impress us a great deal more if the Government had not recently made cuts in the telephone hotline service—the main service that told people what was available.

Mr. Heald: I totally disagree with the hon. Gentleman about the purpose of closing the general advice line. It was closed because numerous people were ringing to ask about their personal circumstances and were having to be told that they would have to get in touch with their local office if they wanted anything to be done. We are localising the service. Why bother having an intermediate step when individuals can ring their local office where trained staff are able to answer their inquiries? The hon. Gentleman says that we all know that individuals do not claim because they do not know about the rules, but we do not know that that is so. What we know is that a significant number of people do not claim, and I believe that there may be a variety of reasons for that.

The Government believe that it is a better use of resources to ensure that information about benefit entitlement is freely available in the public domain, and that is what we do. The Department and its agencies take extensive action to publicise the wide range of benefits that are available. It is a clear measure of success that in 1994-95—the most recent year recorded—£9 out of every £10 of available benefit was claimed.

The state retirement pension order book contains notes explaining details of other benefits, including income support and housing benefit. People whose benefits are paid directly into their bank or building society by automated credit transfer receive annual copies of the notes. Information about social security benefits and the conditions of entitlement to them is widely available to the public from Benefits Agency offices, local authorities, welfare rights organisations and other places such as doctors' surgeries. In addition, leaflets explaining benefit rules are available in post offices and libraries throughout the country.

There will always be some people who choose not to claim. That is their right. For those who wish to claim, information and advice about benefits to which they might be entitled is readily available. In those circumstances, I ask the House to reject the new clause.

Mr. Denham: The Minister has failed to rise to the scale of the problem: 1 million pensioners—one in 10 of all pensioners, and the poorest pensioners in this country—are going without the benefit to which they are entitled; 40 per cent. of people who are meant to be helped by income support are not receiving it; and the number of pensioners who chose not to claim in one year increased by 300,000.

The Minister says that that is simply because people do not want to receive assistance—a contention for which he has put forward no evidence whatever. If the Government were genuinely concerned about the problem, the very least that they would have done would be to conduct some research to try to justify their claim. In the absence of such a claim, I prefer to believe that, although some people may not want to claim, the great majority do not do so because of the stigma, the complexity and the difficulty of understanding the system and making a claim.

Every one of the objections that Conservative Members have raised can be dealt with. If the Secretary of State were convinced that there would be serious objections—albeit from a minority of pensioners—to information that was freely given for one benefit being assessed for another, there is no reason why, under new clause 3, the Secretary of State could not simply include on the claim forms a box to enable people to refuse to allow information to be used for any other purpose. I suspect, however, that very few people would exercise that option. That point entirely meets the objection raised by the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes).

The second objection raised was that information would not be accurate. Anybody who knows the structure of the benefits system is aware that information that has been accepted as accurate for, say, housing benefit or council tax benefit is precisely the same information that is needed to calculate income support. Either the Minister and the hon. Member for Harrow, West are suggesting that there is something fundamentally wrong with the information being used for the payment of benefits, or that objection, too, is a red herring.

Fundamental to the issue is the difference in message that would go out if it appeared that the system worked to the benefit of the individual who needed assistance. It should be made clear that such help is not charity or a state handout, but an entitlement, and every part of the system should make every effort to ensure that those who need support receive it because the support received has been paid for many times over during people's working lives. At present, the Government seem prepared to allow an entire set of wholly unnecessary obstacles to lie in the path of an efficient and effective system. For those reasons, I hope that the House will support new clause 3.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 245, Noes 297.

Division No. 66] **[6.29 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Benton, Joe
Adams, Mrs Irene	Bermingham, Gerald
Ainger, Nick	Berry, Roger
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*	Blunkett, David
Allen, Graham	Boateng, Paul
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*	Bradley, Keith
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*	Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary	Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Ashdown, Paddy	Burden, Richard
Ashton, Joseph	Byers, Stephen
Austin-Walker, John	Caborn, Richard
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Callaghan, Jim
Barnes, Harry	Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Barron, Kevin	Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Battle, John	Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Bayley, Hugh	Campbell-Savours, D N
Beckett, Mrs Margaret	Canavan, Dennis
Beith, A J	Cann, Jamie
Bell, Stuart	Chidgey, David
Benn, Tony	Chisholm, Malcolm
Bennett, Andrew F	Clapham, Michael

Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Davies, Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Strat'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Robert
Shore, Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steel, Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike
Williams, Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jon Owen Jones and
Mr. Clive Betts.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bitten, John
Body, Sir Richard
Boscor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*

Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, John
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Sir Edward
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howell, David *(Guildf'd)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'rne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Scott, Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'd)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bowen Wells and
Mr. Sebastian Coe.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 8

DIRECTIONS BY SECRETARY OF STATE

Amendments made: No. 1, in page 14, line 24, after 'Act;' insert—

'(bb) a copy of a report relating to the administration of benefit has been sent to a local authority under section 102(2) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 and to the Secretary of State and section 103(1) of that Act has been complied with;'.

No. 2, in page 14, line 26, leave out 'that Act' and insert

'the Local Government Finance Act 1982'.

No. 3, in page 14, line 46, leave out 'achieve' and insert 'attain'.—*[Mr. Heald.]*

Clause 11

INFORMATION FROM LANDLORDS AND AGENTS

Amendment made: No. 4, in page 18, line 28, after '(1)' insert 'Regulations shall provide that'.—*[Mr. Heald.]*

Clause 13

OFFENCE OF DISHONEST REPRESENTATION FOR OBTAINING BENEFIT

Amendments made: No. 5, in page 21, leave out line 46.

No. 6, in page 22, line 1, leave out from 'notify' to 'to' in line 3 and insert—

'a change of circumstances which regulations under this Act require him to notify; or

(d) causes or allows another person to fail to notify a change of circumstances which such regulations require the other person'.—*[Mr. Heald.]*

Clause 14

EXTENSION OF OFFENCE OF FALSE REPRESENTATION FOR OBTAINING BENEFIT

Amendment made: No. 7, in page 22, line 26, leave out from 'notify' to 'he' in line 30 and insert—

'a change of circumstances which regulations under this Act require him to notify; or

(b) knowingly causes or knowingly allows another person to fail to notify a change of circumstances which such regulations require the other person to notify,

and he knows that he, or the other person, is required to notify the change of circumstances,'.—*[Mr. Heald.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Mr. Knapman.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): I call Mr. McLeish.

Mr. McLeish: I think that there are two other Opposition contributions to be made before I speak, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

6.43 pm

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: I have no wish to detain the House, but I would like to make a few comments. I welcome the Bill again, as I welcomed it on Second Reading, and I support its implementation. However, I am very disappointed that new clause 2, covering the code of practice on privacy, was not accepted, because of the implications for Northern Ireland.

I am sorry that the Minister felt that he had not enough time to take an intervention, because that part of the Bill is most important to Northern Ireland and the security situation there. I wish to put on record the fact that the implementation of the Bill will go through the House by negative resolution, by Order in Council, so, unfortunately, we shall not have the opportunity to discuss the impact of those aspects on Northern Ireland.

I am unhappy that it was not found possible to include Northern Ireland on the face of the Bill, so that such matters could have been fully discussed and investigated in the context of the legislation. I am the social security spokesman for my party, yet I have found great difficulty in getting information about the system for dealing with social security fraud in Northern Ireland. I am unhappy about that, too.

Until we see the order, which cannot be debated but will go through the House by negative resolution, I shall not know how the system will work. I have not had an explanation. I do not know whether the provisions will be implemented by the Department or by the Benefits Agency, and I do not know how the Housing Executive will fit into the whole scheme.

The fraud situation in Northern Ireland is unique, because we have the only land frontier in the United Kingdom. That in itself creates problems. Other aspects of the situation in Northern Ireland mean that, in some areas, it will not be possible to implement all of what is in the Bill.

It is unfortunate that the implementation of the Bill's provisions in Northern Ireland will go through the House by negative resolution, because there will be no debate, and we shall not be able to consider the details of how things will be done, or whether we should change anything. That is a great tragedy for democracy in this great House.

That is why I wanted to make a final contribution on the Bill. Those who organise such things—the usual channels—may consider such matters a suitable subject to be brought before the Northern Ireland Grand Committee before the order appears. I have given the Bill a warm welcome, but I am unhappy and uneasy about the way in which its provisions will be implemented in my part of the United Kingdom.

6.47 pm

Mr. Chris Davies: On Second Reading, my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne), the Liberal Democrat social security spokesman, gave the Bill a cautious welcome. She expressed some reservations about details, but said that, overall, it was necessary and welcome. At this late stage in the process, I echo those sentiments.

Of course there are faults in the welfare system as a whole. The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), perhaps better than anyone else, has pointed out the way in which the welfare system traps people in dependency, and all too often prevents them from rising out of it.

None the less, unless other widespread changes are made, the Bill is still essential in its present form. It makes no difference what party is in power; it is the task of the Government of the day to ensure that fraud is stamped out, because there can be no place in our system for cheats—for people who rob the taxpayer. They create a climate of hostility among the public, and that leads to political pressures being applied, which ultimately mean that those in the greatest need are denied some of the help that is really necessary.

6.49 pm

Mr. McLeish: It is a pity that the Government have seen their anti-fraud strategy start to unravel during our final discussion on the Bill. The whole House is tough on fraud, and there is no point in trying to defend individuals or landlords—or organisations of both—who try to defraud the taxpayer. In doing so, they create a climate in which many people are accused of scrounging. That is a travesty, and that is why we must continue to be tough on fraud. Certainly the next Labour Government will continue to be tough on fraud.

We could have gone further, of course, and the Government failed three tests. First, we asked the Government to consider introducing a register—or a code of conduct or practice—to ensure that civil liberties are protected as the Government embark on a wide-ranging extension of data matching within both local and central Government. But the Government could not bring themselves to accept our new clause, and I am still dismayed by that.

The second test concerned the question of the specific landlords offence. In Committee, we heard that the Bill would deal with claimants and landlords who indulge in fraud, but that is simply not good enough. It is quite clear that, in view of the scale of the fraud in which landlords are involved and the volume of taxpayers' money being defrauded, we need a specific offence of landlord fraud. That would have sent a powerful message from this House

[Mr. McLeish]

that landlord cheats would be identified and dealt with in the toughest way possible. The Government failed that test, also.

The third test was the opportunity to use a Bill aimed at improving the administration of social security to tackle the problem of people who are entitled to benefits but do not take them up. If it was not so serious, the response of the Government to the matter would be laughable. They said that an attempt by the state to help people to get the benefits to which they are entitled would be invading the privacy of individuals. "Ludicrous" does not start to sum up that response.

We then heard that those people did not want to claim benefits, but we should put that to the test. I believe that many of them would want to claim. We also heard that they would resent the state forcing them to take up their entitlements. This is Third Reading—the conclusion of our discussions on the Bill. We could have introduced a common-sense measure to try to help people who need income but do not get it, and the data matching in the Bill could have been of immense help.

We have lost an opportunity this evening, and I hope that some of these matters may be discussed in another place. I also hope that the Minister will tell us why the Government have refused to strengthen a measure which started by aiming to tackle fraud in a tough way. We should be tough on fraud, and our only disappointment is that the Government have not gone further. They should have sent a powerful message to everyone that not only do we talk tough on fraud, but we implement legislation that hits hard—especially landlord cheats.

6.53 pm

Mr. Heald: The Third Reading debate presents me with the opportunity to thank the Committee for the care that it has taken in discussing the Government's proposals. The Bill received a thorough scrutiny during the 11 sittings of the Committee, but, throughout, business has been conducted in a constructive and professional manner.

I would like to thank the two Chairmen—my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Sir J. Hill), and the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam)—for their guidance, their forbearance and their wisdom. I should also like to thank Opposition Members for their constructive contributions, especially the hon. Members for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) and for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham). Each member of the Committee in his own way made a positive contribution.

Above all, I should like to thank the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People, my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt), who was my partner in taking the Bill through. He is that political rarity, a man who commands equal respect from both sides of the House. His good sense and plain humanity have helped the progress of this Bill in equal measure.

The Bill proposes a number of measures designed to reduce the opportunity for the fraudulent claiming and payment of social security benefits, and a number of other measures to improve the security, control and accuracy of social security administration.

The hon. Member for South Antrim (Mr. Forsythe) played a distinguished part in Committee and raised the issues that affected Northern Ireland, and I pay tribute to him for that. He raised two points on Third Reading. First, he referred to security and the importance that should be attached to data security in Northern Ireland. The principles of data security that I outlined earlier apply to Northern Ireland in exactly the same way as to the rest of the UK.

The Social Security Agency in Northern Ireland takes security and confidentiality very seriously. The hon. Member for South Antrim will be aware of the moves to mirror some of the developments on benefit fraud investigation and security in Northern Ireland, and I am sure that he will welcome those measures. As someone who knows about this matter intimately, he will know that the agency does a good job, often in very difficult circumstances. We should all pay tribute to it.

Secondly, the hon. Member for South Antrim referred to amending the legislation for Northern Ireland by Order in Council. We discussed this matter in Committee, as he will remember. When Northern Ireland legislation follows Great Britain legislation and the Bill provides for that—as this Bill does—the convention is to proceed without amendment, but other issues which may arise in Northern Ireland were discussed in Committee. The hon. Member said that he had tried to intervene earlier, but that I had not given way. I hope that he accepts that it is most unusual for me to do that, and I apologise.

The main provisions of the Bill are: to enable certain other Government Departments to supply relevant information to the Department of Social Security for the purposes of preventing and detecting social security fraud and for checking the accuracy of social security information; to enable the Department to share information with local authorities, and for authorities to share information with each other; to enhance and improve the range of penalties available against those who abuse the system; and to give the Secretary of State the power to inspect local authority performance, make directions as to the standards that are to be achieved and, in the event of the directions being ignored, to reduce subsidy.

The hon. Member for Fife, Central asked whether enough is being done about landlord fraud. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's 10-point plan—which I outlined earlier—will lacerate landlord fraud, and will put paid to the abuses to which the hon. Gentleman referred. More importantly, we should perhaps ask why it would be sensible—in circumstances where different kinds of individuals and organised criminals commit serious fraud—to single out landlords when the level of criminality can be just as serious with another kind of offender.

The Opposition's thoughts on the matter—particularly in circumstances where there is no evidence that landlords are committing the bulk of the fraud—result from their views on landlords. My hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) made the point that there is a demonology of the left, in which a landlord who commits an offence—whatever the level of criminality or the comparisons that can be made—should somehow warrant a 12-year sentence, when everybody else committing the same offence with the same level of criminality should receive a six-year sentence. I do not understand that, and nor does the rest of the House.

Mr. Alan Howarth: By the same token, is there not a demonology of the right as far as disabled people are concerned? Why are two clauses in the Bill particularly pitched at disabled people? Is that not at least as invidious?

Mr. Heald: The answer to that is a frank no.

The Bill will create powers for duly appointed local authority officials to check benefit entitlement, such as powers to enable them to enter business premises, including those of landlords; and it includes other powers which I believe will represent an important step in the Government's increasingly successful strategy to counter benefit fraud—a strategy which has produced record savings for the taxpayer year after year, and as a result of which we are expected to save £7 billion in the next three years.

It is not good enough for Labour Members to give the impression that they have had 17 years of good ideas on ways to counter benefit fraud, which the Conservative Government have ignored. They are Johnny-come-latelies on this issue. As recently as 1993, the Labour Front Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley), was describing the problem of benefit fraud as a mere bagatelle.

Mr. Denham: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Heald: No; I shall not give way any more. I have had enough of these ill considered—

Mr. Denham: Give way.

Mr. Heald: I have already answered the response which I know will come, which is feeble in the extreme. The hon. Gentleman admitted that, when he was in local government—

Mr. Denham: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Heald: No.

The hon. Gentleman admits that he was telling the Labour authorities and the Labour party that this was a serious issue, and they ignored it. It is only because the Government have taken the effective steps and action they have that fraud is now being tackled, and tackled effectively.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Local Government Finance (Wales)

7 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. William Hague): I beg to move,

That the Local Government Finance Report (Wales) 1997–98 (HC 218), which was laid before this House on 3rd February, be approved.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): I understand that with this, it will be convenient to discuss the following motions:

That the Special Grant Report (Wales) 1997 (HC 219), which was laid before this House on 3rd February, be approved.

That the Limitation of Council Tax (Relevant Notional Amounts) Report (Wales) 1997–98 (HC 220), which was laid before this House on 3rd February, be approved.

Mr. Hague: These motions concern provision for local authority revenue spending in Wales in the financial year beginning in April 1997.

In summary, I propose to set the total standard spending of Welsh local authorities at £2,931.3 million. That is an increase of £66.3 million, or 2.3 per cent., over the current year—slightly more than the forecast rate of inflation. Total standard spending includes £340 million for the four Welsh police authorities, £2,515 million in standard spending assessments for the 22 unitary authorities, and £73 million in specific grant such as national park grant and magistrates court grant.

Under my provisional capping criteria, every local authority in Wales can, if it sees fit, increase its budget in comparison with its previous notional amount by at least 3.7 per cent.

My plans for total standard spending increase the advantage that Welsh local government has over its English counterparts. Welsh TSS represents more than £1,000 of expenditure for every man, woman and child in Wales. It is an increase of £20 per head on the current year, and £70 per head higher than the equivalent figure for England.

That is a good settlement, and I look forward to Labour Members' support for it. They recently announced that they agree with and accept the Government's overall spending plans for the next two years. As the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) said, quoted in the *Western Mail* of 21 January:

"Labour will accept the spending plans for the first two years as they stand. This applies across the board and therefore to Wales."

It would be churlish of me not to welcome that statement of support for my budgetary plans, even though Labour Members had previously denounced them. The hon. Member for Caerphilly will no doubt wish to clarify tonight whether that commitment applies to the local government settlement, and, if not, what other Welsh spending would be reduced in order to increase it.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House will also be pleased that the vast majority of local government spending in Wales will continue to be provided from central Government funds. I propose to provide £2,577.9 million in central Government support through aggregate external finance in support of total standard spending. That is an increase of £64.3 million—or 2.6 per cent.—on the current year, about 1 per cent.

[Mr. Hague]

higher than the increase for England. It amounts to £880 per person, an increase of £20 on the current year, and a massive £150 per head more than the level of support provided in England.

Aggregate external finance will comprise £1,732.7 million in revenue support grant, £584 million in distributable non-domestic rates, £244.5 million in specific grants—including police grants to be paid by the Home Secretary—and £16.7 million for council tax damping measures.

My decisions about aggregate external finance clearly confound the view expressed by some people last year that Welsh council taxes would rise rapidly to English levels. My plans will ensure that, on average, Welsh council tax increases should be no higher than those in England, and that average Welsh council tax levels should be about £200 lower than in England.

I remain of the view that, over the longer term, local government should raise a greater proportion of its income from the local taxpayer—it is difficult to understand how anyone who believes in local accountability can hold a different view. However, I have always made it clear that I would take my decisions, year by year, on the merits of the case, and for the coming year I have decided to hold aggregate external finance at about 88 per cent. of total standard spending. That compares with the much lower figure of 79 per cent. in England.

In addition, I expect to fund 100 per cent. of mandatory local government reorganisation costs and a proportion of discretionary costs in the coming year, amounting to a total of £10.1 million. Overall, the provision that we have made for transitional costs arising from local government reorganisation will amount to £104 million over the five-year period ending in 1999.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): The right hon. Gentleman makes a serious point about the way in which central Government increasingly carries the burden of local spending, so that any marginal change in central Government decisions has a disproportionate effect on taxation at local level. That has happened this year and last year. Is not the problem that we have never managed to devise an effective system of local government taxation?

Mr. Hague: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. We have not succeeded in devising a form of local government taxation that would allow local government to raise the vast majority—or all—of its revenue and take all that responsibility. That is why we continue to provide a very large proportion of local government spending from central Government funds. It does not mean that we cannot adjust that amount, but it means that, for a long time to come, unless the basis of local taxation is changed, most of the money will be provided from central Government funds.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Has my right hon. Friend considered that the only way that we shall put this equation right, so that local government is totally accountable for its expenditure, is to remove the cost of education and social services from the local authority, and assume it as a national responsibility? If we did so, local spending could be almost 100 per cent. funded by the council tax, ensuring greater accountability, greater intelligibility to the electorate and more satisfactory local democracy.

Mr. Hague: In theory, one way to change the equation would be to reduce the total amount and shift responsibility elsewhere. As my hon. Friend knows, we have moved much responsibility for education budgets into schools, and I prefer to think that our future progress will involve greater devolution to local decision making instead of centralisation of decision making. However, Governments of all parties have tried to reform the present system, and have not enjoyed the experience. I believe that, within the existing system, the decisions that I am announcing for the coming year are right.

The standard spending assessment specified in the "Local Government Finance Report (Wales) 1997-98", which is before the House, have been calculated in accordance with a formula agreed with the Welsh Local Government Association. It was developed over a two-year period by the Welsh Office and the local government associations, and comprises objective, largely population-based, indicators of relevant need.

That said, I want to explore all avenues for improving the formula. It is subject to a full review being undertaken jointly by the Welsh Office and the Welsh Local Government Association, which will be completed in time for the 1998-99 settlement. I welcome the fact that local authority elected members are participating in the review working groups. Pending its completion, the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government Finance agreed that no significant change should be made to the formula for the coming year. The consultative council will consider the review recommendations in the autumn.

Sir Wyn Roberts (Conwy): It is all very well for the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) to look a gift horse in the mouth when he refers to the 88 per cent. that my right hon. Friend has secured, compared with the 79 per cent. in England, but does my right hon. Friend agree that the real threat to the favourable treatment that Wales receives is from the Opposition's devolution proposals?

Mr. Hague: My right hon. Friend makes two valid points. He draws attention to the advantage that Wales enjoys in local government finance, which we have preserved over many years, with a much larger proportion of local authority spending financed from central Government funds. He is right to say that the threat to the formula which determines the spending of the entire Welsh block, on which these figures critically depend, is a fundamental change in our constitutional arrangements, which could sweep that formula away.

Local authorities are responsible for setting budgets and determining their council tax. In setting budgets, they will need to take account of the effect of their spending decisions on council tax payers.

Mr. Walter Sweeney (Vale of Glamorgan): I assume that the aggregate external finance figures that my right hon. Friend has given include the provision from central funds for the police and the amount that comes from the Home Secretary. Will my right hon. Friend clarify

whether the figures he gave include the additional funds promised by the Home Secretary to fund additional policing?

Mr. Hague: The specific grants, which include £171.1 million in police grant to be paid by the Home Secretary, are included in my figures for aggregate external finance, and that is the total provision from the Home Office for the police in the coming year. It therefore includes all policy initiatives, which my hon. Friend will have heard the Home Secretary announce, and which are now being implemented.

The provisional capping principles that I announced on 12 December enable me to restrain spending by local authorities, if necessary. However, provisional capping limits are ceilings, not targets, and it is open to local authorities to set budgets below their capping limits.

I have taken careful account of representations made to me about potential council tax increases, should authorities exercise their discretion to budget at cap, so I decided to continue for a further year the targeted council tax damping scheme that I introduced for last year. I am making £16.5 million available within AEF to ensure that, excluding any increase in community council precepts and discretionary non-domestic rate relief, no council tax increase can exceed 15 per cent. The great majority of council tax increases will have to be well below that level, and council tax payers in nine of the 22 unitary authority areas will benefit from the scheme.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The capping limit in Wales is 1.8 per cent., whereas in England it is 2.6 per cent. What is the logic behind the difference?

Mr. Hague: The capping limit in England is much more complex. It is 2.6 per cent. for certain types of authority but a lower limit for other types of authority. It varies in England because of the introduction of unitary authorities, and because of a different pattern of local government reorganisation from what we have seen in Wales. If one were to allow for all those differences, the hon. Gentleman would find that capping limits are not as generous in England as they are in Wales. I should be happy to write to him with those figures.

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): The Minister said that, in an ideal world, he would like to see an increase in local democracy, and more money raised locally. We would all agree with that, although we realise the difficulties. Why, then, does he have capping at all? Why not just put the capping aside and allow local democracy to take its course?

Mr. Hague: As we discussed earlier, we do not have a system in which local authorities take true responsibility for all their decisions. I am interested to hear Labour Members advocate the lifting of all capping restrictions, because it is one of those murky areas of policy that the Labour party has developed over the past year or two. Previously, it was in favour of abolishing all capping limits; now it seems to be in favour of capping limits for the coming year, if I understand the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) correctly. I expect that the hon. Member for Caerphilly will enlarge on that in his speech.

My answer to the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) is that the consequences for Welsh council tax payers would be unacceptable if local authorities were left to set the council tax themselves.

There is good news on the local authority front, which Opposition Members and others outside the House often do not care to recognise. Local government reorganisation has worked well, as the Welsh Local Government Association acknowledges. Only last week, Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools in Wales reported a significant and continuing improvement in standards in our schools. Local authorities are playing a full part in attracting inward investment. I am happy to pay tribute to those who have helped to secure some of our recent projects.

Local authorities have increased access to private sector resources for capital investment under the private finance initiative, and a significant number are pressing ahead with schemes. They are beginning to realise that they do not have to depend on central Government capital allocations.

There are a number of ways in which local authorities can take action to help themselves, particularly through the levering in of private finance. Much more can be achieved by innovative partnerships between local authorities and the private sector. That has for a long time been the case with regeneration projects, but now the opportunities extend to a wide field of mainstream service delivery.

Under our PFI, major and radical changes have been made to the capital finance rules over the past two years, which, coupled with new arrangements for revenue support which are not constrained by the normal capping rules, have given local authorities the tools to go about providing services and facilities such as schools, roads, libraries and leisure facilities in radically new ways. Again, I pay tribute to those authorities that are looking seriously at private finance options.

Local authorities should also consider the opportunities for transferring their housing stock, with the consent of their tenants, to a local housing company or an existing housing association. That allows borrowing for improvements in the housing stock outside PSBR constraints, and, depending on the valuation of the stock, it can also generate a usable capital receipt for the authority. Where stock transfers at a positive value, concessions agreed at the time of the budget make the receipt position more favourable than under previous rules.

I am therefore pleased that a number of Welsh authorities are actively considering stock transfer, and I urge all authorities to do so. Experience in England amply demonstrates the benefits to councils and their tenants. Stock transfer should be regarded not simply as a means of dealing with the problems of individual estates, but as a strategic choice for long-term investment in the housing stock. I wish that, instead of decrying as inadequate the resources that local authorities have, Opposition Members and local authorities would take a positive view of the opportunities that those resources and new ideas provide.

I make no apology for stressing the importance of the need for continuing public expenditure restraint. It has been the key to our enviable economic performance in recent years. Local government in Wales continues to

[Mr. Hague]

receive almost half the resources at my disposal. It must expect to play its full part in keeping public expenditure in check.

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): How can the Minister say that he wants public expenditure restraint, while accepting and supporting a £60 million investment in the royal yacht from public funds?

Mr. Hague: Some of the investments that have come into the United Kingdom, and specifically into Wales, in recent years have been partly negotiated or signed because of events held on the royal yacht. I can absolutely assure the hon. Gentleman of that. The royal yacht is worth far more than £60 million in generating new jobs and investment for the UK, and Wales has been one of the principal beneficiaries. [*Laughter.*] Anyone who laughs about that shows a depressing lack of imagination about the marketing of this country.

Mr. Gill: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the £90 million that the British Government will be called upon to pay for the new European Parliament building is 50 per cent. more than the cost of the royal yacht, and will return no benefit to the United Kingdom?

Mr. Hague *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State should confine his remarks to the debate on the rate support grant (Wales).

Mr. Hague: I have no plans, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to allow any of the projects recently mentioned to be financed out of the Welsh local government settlement, as hon. Members will be delighted to hear.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): The Secretary of State mentioned the jobs that have come from the royal yacht. Has he noticed that the royal yacht has never visited Japan or Korea? Can he tell us how many jobs resulted from the destinations that it has visited? How many jobs for Wales arose from its visits to the Lesser Antilles, the Azores, the Leeward Islands, the Windward Islands, Gran Canaria, Grand Cayman, the Ivory Coast or Namibia?

Mr. Hague: The hon. Gentleman will be delighted to know that the royal yacht will be visiting Japan and Korea on its current tour. As his constituency is one of the principal beneficiaries of investment from Korea, he in particular should welcome our continued good relations with Korea.

Local authorities must expect to play their full part in keeping public expenditure in check. As large organisations with big budgets, local authorities have scope to prioritise services and to put in place tight, cost-effective administrative and service structures. Reorganisation has given Welsh local authorities the opportunities to do that.

I have seen the predictable press reports that always appear at this time of year speculating on cuts or meltdowns of one sort or another, including teacher redundancies by a number of authorities. One authority seems to be preparing for teacher redundancies while increasing allowances for its members. I am heartened by reports that some authorities have rejected a policy of teacher redundancies, including Carmarthenshire, Denbighshire and Rhondda Cynon Taff. If some authorities can manage not to sack teachers, I question whether any authorities need to take such action.

If local authorities manage their resources prudently and in a way that their residents have a right to expect, there is no reason why they should have to cut front-line services as a result of my settlement proposals.

This morning, the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) and his Front-Bench colleagues, in their role as the chief gloom-mongers of Wales, were trying to spread despondency about the local government settlement. It is time that they recognised that it is incumbent on those who criticise the level of resources provided to say where they would obtain additional resources. Opposition Members have got themselves into the ludicrous position in which they call for higher spending on a wide range of items in particular, while maintaining that they would spend no more money in total.

Such are the contortions taking place on the Opposition Benches that the hon. Gentleman has even had to resort to defending my budget. He said in the Grand Committee on 4 December that it meant "cuts", the consequences of which "would be dreadful". However, the day after the shadow Chancellor's famous speech last month, the *Western Mail* said of the hon. Member for Caerphilly:

"He said the figures were open to debate as to whether there was a cut or an increase."

That is the light in which we must judge anything he says about cuts during the debate. Not only does he not agree with me; he does not even agree with himself.

If the hon. Gentleman does not agree with the settlement that I propose, let him say what settlement he proposes. The figures for each local authority which we are debating tonight are the product of two factors, and two alone: the first is the total available for local government spending, and the second is the standard spending formula by which that money is distributed. Anyone who votes against the measures tonight is implying that he is unhappy with the total, or the formula, or both.

Last night, the Opposition voted against the parallel English reports, because they said that they disagreed with the formula by which the money was shared out. Tonight, however, we are debating a Welsh settlement, before which the Welsh Local Government Association, with its clear Labour majority, specifically asked me not to change the formula.

The formula is agreed with Welsh local government, including members of the Labour party. The formula, as I have said, has been worked out by the Welsh Office and the Local Government Association, in close consultation and by agreement. It therefore cannot be the formula which troubles Opposition Members tonight, unless they are telling me that the leaders of all the Labour-controlled authorities were wrong.

The only other factor up for debate is the total sum available. That could be increased only by reducing other Welsh Office programmes, given the cross-party

agreement on the total Welsh budget—a budget that already assumes large and continuing reductions in the running costs of the Welsh Office and the non-departmental public bodies.

To vote to increase the settlement, while also stating that the Welsh Development Agency would be a high priority, that the money for an assembly would be found within the block, and yet that the total budget would remain the same under a Labour Government, is ludicrous double-speak. If Opposition Members vote against the settlement while maintaining that they need no compensating reductions elsewhere, people sitting at home in Wales tonight will be able to smell the hypocrisy oozing out of the No Lobby.

I am the first to acknowledge the importance of local authority services to the communities they serve, and to the people of Wales as a whole. That is reflected in my settlement proposals. A 2.3 per cent. increase in standard spending is fair in the context of the overall level of resources available and the needs of other public sector organisations, including the health service. It enables local government to maintain its services, provided that authorities are ready to set clear priorities and to pursue new opportunities to save and raise money. I commend the settlement to the House.

7.26 pm

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): I shall deal first with the central thrust of the Secretary of State's argument. I shall vote against his proposal—and encourage my right hon. and hon. Friends to do likewise—because I believe the settlement to be deeply damaging. Let me assure the Secretary of State that there is no agreement whatever on the Welsh Office budget.

It would be dishonest for me or any of my colleagues to urge local government in Wales to spend over budget in the coming financial year in the hope or expectation that an incoming Labour Government could bale them out in the middle of the financial year. I do not propose to be dishonest. That is why I and my hon. Friends have made it clear to local government that, if there is a general election that takes us into the next financial year, and local authorities have overspent, they cannot look to the Welsh Office to bale them out. That is our clear position.

The Welsh Local Government Association has made it clear that it is deeply unhappy with the settlement. I have no doubt that my right hon. and hon. Friends who represent Welsh constituencies have been in touch with their leaders and local authorities, who will have impressed on them the deep dissatisfaction of Welsh local government with the settlement.

Mr. Hague: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the coming year. He was quoted in the newspapers as saying that he agreed to the total Welsh Office spending plans for the next two years. That applied to total Welsh spending and to the Government's total spending plans. Was he misquoted? If not, and if he wanted to spend more on the local government settlement at any time in the next two years, would he not have to reduce other spending programmes?

Mr. Davies: The Secretary of State is deliberately misquoting me. I have never said that I agree with the settlement; but I recognise that it is the settlement that will apply in the next financial year.

After 18 years of Conservative government, if I were Secretary of State I would not expect local government to cope with the burden of cuts that the Government have imposed. I do not agree with the settlement and I do not want it. I can tell the Secretary of State directly: I believe that the settlement is inadequate and unfair to local government. I believe also that the Government are playing politics with local services and the jobs of people in the public sector. Education will bear the brunt of the cuts that the Secretary of State has put before the House this evening, which will result in the loss of 1,000 teaching jobs in Wales in the coming year. How on earth could I, or any right hon. or hon. Member who represents a Welsh constituency, agree with that package?

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North–West) *rose—*

Mr. Davies: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman. Many of my hon. Friends wish to contribute to the debate and, if the hon. Gentleman wishes to make his own speech, no doubt he will seek to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If any other right hon. or hon. Members who represent Welsh constituencies wish to intervene, of course I shall consider giving way.

I make it clear to the Secretary of State that I have ambitions for local authorities to become dynamic and independent. I want them to promote economic development, conserve their environment, plan communities, educate children and care for the infirm. Year after year, the Government have undermined the ability of local councils to achieve those goals. The Government have placed duties on councils and then removed the resources needed to meet their obligations.

In the past 10 years, central Government expenditure in Wales has increased by 71 per cent. in real terms, while local government expenditure has increased by only 43 per cent. While central Government expenditure has more than kept pace with inflation, local government expenditure has failed to do so. Local government has experienced a real reduction in available resources, services have been cut, and council taxes continue to rise. It is a typical Tory trick: pay more and get less.

That is precisely what will occur under this settlement. Services throughout Wales—particularly education—will be cut. The Secretary of State is fond of quoting the *Western Mail*. I refer him to its report of 27 January, which forecast the loss of 750 teaching jobs. If this settlement is approved tonight, there will be an average increase of 8 per cent. in council tax across Wales—or £40 extra tax for every council tax payer in Wales.

The Secretary of State boasted this evening about how well Wales is supposedly doing under his stewardship compared with the rest of the country. I remind him of Westminster city council: it is up to its eyes in sleaze and corruption, and is one of the richest boroughs in London. If Welsh local authorities were funded on the same basis as Westminster, band D council tax in Wales would be reduced by a staggering 33 per cent. Local government has been the Government's whipping boy and, as the British people have voted consistently for Labour councils, the Government have responded by whipping those councils even harder.

At the heart of the argument between us is the performance of the British economy under the Conservatives. The simple fact is that Conservative

[Mr. Davies]

economic policy has failed and, in typical Tory fashion, the price must be paid in homelessness, crumbling schools, deteriorating health care, and divided and alienated communities. The people of Wales know that only too well. Welsh gross domestic product is 16 per cent. below the United Kingdom average, and it has shown no improvement after nearly 18 years of Tory rule. Economic failure has resulted in an inability to control the nation's finances. Our national debt is almost £400 billion—double the level when the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) became Prime Minister.

Interest payments last year were more than £25 billion—more than three times the size of the total Welsh block—and the public sector borrowing requirement in 1995-96 amounted to more than £30 billion. Even in the fifth year of supposed recovery, the PSBR is still unacceptably high at £27 billion. The balance of public expenditure is out of control. Instead of investing for the future, improving infrastructure and promoting the economy, education and training, public expenditure is increasingly used to meet the social cost of failed economic policy. Education expenditure in Wales has increased by 36 per cent. in the past 10 years; social security expenditure—largely the cost of idleness enforced by Government policy—has increased by 43 per cent.

The Secretary of State claims that his priorities for the coming year are economic growth and the national health service, but he has provided no details of those additional resources nor of how they are allocated. He has not told us how his decisions will affect other programmes in the Welsh Office total spend. He has not yet published his Department's report, so how does he expect me to propose amendments to it? He and his predecessors have tried constantly to mislead the people of Wales about the true level of Government spending in Wales. They have elevated media manipulation to an art form: they have leaked, briefed and dissembled. Last December, the Secretary of State had the effrontery to announce an inquiry into the publication by the *Western Mail* of expenditure figures that his own office had leaked.

If we accept that the Secretary of State's stated priorities are economic development and health, will he acknowledge that local government has a vital role to play in enhancing economic growth—including projects such as LG—and in protecting the health of the Welsh people? What share of the alleged resources for economic growth and health has he given to local government? That is a straightforward question, and we are entitled to an answer. I invite the Secretary of State to intervene and provide that answer.

Mr. Hague: I shall intervene, but not on that point. The hon. Gentleman made an entirely unsubstantiated assertion about the source of a leak from the Welsh Office. I have established an inquiry into the matter and the report is imminent. I shall write to the hon. Gentleman about it, and to anyone else who is interested—including the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), as he is obviously curious about the findings. There is no evidence for the hon. Gentleman's assertion that the information was leaked by my office. He should therefore back up his assertion or withdraw it.

Mr. Davies: I have no intention of doing so. The figures were prepared by the Secretary of State's Department for his use. They were not divulged to anyone else. How could anyone outside the Department have released those figures? It is a simple matter: they were the Secretary of State's figures and he had exclusive control of them. They were prepared by his office for his use. No one other than officers of his Department could have accessed those figures.

Mr. Hague: When the hon. Gentleman says that the figures were leaked by my office, he clearly implies my personal office. The standard of his accusations and of his debate this evening are a sad reflection on his leadership of the Labour party in Wales.

Mr. Davies: Is the Secretary of State saying that the figures were leaked not by his own personal office but by someone in the Welsh Office?

Mr. Hague: We are having an inquiry.

Mr. Davies: How can the Secretary of State be sure that his private office did not leak the figures if, as he now claims, the inquiry is not complete?

Mr. Hague: I asked the hon. Gentleman to substantiate his accusation regarding civil servants—who cannot answer for themselves in this place—and he cannot do so. That is highly irresponsible conduct, which is exactly what we have come to expect from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Davies: I am afraid that the Secretary of State's performance is woeful. The figures were prepared by his Department for subsequent publication. They were available only to civil servants and politicians in his Department—nobody else could have accessed them or leaked them. The Secretary of State is responsible for his Ministers, political advisers, media officers and other civil servants in his Department. Someone in his office leaked the information, deliberately and maliciously, to the *Western Mail*.

Mr. Richards: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I seek guidance on what the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) has been saying for some time. Is it in order for an hon. Member—

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): This is a foolish point of order. Sit down.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am trying to listen to the hon. Member's point of order.

Mr. Richards: The hon. Gentleman's body temperature is higher than his IQ—on the centigrade scale.

Is it in order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for an hon. Member to make unsubstantiated accusations in the House against officers of the Crown? [HON. MEMBERS: "Sit down and do not be silly."] I recall Madam Speaker saying that she deprecated attacks on civil servants by hon. Members.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members are responsible for their own speeches.

Mr. Davies: I invited the Secretary of State to give a straightforward answer to my question. What share of the alleged additional resources for economic growth or health has he given to local government? If he cannot answer that question now—I realise that local government finance is complex, and perhaps he has not had time to master it—will he write to me with that information?

Mr. Hague: I am happy to answer the hon. Gentleman's questions all evening. It amazes me that he is so resistant to more Welsh Question Times in the Grand Committee, given that he is so keen to ask questions in the House.

The increased resources for economic development and for health that I announced are channelled through the health authorities, the Welsh Development Agency and the Development Board for Rural Wales. Local authorities often work in partnership with those authorities and agencies, so there are important spin-offs for local government. The resources are not specifically channelled through local authorities. That is the answer to the hon. Gentleman's question, and I am perfectly happy to answer any other questions that he may have about the Welsh Office budget and local authority finance, but that may keep us here for a long time.

Mr. Davies: I am grateful to the Secretary of State, because that is precisely the answer that I knew he would give. His Department fails to acknowledge the crucial strategic role that the Welsh Office and local government could play together in tackling the economic and interlocking problems of our communities, such as unemployment and idleness, under-achievement, poor housing, poor environment, poor standards of public behaviour and poor health. It is the Welsh Office's failure to understand that and to work with local authorities that has caused so much resentment and frustration in Welsh local government under his regime.

We need a coherent, strategic partnership, but that is the last thing that we will get from a Government who are obsessed with short-termism and media manipulation.

Mr. Sweeney: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: No, I have given way to the Secretary of State and I want to make progress.

Mr. Sweeney *rose—*

Mr. Davies: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a little while.

The Secretary of State has just claimed that total standard spending has increased by 2.3 per cent., but that is at best misleading. He knows full well that the true increase is only 1.6 per cent., which is below the level required to keep in line with inflation. He tried that trick in the Welsh Grand Committee last year. When challenged by my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths), he said:

"It is no good taking out this or that to make the figures look different. The total figure is rising by 2.6 per cent."—[*Official Report, Welsh Grand Committee*, 4 December 1996; c. 14.]

The Under-Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), in his letter to the chair of the Welsh Local Government Association on 15 January 1997, admitted that the true increase is only 1.6 per cent. We have the Secretary of State's version—a 2.6 per cent. increase—and his hon. Friend's version, a 1.6 per cent. increase. Which of those two figures represents either the true position or the Government's position?

We all know that a host of adjustments will have to be made before the truth is uncovered. Expenditure provision in the settlement is insufficient, not only to meet pay and price inflation, but to enable local authorities to maintain services at the current level in the face of rising demand, especially in schools, community care and the fire service.

The Secretary of State also claimed that aggregate external finance has increased by £64.1 million. Does he agree that, if both last year's damping schemes are included, external finance for local authorities in Wales increased by only £43 million, which is less than required to keep pace with inflation?

The Secretary of State's decisions will mean yet further council tax increases for the people of Wales. The increases will be 8 per cent. on average, with many Welsh authorities facing increases of nearly double that figure. In Ceredigion, the increase is 9 per cent., which is £49; in Torfaen it is 15 per cent., which is £65; in Merthyr it is 15 per cent., which is more than £74; and in Denbighshire it is more than 16 per cent., which is £80.

Those council tax figures are part of a deliberate, long-term plan to increase the level of council tax in Wales, and there is no use the Secretary of State denying it. In a letter dated 7 November 1995 to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris), the Secretary of State confirmed that that is his long-term plan. His very words were:

"I believe that over time local authorities in Wales should raise a higher proportion of their income from council tax. The 11 per cent. increase is the result of this approach."

We should have no illusions about this settlement. When council taxes go up, it is because the Welsh Office and the Treasury intend them to go up. The 8 per cent. increase in Wales far exceeds the 6 per cent. increase for England that the Government announced yesterday. Further evidence is provided by the fact that revenue support grant now accounts for 54 per cent. of local government spending, whereas 10 years ago it was 64 per cent.—10 per cent. more.

Mr. Rowlands: My hon. Friend returns to the point with which we began the debate, about the balance between central and local government expenditure and taxation. A marginal change in central Government support to local authorities leads to a disproportionate increase in council taxes. Any increase in local taxation is unfair, especially to poorer communities such as he and I represent. The burden of taxation is heavier on poorer communities.

Mr. Davies: My hon. Friend is right. He represents Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney, which includes part of my

[Mr. Davies]

local authority area of Caerphilly. That local authority faces horrendous consequences as a result of this settlement. It is grappling with budget cuts of £8 million, as are other local authorities. The local authority of my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) is one of the smallest, but it faces cuts of £6 million or £7 million in its annual budget.

The consequences must rest on the Government's shoulders. There will be real and severe cuts across the whole range of local government services, especially services that are trying to meet the cost of economic and social failure. The settlement will affect local authorities that are trying to invest in and improve their communities to generate wealth and job opportunities, and to build for the future. The Government are so short-sighted that they do not understand the role that local authorities play, and they will not work in partnership with them. It is all part of the Government's strategy to make council tax payers pay more. The 1p cut in the standard rate of income tax in last year's Budget will be more than cancelled out by council tax increases resulting directly from this settlement.

In addition, the capital settlement has been cut by £66 million. That money is needed for investment.

Mr. Sweeney: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: I shall give way in a moment.

The capital settlement has been cut by 13 per cent. in cash terms, and by more than 15 per cent. in real terms. Is that not typical of the Government? They are irredeemably short-termist, and look only as far as the next election: they do not even have the courage to face that election.

Mr. Sweeney: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He said some time ago that he would give way in a moment; then he said that he would give way in a little while; then he said that he would give way in a moment. Since then, he has responded to two other interventions.

I wanted to take up a point in the hon. Gentleman's speech—I hope that he can still recall it—when he contrasted the increase in education spending with the increase in social security spending, implying that the increase in social security spending had been excessive. What cuts in social security does he propose in order to increase education funding? If the hon. Gentleman's party were to take office, and if the social chapter were to be introduced, how much more would he have to spend on social security—or cut benefits?

Mr. Davies: I shall give the hon. Gentleman a direct answer. In Wales, some 30,000 people under 25 are unemployed. I want them to return to productive work. I want them to have the self-respect and discipline that comes from the opportunity to work for a living—an opportunity that the hon. Gentleman and the Government he supports have denied to generations of young people in Wales. When we provide young people with that opportunity—with the ability to be self-sufficient, and to work for themselves—the social security bill will fall.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: No, I will not. Many of my colleagues want to speak. The Minister will be able to speak—he will wind up the debate—and I want to finish my own speech so that the debate can continue.

The reality of the settlement is that total standard spending has been cut in real terms, Welsh Office support has been cut in real terms, and the capital spending programme has been slashed in both real and cash terms. Not only are resources being reduced; responsibilities are being increased. How can the Secretary of State expect local authorities to meet the cost of inflation in pay and prices? Will he confirm that a 3 per cent. increase in teachers' pay—mentioned in leaks in Sunday's newspapers—will cost Welsh local authorities nearly £20 million extra next year, and that the settlement makes inadequate provision for that increase?

Does the Secretary of State acknowledge that the expenditure forecasting group, in which both his officials and local government officials took part, estimated that central Government initiatives, through legislation and policy, will require extra spending of £129 million next year—on top of inflation? Does that not mean that, in real terms, the settlement means a cut of 3 per cent., or even more, in the budgets of Welsh local authorities next year?

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that his vacillation, and that of his Department, over the technical adjustment of the notional amounts in the capping rules for the nursery voucher scheme has bedevilled this year's settlement? Why does he not accept that nursery vouchers are wasteful, inefficient and particularly unsuited to Wales, as evidenced by the overwhelming number of representations against the scheme made to him and the single, solitary letter in support?

Does the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that the new local authorities have had to make substantial savings in the current year to meet the continuing cost of reorganisation, and that they are having to deplete their reserves to maintain existing services—if they can? He should recognise that, and he should admit that this is a dreadful capital and revenue settlement. No doubt hon. Members will wish to illustrate the effect that it will have on their local authorities. It is clear that the Secretary of State does not realise that the financial base of the new local authorities in Wales is already precarious, and it will be weakened further by this harsh settlement.

Mr. Richards: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: No, I will not.

It is time for the Secretary of State to admit that his decision will impose an unmanageable outcome for local government, and to acknowledge that that is bound to result in damage to our local communities. It is time for him to accept that his policies are flawed and lacking in coherence. It is time for him to accept that his budget decisions betray a lack of understanding of, or sympathy for, the needs of the people of Wales.

The settlement reflects the failure of Conservative policies, and itself fails to provide a platform on which to build for the future. Since 1979, local government in Wales has struggled to serve its communities well, despite the handicaps inflicted on it by successive Welsh Office Ministers. Welsh councils have had enough of this tired, incompetent, feckless, dishonest Government. Like the rest of the country, however, they will have to wait for the general election and the next Labour Government. The sooner that comes, the sooner we can start the long climb back to ensure honesty and decency in the provision of public services in Wales.

7.54 pm

Sir Wyn Roberts (Conwy): I am glad to have the opportunity to comment on the settlement, but I do not know whether to be reassured or perturbed by the fact that the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) is prepared to accept so much with which he disagrees. It makes me wonder what else he accepts, but disagrees with.

The settlement is, once again, constricted—as it should be, if we are to keep inflation under control and the overall budget deficit within manageable proportions. It is indubitable that there are public pressures to let public spending rip, but we all know that would be wrong, and, if it happened, it would end in tears of contrition.

One of my local councils, Gwynedd, has written to me, commenting—very sensibly, in my view—on the position, as seen by its finance and policy committee. The committee estimated its needs at nearly £120 million next year, if services of the present quality are to be provided; but it will be capped at £115.7 million. Its grant from central Government is £95.3 million—which is not ungenerous, at 82 per cent. Interestingly, the council does not propose to spend to the capping limit, because, it says, that would mean a council tax increase of 11.3 per cent. It is a good council, in the sense that it does not regard the capping limit as a target.

With commendable restraint, the council has expressed a wish to keep its increase to what it thinks will be the Welsh average—between 8 and 9 per cent. That, however, will mean alarming reductions in expenditure, which the council spells out in its letter. It will be interesting to see what final conclusions the full council reaches on 6 March, but one thing is clear: the severity of the cuts that it may impose will depend greatly on the extent to which it is prepared to raise money locally, and, of course, on what it believes it can raise locally—what local people can afford.

With the present Parliament coming to an end and a general election looming, I am more concerned about the future of local government finance than with the past. In particular, I am concerned about the Opposition's proposals to do away with capping and return local business rates to local control. In my view, both moves would be retrograde. One thing is clear from the deliberations of Gwynedd council, and its decision not to spend up to the capping limit: it, at least, has got the message about the need to restrain spending, and I commend it for that. The abolition of the cap, as proposed by Labour's document "Renewing Democracy, Rebuilding Communities"—published in September 1995 and confirmed in yesterday's debate by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson)—would send local authorities a very different and destructive message.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The right hon. Gentleman has mentioned Gwynedd council twice. Perhaps he should have told the House that the council had to raise its tax by 25 per cent. last year. To impose a similar tax this year would be totally unrealistic. It could not be paid anyway, could it?

Sir Wyn Roberts: The council managed 25 per cent. last year, but interestingly it has decided that it could not raise the rate by the figure that might have been suggested to it, and that it would rather keep the rate at the Welsh average. That shows responsibility on its part.

I am also critical of the proposal of the hon. Member for Caerphilly to return the business rate to local control, because we all surely remember what happened under the last Labour Government when local councils controlled the rate. Businesses were caned and destroyed by high rates. They were easy to hit, because owners had few votes compared with domestic ratepayers. I hope that the Labour party has grown up even since 1995—I refer again to its document. I shall listen carefully to the winding-up speech of the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) for, I hope, a denial of Labour's intention to abolish the national uniform business rate, the burden of which the Government have alleviated in last November's Budget, certainly in relation to small businesses.

The Labour party also proposes, I understand, to end compulsory competitive tendering. That, too, is regressive. The Government are only now beginning to succeed in persuading authorities of the undoubted cost benefits to their consumers of acting in an enabling rather than a direct-provider role. It would be a shame if we were to take a step backwards to the position where, frankly, services were provided primarily for the benefit of local authority trade union employees, rather than the ratepayers who pay for them.

I assure Opposition Members that I am not alone in not wishing for a return to that position, which, I hate to remind them, finally led to the winter of discontent, when there were mountains of uncollected rubbish and even unburied dead, and the last Labour Government fell out with trade union leaders, who refused to listen to them and to their pleas for restraint.

I have been reading Lord Callaghan's "Time and Chance", which contains a first-class account of what I have been talking about. We have always maintained that capital receipts from the sale of council houses and other property should for the most part be used to reduce existing debt, thereby reducing the debt interest burden on ratepayers, but the Labour party believes that those receipts should be spent.

I have read recently that the Labour party is adhering to that policy. If so, it must explain, if it can—I do not believe that it can—how it can allow that without failing to reduce the nation's debt burden as a whole. Welsh local authorities' outstanding loan debts on housing and non-housing services run to hundreds of millions of pounds, as the table on page 17 of "The Local Government Finance Report (Wales) 1997-98" shows.

It is clear that, whatever local authorities' financial problems may be, they will be as nothing compared with the problems should the Labour party gain power. If the

[Sir Wyn Roberts]

Opposition's devolution plans are approved by Parliament, there will be even less money for local government and less power too, as the assembly arrogates to itself more and more of the powers now exercised at local level. That will certainly happen.

It is now of course fashionable to malign the quangos, the non-departmental public bodies, but we should never forget that they were largely the invention of the Labour party, which believed that local authorities were inadequate to perform the nationwide tasks that needed to be performed in different sectors. Tourism and economic and industrial development are good examples.

Latterly, the Labour party seems to have repented and reverted to supporting the local authorities that it controls, but I do not believe for a moment that its repentance will last for long, once it has its party commissars and apparatchiks on the NDPBs.

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend has expressed his concern about the Labour party's proposal to create an assembly in Cardiff. Is he doubly concerned about the effect of an assembly in Cardiff on his constituents in north Wales? Is he not alarmed by the statement of the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies), who said that the assembly would not have tax-raising powers initially, which implies that the Labour party's plans are similar to those in Scotland, in that a Welsh assembly would have tax-raising powers?

Sir Wyn Roberts: All parts of north Wales and mid-Wales fear that, because of the sparsity of their populations, they would be dominated by an assembly in south Wales, representing as it inevitably would the bulk of the population, which is located in the south.

On my hon. Friend's second point, I do not think that we have heard the end of the Labour party's plans for an assembly, and I would not be surprised if, even initially, it had tax-raising powers. I am sure that, if there is a Scottish Parliament with tax-raising powers, there will be a cry from the assembly men in Wales that they should have a similar power.

Mr. Ron Davies: I do not know why the right hon. Gentleman keeps raising this argument. We have made it absolutely clear that the Labour party has no proposals to give tax-raising powers to the assembly.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The hon. Gentleman assumes that he and his party can carry any proposal for an assembly through the House without change. Again, I ask him to go back to our debates in the 1970s to find out just how radical the proposed changes were—they were carried in the House, resulting in the defeat of the then Government, so he must not assume that he can dispose whatever he proposes. It is not up to him; it is up to Parliament to dispose.

Mr. Davies: I am not assuming anything. All I propose is to put to the people of Wales the question whether they should have their own assembly. If they vote yes, I am sure that the House will wish to accommodate that wish.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Passing reference to an assembly is one thing, but talking about it in detail is another.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I accept your guidance, of course, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but the hon. Member for Caerphilly simplifies a complex issue, as he will find it to be.

I was saying that the great danger is that NDPBs, like the Welsh tourist board and the Welsh Development Agency, will do little of value and substance, except pander to the whims of the their political masters.

On the settlement, I have read the police authorities' representations. The reduction in their capital expenditure is compensated for by additional money for extra officers, plus an increase in revenue—not far short, it seems to me, of what they wanted. Their strongest plea is to be included in the formula working group. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales can accommodate them in that wish. Overall, I agree with him that his proposals

"provide local authorities with a fair level of funding in 1997–98 given the overall level of resources available and other spending needs."—[*Official Report*, 28 January 1997; Vol. 289, c. *159*.]

I shall be happy to support him in the Lobby.

8.9 pm

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): I have never heard so many "opposition" speeches by Conservative Members. One would think that we were in government, as we shortly shall be, and that the Conservatives were in opposition. The Secretary of State and the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) were more concerned with Labour proposals than with their own. The right hon. Member for Conwy introduced the issue of a Welsh assembly. It is an interesting subject and I am sure that there will be many interesting debates on it, but enough of that for this evening.

I was disturbed by the Secretary of State's speech, because only in his last sentences did he talk about the services that are provided by local government. I accept that, in the early part of his speech, it was incumbent on him to outline his proposals and the finance related to them. However, I wish that he had said more about services and about how the money is to be applied to them.

Local government is about providing services to people, whether they live in deprived or in wealthy communities. It is about the direct services that people need. Instead of indulging in yah-boo tactics, we should get down to talking about our communities and the services that they need. I should like to outline the position as it is seen by my local authority, Rhondda Cynon Taff, which covers the constituencies of two of my hon. Friends as well as mine. I shall look at one aspect of local government to highlight what we are debating.

The Government's proposals will have a substantial effect on Rhondda Cynon Taff council. There is no point in the Secretary of State saying, "It is up to the councils to make the cuts," because the reality is that there will be cuts. In my communities they will lead to the loss of 100 teaching jobs, and about 120 jobs will be lost in social services. Social services jobs have to be translated into issues such as the closure of a sheltered employment facility and a children's resource centre and less assistance to the disabled and disadvantaged who are living at home. Those are just some of the effects of the cuts.

The housing service will be forced to reduce support for the homeless. There will be a reduction in child care provision. The peripatetic music service, for example, and other services that should benefit our children will be cut, and that will make the schools much poorer.

In discretionary areas, the adult education service will be almost destroyed, as will discretionary awards for students. That will affect mature students who perhaps take advantage of other courses and then want to go to university or college. Figures can be bandied about for ever, but they mean that there will be cuts in services, often affecting the most vulnerable people.

In the second part of my speech, I shall look at the service that is provided for those with learning and disability problems. It is provided jointly by social services, health authorities and local NHS trusts working, in many cases, with voluntary and independent providers such as Mencap. Such services are laid on local authorities by the Government and, in the past 18 years, the Government have put extra duties on local government and have an obligation to fund them. The Government say that they can be paid for from local resources, but they cannot.

The transfer of some local government functions to central Government has been mentioned. There is an argument for that when central Government continually place obligations on local authorities, fund them initially, subsume the funding into the general rate support grant and then squeeze it off.

Disadvantaged people come within the framework of five pieces of legislation: the National Assistance Act 1948; the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990; the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995; the Chronically Sick and Disabled Act 1970 and the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986. Those Acts place obligations on local authorities and they cover the areas that will have to be cut because of central Government settlements such as this. The Mental Health Acts of 1983 and 1985 are also relevant to the provision of services for the unfortunate members of our community.

Beyond the specific legislation passed by this institution, the Welsh Office has laid down guidelines. For example, in 1983 it set out key principles for those with learning difficulties and said that disabled people and those with problems have the right to live an ordinary pattern of life within the community. That is one of the Secretary of State's guiding principles. The guidelines stated that such people had the right to be treated as individuals and to have individual assessment of needs, and added that provision should be made to fulfil those needs.

The 1983 guidance was updated just two years ago, in 1994, by the Welsh Office document entitled "Welsh Mental Handicap Strategy". It reiterated the key principles and stated that there had to be an individual plan for everyone and that a range of care and support should be provided. It stated that there should be help to obtain real jobs for most adults and that there should be a range of accommodation to include provision for the resettlement of people who were living inappropriately in mental hospitals. Such provision will be savagely cut if the provision of accommodation for the whole community is cut.

The people I have mentioned depend on support to live in the community. People who have been incarcerated in mental hospitals, sometimes for many years, cannot be allowed to drift into the community, let loose without proper support. This Government and previous Governments have placed responsibility for that support on local authorities. If they want local authorities to do the job, they should provide resources. Not just this Government, but every Government have to do that.

There is no point in treating local authorities like political footballs. If we are to have a proper system of devolved government, we must allocate to it the resources that are needed to do the job that Parliament has asked it to do. The Secretary of State's proposals are not good enough to allow local authorities to do that. People with learning and disability problems have the right to independence, dignity and the same quality of life as those who have full use of facilities and faculties and are fully able to participate in society. To help them, we must harness the resources not only of local authorities but of other institutions.

We should set up community support teams consisting of social workers, community nurses, psychiatrists, psychologists and occupational therapists. In addition, we must provide proper medical care, including that which people with learning and disability problems require over and above that of the ordinary members of society. Those are the obligations and complexities of providing for those whom we have said should be in the care and responsibility of local authorities. If the Government cannot will that money to local authorities to carry out those functions, they are failing in their duty and in their responsibility to the people of Wales.

8.19 pm

Mr. Walter Sweeney (Vale of Glamorgan): I should like to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for once again securing a generous settlement for Wales, compared with that for England. The aggregate external finance that he has announced represents a 2.6 per cent. increase over last year, and it is about 1 per cent. more than the increase announced for England.

Mr. Donald Anderson: With that generous settlement, how many jobs does the hon. Gentleman expect will be lost in his local authority?

Mr. Sweeney: That will be a matter for the local authority to determine, because my right hon. Friend has left with local authorities the discretion, provided that they do not exceed capping levels, to determine how much council tax people will pay. That discretion will apply in Vale of Glamorgan as it will across Wales. I should expect Vale of Glamorgan to look for ways of getting better value for money and of providing better services for a given amount, and not, for example, to waste money on titivating the reception area of its civic offices, on which an enormous amount appears to have been spent.

When council tax demands are sent, my right hon. Friend and all Conservative Members will no doubt be castigated for not giving enough money to Vale of Glamorgan. Let the local authority put its house in order. If it manages to run Vale of Glamorgan responsibly, I am optimistic that service and job cuts, to which the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) has alluded, will not have to be made.

Aggregate external finance for Wales amounts to £880 per man, woman and child in Wales, which is £150 more per head than in England. AEF represents 88 per cent. of total standard spending, which on any reckoning is an extremely high percentage. I shall not be at all surprised

[Mr. Sweeney]

if, when Labour-controlled local authorities send out their council tax demands in a few weeks, they attempt to blame the Government for the increases that they will undoubtedly impose; but local authorities will of course be free to set the council tax of their choice.

Mr. Llwyd: Subject to capping.

Mr. Sweeney: Subject, of course, to capping. It is interesting to note that Opposition Members do not seem to like capping. Perhaps that is not surprising, as we all know that Labour-controlled Governments, just like Labour-controlled authorities, tend to act irresponsibly when spending is involved. In the past few days, we have received assurances from some Labour Members, who are not in the Chamber for this debate, that Labour will not attempt to increase spending in the next two years. However, the tone of Opposition Members' speeches today suggests that they assume that central Government are not providing enough money for local authorities. The clear implication is that a Labour Government would provide more.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North–West (Mr. Richards) that we need answers from the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies). We need to know how much extra money he would spend on behalf of a Labour Government this year and in the year after; but, of course, he has said nothing. It is much easier to stand up and rant at the Government than it is to set out one's own policies, for which one could be blamed.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) has rightly stressed that Government spending must be kept under control to maintain a strong economy. Indeed, if we are to maintain the sustained growth, low inflation and low interest rates of which the Government are rightly proud, we must reduce borrowing and continue the Conservative policy of lowering income and capital taxes. It is therefore important for the Government to encourage restraint in local government spending. Against that background, the Secretary of State deserves to be congratulated on his success, in what must have been extremely tough negotiations with the Treasury and with his Cabinet colleagues, in driving a hard bargain on behalf of the people of Wales.

In the longer term, I believe that it would be right for a larger proportion of the cost of local government to be borne locally. That would increase accountability and induce a greater sense of financial responsibility, even among Labour councillors not renowned for their careful housekeeping. However, under the current system, it is plainly an important part of the Secretary of State's role to battle for the largest possible share of the taxation cake for the people of Wales. He deserves the thanks of all people living in Wales for screwing an extra £150 per head out of central Government taxes compared with what people in England received.

I am thankful that more hon. Members representing English constituencies are not in the Chamber for this debate, because, were they to realise fully the effectiveness of my right hon. Friend in those Cabinet discussions, I fear that they would be up in arms and would attempt to cut the amounts provided to Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Is my hon. Friend aware—I think that I am right in saying this—that the abolition of capping might result, at a conservative estimate, in the spending of an additional £1.5 billion? Does he agree that that would be very inflationary?

Mr. Sweeney: My right hon. Friend makes a very good point. Opposition-controlled local authorities clearly would like to have us believe that money spent by local government is somehow different from that spent by central Government and that it should not appear in public borrowing figures. Time and again, we hear the argument, "Allow us to spend all our receipts from council house sales," notwithstanding the fact that the authorities borrowed the money to build those houses and have not paid it back.

You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have already ruled that this is not the occasion for a full-scale debate on Labour's proposals for devolution in Wales. However, it would be wrong for me to conclude my remarks without pointing out that, if we did not have the strong voice that we have in our Secretary of State, we would not have secured this settlement for Wales. If we were to have the assembly proposed by the Labour party, the danger would be either that we would lose our Secretary of State entirely, or that he would be emasculated and no longer able to speak in the interests of the people of Wales with the strong voice that he now possesses.

I can see you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, looking at me as if to say—

Mr. Llwyd: "Shut up".

Mr. Sweeney: Just so. *[Laughter.]* I shall therefore finish on this note: let us say no to devolution; let us keep our Secretary of State for Wales; and let us look forward to generous and effective leadership in future.

8.27 pm

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): I was brought up to believe—my socialism reflects it—that investment should go where need is greatest, and I believe that that should be reflected in the settlement. If such an element of fairness were introduced into the settlement, my constituency of Blaenau Gwent would be one of the greatest recipients. Whatever measuring rod one uses to measure need and poverty, Blaenau Gwent almost certainly would be near the head of the league.

Just last week, the Government's statistical office accepted that Blaenau Gwent has the lowest levels of household income and wages in Wales. We have never recovered from the closure of the coal industry and the rundown of the steel industry. The lost jobs have not been replaced with similar ones. In addition, male unemployment in my constituency is unacceptably high, especially if one examines the real figures rather than those that the Government have fiddled about 30 times. The Government would have done far better to invest in creating jobs than to concentrate their investments in the dole queue.

Linked with unemployment and low wages is the problem of ill health. In Blaenau Gwent, the level of heart and respiratory illnesses and, indeed, cancers is far above the national average. The number of deaths from heart disease is exceptionally high in my constituency—we are not far behind Scotland, which has one of the worst rates in Europe. The 1991 census showed that 41 per cent. of

families in my constituency had a member suffering from a long-term illness or a disability which affected how that person lived his life.

The same census showed that some 40 per cent. of the houses in Blaenau Gwent were built before 1919 and were in need of repair. We also have one of the lowest levels of car ownership in any of the valleys in south Wales, which will make it especially difficult for us to take advantage of the LG investment in Newport unless we reintroduce the train service which served that community so well for many a year.

Mr. Rogers: My hon. Friend makes an important point. New industries may come to the coastal areas of south Wales, but people from the valley communities will face a virtual penalty of £20 to £25 per week in travel costs. That means that the jobs are not, in effect, well-paid.

Mr. Smith: It is certainly difficult to get from the north to the south of the valleys, just as there are difficulties in moving from one valley to another. Someone living in an area of high deprivation who cannot afford his own transport will certainly have his chances of finding employment limited.

To digress a little, I remember a past chief executive officer of Gwent health authority drawing up plans for the ambulance service in my constituency. He brought along a map, and although none of us had a PhD in geography, we had to tell him that the map was flat whereas the area had valleys. The same kind of logic applies in relation to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers).

I could repeat the type of figures that I mentioned earlier, but I think that I have said enough to highlight the deprivation faced by many people in Blaenau Gwent. What is the Government's response? It is to treat the most vulnerable people with disdain. That is certainly the case in the settlements that we are debating.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I really cannot allow the hon. Gentleman to get away with that. The standard spending assessment for Blaenau Gwent is £65.268 million and its external support is £62.9 million. He really cannot expect more generous treatment than that.

Mr. Smith: It is convenient that the right hon. Gentleman should intervene at this point, as I am about to deal with the settlements for last year and for this year and how they affect my constituency. My conclusion—and that of the people who make up that community—is, to say the least, somewhat different from the right hon. Gentleman's. For instance, in our first budget as a county borough we had to make cuts of £5 million—and that was in addition to the £2 million that we had to take from our reserves. We also had to increase our council tax by some 25 per cent.

Cuts were made across the board by reducing social services after-care, cutting much-needed building maintenance and closing a cinema. Charges were also increased substantially. This year we have no reserves on which to call. It is estimated that the council tax will rise by 16 per cent. and that cuts of £6.3 million will have to be made. Within the past year, there have been cuts of £11.3 million in the two budgets to which I referred, and we have taken £2 million from our reserves. Clearly, this has hit some of the most vulnerable people.

As the Secretary of State was reminded by the placards that greeted him when he visited my constituency yesterday, those cuts represent about 20 per cent. of the money to be wasted by the Government on the royal yacht. The Government clearly regard the royal yacht as a greater priority than education or social services. In education, social services, economic development, highways, finance and leisure, the effect will be the same: cuts and more cuts. In the forthcoming year, cuts will total approximately 10 per cent. I may be old-fashioned, but I was brought up to believe that it was the task of local authorities to provide local services, whereas the Government believe that the role of local authorities is to dismantle those services.

The Secretary of State visited my constituency yesterday to meet the Heads of the Valleys Standing Conference. Perhaps he would like to return to my constituency and meet some of the people whose lives will certainly be blighted by the cuts. The council has not yet taken any decisions, so the Secretary of State could still examine the options that it faces. They include what is to happen to the elderly and most vulnerable if the home care service is reduced, or to those youngsters in education whose future will be even bleaker if teachers are made redundant and school budgets cut or cash-limited because of increased expenditure on items such as salaries.

Related problems include changes in the cost of school meals and the possible removal of the price subsidy, the rationalisation of nursery schools, a reduction in school buildings maintenance and a reduction in home-to-school or home-to-college transport. Leisure services could be hit by the closure of facilities such as swimming pools and by cuts in highways maintenance. The list of services affected is endless. Although the council has not decided where the cuts will be made, it recognises that all services have to come under scrutiny—none is immune from cuts.

The Government want to create the impression that the cuts are the fault of inefficient Labour-controlled local authorities, but people in communities such as mine are far too sensible to believe such nonsense. They know that the real reason for the cuts is that the Tories do not believe in public services—and even if they did, their expenditure is restricted by the convergence criteria of the single currency. Neither the Tories nor the single currency have any relevance to our communities: that feeling is reflected in the opinion polls, and it will soon be reflected in the polling booths.

8.38 pm

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): We are debating the Welsh revenue support grant reports, but it is necessary to consider them in the context of Welsh local government and its structure following the recent reorganisation.

The reorganisation of local government is a costly business, but there have been two major reorganisations in Wales in just over 20 years. They were both carried out by Conservative Governments. I suggest that we have still not got the right structure.

I shall illustrate the absurdity of the present structure with a blatant example. Before the recent reorganisation in Gwent, we had one director of education; now we have five. That is just one example, and I could cite many more. Such arrangements are wasteful, extravagant and unjustifiable. Compare that with the parsimonious

[Mr. Roy Hughes]

revenue support grant settlement that the Government are trying to foist on Welsh local authorities. It all goes to show that the Conservative party has never understood Wales. That is why it has always fared so disastrously at the polls at parliamentary and local government level.

Mr. Sweeney: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: No, I am not giving way.

Having willed the end, the Government have a moral duty to provide the means, so that adequate and efficient local government services can be provided for the Welsh people. That is not happening.

Mr. Lawrence Nippers, Newport's director of finance, is an experienced and much respected local government officer. He wrote to me on 31 January, pointing out that the RSG settlement for next year has been a massive disappointment to the new unitary councils in Wales. He says:

"Our spending on both revenue and capital is being squeezed . . .

Newport, in common with almost all other councils in Wales, is being permitted to spend an additional 1.8 per cent. next year".

That increase, he says,

"is insufficient to meet the cost of pay and price inflation. . . . the pay review bodies are considering awards at over 3 per cent. for some groups of public service employees."

Mr. Nippers goes on:

"For Newport the permitted increase of 1.8 per cent. equates to approximately £2 million extra spending capacity."

Of that, £450,000 goes to the new combined fire authority. That more expensive figure replaces what went to the former Gwent fire brigade. Some of us bitterly opposed the break-up of Gwent fire brigade. This is just another example of the Government's feckless handling of public finances and services in Wales.

An additional £1 million or so goes in waste disposal charges for Newport,

"arising from the enforced privatisation of our waste disposal service and the Government's new Landfill Tax,"

says Mr. Nippers. One does not need to be an authority on local government finance to realise that there is precious little left to meet the cost of pay and price inflation for all Newport services, let alone any leeway to make improvements.

Newport has a reputation as a well run council, with one of the lowest council tax levels, but its expenditure is capped so low that it has one of the worst primary school pupil-teacher ratios in Wales. Mr. Nippers says:

"We are unable to maintain the current standard of our services despite major efficiency savings."

Serious attempts are being made to reduce expenditure on all services and to give priority to the education service and social services. Education in Newport now seems to be in a desperate plight. Representatives of the council, teachers, governors and professionals in the education service wrote to the Secretary of State on 19 November last year, asking him to meet a small deputation to discuss the difficult situation. In his reply, the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans), said that such a meeting would serve little purpose.

A further letter has now been sent to the Secretary of State. I urge him to respond to Newport's pleas. With the arrival of the LG investment from Korea, with all its likely spin-offs, Newport needs perhaps above all else an efficient, well funded education service.

All manner of cuts are now envisaged in other services, some affecting disadvantaged people. Home care, day care facilities, meals on wheels and school meals are all possible targets, as are school transport, clothing grants to pupils and student grants. One social services residential establishment may be forced to close. Grants to outside bodies are also under threat.

Gwent theatre, for example, which does wonderful work in the community, could lose because of the Government's diktat, as could Newport Women's Aid. Newport's director of finance summed up the position, saying that the Secretary of State

"has short-changed the new local authorities."

I have represented Newport for the past 31 years. I say in all sincerity to the people of Newport, "Don't blame your local authority and its elected representatives for this situation. Put the blame squarely where it belongs—on this sadly discredited Conservative Government."

My constituency straddles two authorities—Newport, which I have already referred to, and what is now known as Monmouthshire county council. Monmouthshire has recently been complimented by external auditors on its prudent financial decisions. It might be called a lean and well-managed authority, but it, too, has been put under great pressure by the RSG settlement.

Monmouthshire county council covers a relatively prosperous area of Wales, but, as council leader Graham Powell pointed out to me, it is expected to provide the same level of services as any other, but with £11 million less than it would receive if it were funded at the Welsh average. A further irritant to the council was the decision of the Welsh Office to cut its provisional settlement by a further £423,000. The cuts will lead to an absurd situation, bringing about reductions in services, likely redundancies and increases in council tax. Is it any wonder that there is so much concern about the situation?

That is not the whole story. The Government are cutting other aspects of local authority expenditure. Last Friday, my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) and I were asked to meet the chairman of Gwent magistrates, Mr. David Turnbull, together with his vice-chairman and the clerk of the magistrates, Mr. Brian Forster. They told us of the difficulties they had experienced over the proposed building of a new magistrates court in Newport. It was to be built in a part of Newport that badly needs redevelopment. The area is known as the old coalyard site and is owned by Newport county borough council.

Negotiations had reached an advanced stage when, under the new private finance initiative guidelines, on 29 July 1996, the Lord Chancellor notified the local council that the project was way down the list of new building schemes to be phased into a private building programme. That does not say much for the PFI method of financing public projects.

The present magistrates court is in a 60-year-old building. There are no facilities for the disabled. Witnesses are not separated, due to inadequate facilities. Magistrates are concerned about their safety, because they have no separate entrance. Even possible new recruits to the bench have been deterred by the inadequate facilities.

If there is much further delay, the site could well be used for other purposes. I urge the Minister to notify the Secretary of State, as the principal spokesman for Wales, and ask him to intervene to get the project off the ground.

The current position is most distressing. There should be a partnership between local government and central Government. Instead, after 18 years of Conservative government, local decision making has been eroded, and we have dictatorship from the centre. Local government should be given back the powers it has lost, and I trust that the incoming Labour Government will take early steps to bring that about.

8.50 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): This evening sees the annual ritual of special pleading by hon. Members who are concerned about the finances of their local authorities. However, our ritualistic complaining belies a serious problem—the precarious position of Welsh local authorities. Furthermore, their difficulties are no fault of their own. For the past five or six years, heavy expenditure cuts have been imposed on local government year on year. One is tempted to ask where it will all end.

It is no secret that central Government view local government with distrust and even disdain. That could be because there are so few Tory-controlled councils in Wales. The process has continued for some 18 years, and the House has passed countless pieces of legislation curtailing the powers of local government. There have been more than 100 such measures in the past 18 years, in a steady, unrelenting erosion of local government powers and responsibilities.

It is small wonder, therefore, that that has gone hand in hand with ever-deepening cuts in local government finance. The dead hand of central Government is truly upon local government, and it is time that we all realised what is happening.

It has been said that, if we want people to act responsibly, we should give them responsibility. The corollary to that is that we have witnessed diminishing powers, financial support and morale in local government. This year's settlement, alas, is no exception to the general rule.

Conservative Members may seek to intervene and make the point that some 80 per cent. of standard spending is provided by the Exchequer in comparison with a lower figure for England, but that simply underlines the fact that Welsh local government is even more in the ever-tightening grip of the Exchequer.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, in the neighbouring parts of rural Wales that he and I represent, the big lie that local authorities are to blame for cuts in local services is no longer believed by anyone?

Mr. Llwyd: That is absolutely true, and it will be further understood in the coming weeks and months, and rightly so. There is no doubt that, when people say that central Government have been judged unfairly, they are talking palpable nonsense. If central Government had even a modicum of respect for local government, they would redress that balance. I agree entirely with the hon. and learned Gentleman.

Welsh local authorities are responsible authorities—not for them flagship projects, but rather a real concern for the delivery of everyday essential services. Even the most basic ones are under threat from this year's settlement. When one meets representatives of local government, they often ask where the cuts will stop.

My authority and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) is a case in point. I met the chief executive of Gwynedd council last week. The picture he painted, although realistic, was a dismal one. I shall not repeat what the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) said earlier, as his figures were accurate.

Put simply, the council requires £119.9 million in 1997–98. The spending limit set by the Secretary of State is £115.7 million, and the council will receive only 82 per cent. of that, or £95.3 million, in rate support grant. Therefore, the council will need to cut its budget by more than £4.2 million to meet the Secretary of State's figure.

Should Gwynedd spend up to the maximum, £20.4 million would have to be raised from council tax, which would mean an increase of 11.3 per cent. The right hon. Member for Conwy made a reasonable argument. It would be totally unreasonable to expect the council to impose a large increase in council tax following a 25 per cent. increase last year. There is only so much that people can suffer in any part of Wales and throughout the British Isles.

Thankfully, Gwynedd, like many other councils, received a special additional grant of nearly £2 million from the Welsh Office. However, that is for the current year, and it will not be available for 1997–98. Gwynedd has resolved to attempt to keep the council tax increase low, or at least to the average for Wales—between 8 per cent. and 9 per cent. There will be a shortfall of £4.5 million, and the council has resolved to make cuts amounting to £4 million and to find the remaining £500,000 from the balances.

As it is a highly responsible authority, Gwynedd will seek to find as much as possible of the money for the deficit by cutting administration and seeking to be still more efficient. It must be remembered, however, that last year the same council cut £1 million in administrative costs, so the future will be bleak.

The council has agreed that there should be a 6 per cent. cut over all departments, and some departments will have to face additional cuts. I do not like scaremongering, but Gwynedd is considering cutting teaching jobs, which account for a large part of the education budget. That will be inevitable.

I am not trying to make unreasonable points, but Gwynedd will face cuts in teaching staff, leisure, culture, planning, highways and social services. There will be direct cuts of 3 per cent. in the school budgets, cuts in home care services and the closure of some homes for the elderly. The council will also be cutting its attempt to promote the local economy—something much heralded by the Secretary of State earlier, and rightly so. Unfortunately, Gwynedd will therefore have to reverse its enlightened policy in that regard.

It grieves me that, as the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) said, the least able people in society will come out worse in this spending round. Those with special needs, those who benefit from the community care budget, the elderly and the infirm will bear the brunt of

[Mr. Llwyd]

the cuts. Coupled with cuts in education, we are taking a retrograde step in many ways, about which I am very concerned.

The Welsh Office settlement of 1.9 per cent. is, of course, below the rate of inflation—despite what the Secretary of State said. It seems that no effort is being made to ensure a fair, reasonable settlement for Welsh councils. In addition to the drastic cuts that Gwynedd faces to which I have referred, I am very concerned that it will have to make cuts in other areas that are yet to be decided. Such decisions will be made on 6 March.

Another authority that impinges on my constituency and the constituencies of the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) and the right hon. Member for Conwy is Conwy borough council. I have recently spoken to members and officers of that council and been told that the council will have to find cuts totalling at least 6.5 per cent.—with no service protection—of this year's budget, amounting to £5.2 million.

After taking into account pay inflation and other demands on services, a further cut of £2 million will have to be found to meet the capping target. There will have to be cuts of £2.4 million in education, £1 million in social services, £400,000 in highways expenditure and £1.4 million in other miscellaneous areas. I greatly regret that, inevitably, teaching posts are under threat.

In addition, reductions in maintenance are planned, and, since the capital programme cannot sustain capitalisation of such costs for 1997-98, there will also be a cut of £500,000 from that source. It will not be possible to recognise fully increased demands on social services to offset the proposed cuts, which will result in proposals including increased charges for a wide range of services and reduced grants to the voluntary sector. Again, that will impinge on and affect the most needy people in our society.

It is also envisaged that there will be early voluntary retirement, with staff not being replaced, increased charges, reductions in grounds maintenance, and so on. The balance of savings will undoubtedly be found through further job losses, more increases in charges, and reductions in services.

The increase in the SSA does not seem to come anywhere near recognising demographic changes and normal inflationary pressure—ignoring the fact that no provision has been made for pay inflation. A late change in the SSA has resulted in Conwy borough council having to find even cuts than those anticipated, raising further questions about the SSA model and system. Adjustments in nursery vouchers will cause more problems. Additional aggregate external finance, although much heralded by the Secretary of State, is not a substitute for increased spending power.

After it has saved £7 million, the council tax will be cut by 1 per cent.—not because the council chose to do that, but because more AEF has been put into the system. Conwy's director of finance concludes his submission to me by saying:

"All in all, the 1997-98 RSG settlement has to be one of the worst ever settlements for local government and, therefore, the local taxpayers."

In Ceredigion, the story for the council in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) is equally serious, with cuts totalling £4.2 million required to bring the budget to within 1 per cent. of the cash limit, and a projected serious loss of jobs—at least 40 to 45 in central departments, and an inevitable consequent decline in the level of service being offered. As one might expect from a cardi council, a responsible and cost-effective authority is being forced into providing a shoestring service to the public, which is very worrying for and damaging to ordinary people who live there.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing attention to the situation in Ceredigion. It is well understood in Ceredigion that the reduction of 1p in the standard rate of income tax is being paid for by the reduction in the level of service and an unreasonable increase in council tax. That will be worse next year if damping comes to an end without any compensatory increase through an adjustment in the SSA. Will he join me in requiring that the SSA must reflect the higher cost of service delivery in rural areas?

Mr. Llwyd: I agree entirely—that is probably the system's biggest deficiency, and it needs addressing.

Ynys Môn county council is also in a serious position. It will suffer an 11 per cent. cut in standard credit approval, and an 18 per cent. cut in housing. There will be cuts of 2.7 per cent. on the revenue side in education, meaning 20 teaching jobs lost; planning services will be cut by 6.6 per cent.; buses and public transport services will be cut and fares increased; public protection will be cut and public conveniences closed; road sweeping and beach cleaning will be cut; and there will be a 6.6 per cent. cut in social services. It has been decided that the council will try to protect children's services, but people with special needs will be badly hit. To say that the council is between a rock and a hard place is to understate the case.

Mr. Llew Smith: I am sure that, like myself, the hon. Gentleman is totally opposed to public expenditure restraints or cuts, but will he accept that there is logic in the Government's position—that, if one accepts the convergence criteria for the single currency and the restrictions on public expenditure, that must show itself in the amount of money that goes to local authorities?

Mr. Llwyd: I do not want to get into the European argument at this point.

The nursery voucher scheme—ill judged and half-baked—will put further pressure on Ynys Môn's budget, and the much-heralded council tax reduction scheme has had little effect, adding nothing to the council's finances.

The future is therefore extremely bleak. What is unacceptable is that those forced cuts come side by side with the second annual 1p income tax cut. Cutting taxes is fine when necessary services are protected, but can never be justified when education, social services and transport are being ceaselessly cut. The shadow Chancellor has said that he will abide by the present Budget for the next two years, so my question is: why vote Labour?

The Labour party, in its craven urge for power, has sold out, and left thousands of Welsh people in its wake. I trust that the people of Wales will realise that they are being

sacrificed on the altar of Labour's dream of power. Labour has taken Wales for granted once too often, and the British Labour party has shown that it is far more interested in city types and the well-off of the south-east than in the ordinary working men and women of Wales.

I trust that, when these dreadful and painful cuts are made throughout Wales, the Welsh people will realise that the British Labour party in Wales has no core values any more and no regard for the interests and well-being of the ordinary people of Wales. I trust that the people of Wales will realise that in the months to come.

It is now clear to the people of Wales that there is only one serious party that opposes these cuts—Labour is not prepared to stand against them, and the Tories are hell-bent on making them. Both Labour and the Tories agreed to cut 1p off income tax last year and this year. We voted against that on principle.

If the people of Wales want a party that is committed to protecting their interests, the choice is clear. If there is a Labour Government and an increase in Plaid Cymru representation in the House, we will bring pressure to bear to force the Labour party to think again about the interests of the people of Wales, which it is now selling down stream.

9.7 pm

Mr. Don Touhig (Islwyn): For the people of Wales in general, and for my constituency in particular, this financial settlement will prove to be severe in the extreme. It will have dramatic consequences for the level of services that Welsh local authorities provide, and it will mean that my constituents will pay more in council tax for a significantly reduced level of services.

The services provided by local councils such as mine—the county borough of Caerphilly—are vital to sustain the very quality of life itself. When we step outside our front gate, we walk on a pavement provided by the local council; we drive our cars on roads maintained by the local council; our children—or those of most of us—are educated in schools built by the local council; we swim in leisure centre pools operated by the local council; and our elderly relatives receive meals on wheels in a scheme funded by the local council. All those services are now at risk.

Yesterday the leader of Caerphilly county borough council, which cut £12 million from its budget last year, told me that it now faces a further £8.5 million cut in the coming financial year. That means that there will have been £20 million-worth of cuts in the first two years of the authority's existence. Cuts in school budgets in Caerphilly could cost up to 100 teaching jobs, class sizes will increase, and the school meals service is under threat. Young people wishing to go on to higher education may not receive the appropriate grants.

I spent 20 years as a councillor before entering the House, and I have always supported and worked to protect the education service in particular. A council can cut a road programme; a town centre bypass may be deferred; motorists may be angered and frustrated, but at a later date the money may be found, the bypass will be built, and people will be satisfied. We cannot cut a child's education and put something back in five years' time. Yet that is the prospect that the children of the people I represent face in the coming year.

The social services in Caerphilly borough will have to make severe reductions in home care budgets, and those who depend on such services and already have to pay for some of them will face increased charges. There may be cuts in refuse collection services and reductions in council house repairs. Highways and grounds maintenance also face the axe. Despite all that, my constituents face a 15 per cent. hike in their council tax. Other hon. Members have mentioned the damping grant. Without such a grant, my constituents would face a 30 per cent. increase in their council tax this year.

At Question Time last week, in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), the Prime Minister said:

"we have the most successful economy, with the highest growth and the best inward investment record, in western Europe."—[*Official Report*, 28 January 1997; Vol. 289, c. 150.]

My constituents' response to that will be to ask, "If the country is doing that well, why are we sacking teachers, cutting social services and asking the public to pay more for services?"

I will tell my constituents why: we are paying the price for the failure of Tory economic policies over the past 18 years—policies which meant that billions of pounds of North sea oil revenue, and billions more pounds in income from the sale of former public utilities, were used not to invest in infrastructure, public services or our children's future, but to give tax-cutting bribes before each general election. There can be no clearer illustration of the failure of Tory economic strategy than the fact that the British people will now be paying more tax than they were when the Tories took office in 1979. The results of the failure to invest those billions of pounds in our country's future prosperity are now being seen throughout the country.

In a recent report to Caerphilly councillors, chief officers said that the Secretary of State's announcements

"paint a very bleak picture for all local authorities in Wales . . . It is inevitable that there will be severe reductions in both revenue and capital spending coupled with double figure increases in council tax."

The problems faced by my local council can be summed up as follows. The standard spending assessment has been increased by 1.6 per cent. and the capping limit by 1.8 per cent.; yet Caerphilly county borough council believes that it needs an extra 6.5 per cent. in spending for the coming year. Why is that? It is because it faces, among other things, inescapable increases in expenditure arising from demographic and legislative changes.

The council needs £118,000 next year because of increased pupil numbers. It needs £274,000 to comply with transport legislation, such as that on seat belts. It needs £60,000 to administer the nursery voucher scheme and £50,000 as a result of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. It also needs £500,000 to implement additional legislation affecting social services, and £361,000 for the landfill tax.

Instead, the council will have to make cuts of £8.5 million. Those cuts have yet to be determined in detail, but they will inevitably result in severe reductions across all departments, including sensitive front-line services provided by the education and social services departments, with the consequent loss of jobs. Even so, council tax increases are in prospect: 10 per cent. in the former Rhymney Valley district and 15 per cent. in the former borough of Islwyn. The non-housing capital

[Mr. Don Touhig]

programme may be cut by 12 per cent., and the council house capital programme by 25 per cent. The urban aid and housing improvement grants scheme part of the capital programme may be cut by 35 per cent. Set against that, the true year on year increase in Government grant is but 2 per cent.—well below the rate of inflation. It stretches credulity to the limit, and it is impossible to reconcile that increase with Government's pronouncements which use terms such as "a good settlement" and "extra funding for education."

I have no doubt that we shaill hear the same old hoary tale from Ministers that there is no need for councils to increase taxes, that the settlement is fair and that if taxes increase it is all the fault of local councils. I say to the Government what any Welsh housewife would say: "You can't spend what you haven't got." The plain fact is that the Tory Government dislike and distrust local government; that is why local government finances are now largely controlled by central Government.

There are three ways in which the Government keep total control of local government finances. Central Government, not local government, now determine the level of public spending and the level of external finance available to support local councils' revenue budgets. Central Government, not local government, determine the maximum level of spend for local councils through the capping regime. Central Government, not local government, determine the allocation of borrowing approvals to finance capital expenditure. It is a case of the old saying, "He who pays the piper calls the tune."

Given those controls, it is central Government, not local government, who must take responsibility for the key public services that my council is being forced to cut and for the hike in council tax. Very soon the public will have an opportunity to pass judgment on the Government. I believe that the people of Islwyn—who sent me here after a by-election two years ago in which the Tory candidate received 3.9 per cent. of the vote and lost his deposit—will have their day, like others across Wales who have suffered under the Tory Government. The Conservative party will pay a price at the polls for its failure to invest in public services. It will be a heavy price, but the Tories will richly deserve to pay it.

9.16 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): I begin by apologising for being late for the beginning of the debate. My lateness was the exact equal of the lateness of one of the few direct trains from north Wales. The fact that it is direct does not make it punctual, and regular travellers on that route say that it is extremely rarely punctual. That is just another symptom of what has happened to us in recent years.

I suspect that many of us taking part in the debate feel a sense of deja vu or even of deja vu upon deja vu. We have all been here before, year after year, talking about the Tories' meanness in the local government settlement. This debate is a distant democratic fiction to the people who live in Montgomeryshire, which I represent, in the area represented by the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) and perhaps in every other part of Wales. Here we are, supposedly democratically discussing the local government settlement for Welsh communities, without the power to amend it, to examine it in Committee or to scrutinise it in any meaningful way. We have the power to put forward in a few minutes—as we all do, understandably—the views of our constituents, but without the expectation of being listened to.

When I leave this House, as I shall in a few weeks—

Mr. Richards: Hear, hear.

Mr. Carlile: The hon. Member for Clwyd, North–West (Mr. Richards) has abuse in his nature. One of the most offensive things about this House is having to sit opposite him and watch him perform in that revolting way. He is an insult to the intelligence. However, I will return to the subject of the debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Many people in Wales cannot reconcile the fact that they elect councillors and Members of Parliament but apparently have no power whatever—even by logical argument—to influence the outcome of the Government's deliberations as to what local services they are provided. The fact that 90 per cent. of local government finance is provided by central Government is very bad for local government and for democracy in Wales. I am pleased to say that I belong to a party which has always believed that less money should come from central Government and more money should be raised by local taxation, for which locally and regionally elected representatives would be accountable and for which they would answer to their electorate. Surely that is the only logical way of providing democratic local government and making it possible to debate these issues seriously.

I am puzzled by the Government's performance. They tell us that the economy is so successful that we have reached a new prosperity. They tell us that such has been the outstanding ability of the Government that we can have income tax cuts, but with the other hand they are taking away local services. In the rest of my speech I shall tell the House what constituents say to me about the results of the rate support grant settlement.

Mr. Rogers: The hon. and learned Gentleman has advanced the novel idea that local government should be the collector of taxation for central Government. He should bear in mind the fact that most of the functions that local authorities perform are imposed on them by central Government.

Mr. Carlile: The way in which those functions are performed by local government is very much a local issue, and in common with most of our partners in Europe I believe that raising local taxes—such as a local income tax—to pay for local facilities is much more logical than the bizarre system that we have in this country. No doubt we shall be arguing that case in future.

I was about to tell the House what people are saying in rural Montgomeryshire, in rural Powys, about the effect of the settlement. They tell me that there is less money for the elderly and for people with learning difficulties, for the mentally ill and for all those who need assistance from their local council.

The two learning difficulties hospitals in my constituency, Bryn Hyfryd and Llys Maldwyn, are to close shortly. It is right that they should close, but the people with nursing qualifications who have skilfully looked after patients at those hospitals rarely obtain jobs

in the new facilities to which those people are sent. It is absurd—even offensive—that the people who have learnt over years the skill of dealing with problems such as bedsores and other physical ailments will no longer be able to provide such nursing care to the people who in the past were judged to need it. The reason? There is not enough money to employ them.

Rural roads are also affected by the settlement. Like many hon. Members, I had some farmers to dinner at the House last night. Almost the first thing that they complained about was the condition of the roads and the way in which it has been affecting dairy farmers this year. It is illustrated by human situations such as the fact that in Powys more milk tankers have skidded off the road this year than last year because there is less money for gritting roads. That is a real effect on people, and it is quite cynically determined by the Government.

Schools are being forced into a vicious circle by the rate support grant settlement. In Newtown in my constituency, the high school, which is far from being one of the worst schools in Wales—it has a pretty good record on the whole—is being forced to cut teachers, partly because many parents are sending their children to more distant high schools which they have chosen. However, as teachers are lost from Newtown high school, the school will inevitably suffer further difficulties, which will make it less popular among parents, and so it goes on. As a result, the high school in the biggest town in my constituency will be forced to become a poorer school, despite the fact that its head teacher has a clear sense of direction.

The contribution made by local government to police and fire services means that they are less able to purchase new technology such as closed-circuit television—which country towns now unfortunately need because of the increase in violent crime—so we have a reduction in our quality of life.

As for other forms of crime prevention, traditionally we have had a good level of probation services throughout north and mid-Wales, but probation services are now running hard even to stand still. A more realistic picture is probably that they are now going backwards and are less able to provide the sort of support services that are needed and which lead to crime prevention.

The real poor relation of local government is consumer protection and trading standards. As it happens, in my legal practice over the past 25 years I have been heavily involved in matters concerning the application of false trade descriptions and other related issues. Even 10 years ago, most Welsh counties could provide a high quality trading standards and consumer protection service. It is now a Cinderella service, and whose fault is that? It is the fault of the Government.

Those are real examples of what real people in Wales—not Ministers blustering from the Dispatch Box at the end of a short debate—see as happening as a result of Government policies. I suspect that, after all these years of Conservative government, the Conservative party has probably visited defeat on itself. There is now a mindset among many people which says that so much has been cut that, whether they like the Conservative party or not—I suspect that most of them do not, and rightly so—there must be a change of Government, because the balance has gone too far in the other direction.

9.26 pm

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North–West): The local government settlement was made in a tight financial climate. Given the circumstances, it was fair, and we must remember that all local authorities in Wales agreed to it. As several Opposition Members have said, although the economy is now going strongly and is the strongest in Europe, we must bear it in mind that we have recently come out of a deep recession. The public sector borrowing that was required to maintain services at an acceptable level at that time must be repaid in times of plenty, and those are the circumstances in which the local government settlement has been made.

I therefore compliment my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on the settlement that he achieved with the local authorities and on his presentation this afternoon. It was in contrast to the presentation of the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies), who I notice has just scuttled out of the Chamber before I reach the key point in his speech—[HON. MEMBERS: "He is here."] He has scuttled to the Back Benches, where he expects to be after the general election.

The hon. Gentleman gave a poor presentation. Indeed, I could have found a much better debate had I gone to Caerphilly Co-op, but that is another matter. He said that, if there were a Labour Government, they would not break the expenditure totals in Wales in their first year in office. Even though pressed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Caerphilly would give no such assurance for the second year of a Labour Government. I invite the hon. Gentleman to make his position clear. He said that an incoming Labour Government would not break the expenditure total in Wales in their first year. Is that the case in the second year—yes or no? I invite the hon. Gentleman to say so now.

The hon. Gentleman has declined my invitation. The right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) has made it clear that an incoming Labour Government would stick to the Government's expenditure targets for two years. Does the hon. Member for Caerphilly want me to write to the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East to tell him that there is a breakaway movement in Wales, and that the hon. Gentleman refuses to give such an assurance? I again invite the hon. Gentleman to make his position on Wales clear. Is it the same as the position stated by the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East for the rest of the United Kingdom?

The hon. Gentleman may laugh, but the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East may not. If the hon. Gentleman intends to break the Government's expenditure targets for the second year, and the right hon. Gentleman intends to stick to his statement, the subvention to Wales from England would be increased, which would mean a cut in Government expenditure in England. Is that what the hon. Member for Caerphilly intends? Does he or does he not agree with the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East that he will stick to the expenditure target in Wales in the second year?

It is evident that the hon. Member for Caerphilly is once again out on a limb in relation to his party leadership. I am sure that we shall return to the matter, and I assure him that I shall return to it when the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East is occupying the Opposition Front Bench.

9.32 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): It is a sad fact that, when there are two routes to a political destination—the high road and the low road—the hon. Member for Clwyd, North–West (Mr. Richards) will invariably choose the low road.

I shall make but one general point and one point in relation to my constituency. On the general point, of course there is a ritual in these debates: as they sink to their knees, Conservative Members say that we have never had it so good and that Wales is fortunate to have a Secretary of State who has brought back the goods yet again; we point out that, at local level, there is an impact on the services that our people properly expect.

The political context in which we now operate is that there has been an almost complete meltdown in Conservative representation in local government in Wales, so the Government do not have a constant reminder of how the folks at local level are feeling the effect of cuts. The Government live in a vacuum, away from where ordinary folks live, move and have their being. After the general election, there may well be such a meltdown at central Government level in Wales, and there will be no one from Wales on the Conservative side of the House.

I agree with the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) about one clear fact that I appreciate after many years in the House. In spite of the Government's public relations efforts, the people of Wales point the finger of blame not at their local authorities—which are all non-Conservative—but at central Government. They realise who are the real villains of the piece. They see the reduction in the proportion of rate support grant for local government spending from two thirds in 1993-94 to just over a half now, and the real cuts of 25 per cent. in housing renovation grants over the past three years. Housing capital provision has been cut by a quarter in the past three years. The people of Wales see the impact of the Government's policies in the failure of councillors to provide much-needed services—for example, ridding houses of damp and providing affordable housing for their sons and daughters.

The settlement will impact on Swansea city and county council, which will have to increase council tax by 5 per cent.—4 per cent. of which is a result of damping for the rest of Wales. That is only part of the new burden that the Government have imposed on local authorities. My council faces more than £1 million in additional expenditure as a direct result of legislative changes for which it was not allocated resources. For example, the landfill tax has meant a net expenditure increase of £500,000, and an expensive reorganisation of the fire service has occurred against the wishes of the local authority. That is a double whammy; the council did not want those policies, but must now deal with their financial effects.

The pay increase for teachers looms. The budget does not take it into account, although it will have a substantial impact on local government expenditure. The settlement will mean a loss of about 175 teaching posts in my constituency, and the £11 million reduction will mean cuts in school budgets, home helps and road maintenance work.

There is intense anger in my city because the Government have approved no new transport schemes. That has had a disastrous effect on Hafod in my constituency, which will suffer as a result of the failure to complete the Swansea valley route. Real spending cuts are perceived by the Welsh electorate as a direct result of Government policy, not the fault of local councillors. They will adversely affect the services that our people expect. The Chancellor's claim that things are good will be met with the cry from the Welsh electorate, "If things are so good, why are they so bad for us and for local government services?"

9.36 pm

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): I look back fondly to the tenure of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) as Secretary of State for Wales. The shadow Secretary of State for Wales, my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies), made a shrewd speech tonight, and I am happy to support his remarks. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) made the essential debating point when he said that, within a generation—little more than 20 years—two great reforms of local government were enacted, and the latter reform was totally under-resourced. Those local government reforms were very costly, and their consequences will be apparent for years to come.

I had hoped that the settlement would allow my county of Flintshire to avoid cutting education resources. The council leader, deputy leader and chairman of finance are anxious about the prospect of losing teacher posts. I know that headmasters, staff, governors and parents in my constituency do not want to lose one teacher—they want more, not fewer, teachers.

The housing scene is a battlefield as a consequence of the Secretary of State's cuts. I had hoped that he would release more council house sales receipts, which would generate extra jobs for those who repair and modernise homes in my constituency and throughout Wales.

I emphasise that point, because the poor and the elderly had an extremely rough time during the desperately cold weather that we suffered at the turn of the year. Tens of thousands of houses throughout the Principality were very cold and almost impossible to live in. Those homes require double glazing and new doors, and the whole housing fabric needs to be modernised. The Secretary of State should have made that a priority when he arrived at this grant settlement.

I believe that, when the day comes, the Welsh people will take electoral revenge, unprecedented in its savagery.

9.39 pm

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): We have had a wide-ranging debate, in which my hon. Friends the Members for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers), for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith), for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes), for Islwyn (Mr. Touhig), for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) and for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) graphically explained why the local government settlement will result in deep cuts in services, while at the same time forcing local authorities to increase their council taxes beyond the rate of inflation.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) and the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) described the way in which

their authorities were savagely affected by the local government settlement. The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy spoilt his remarks by his unjustified attack on the Labour party's desire to seek power for the betterment of everyone and not just the few, which is a characteristic of the Government's policies.

Unfortunately, the contributions of the hon. Members for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney) and for Clwyd, North–West (Mr. Richards) and that of the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) were characterised by an unnecessary and unjustified attack on my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies). The personal abuse that one or two Conservative Members sought to pile on him was totally unjustified, because he was showing clearly the dramatic effects that the settlement will have on the provision of services in Wales.

It is all very well for the Secretary of State to talk about the thousands of millions of pounds and the increases of 2.6 or 2.3 per cent. that he has obtained, and about the wonderful job that is being done—his hon. Friends duly backed him up. My hon. Friends the Members for Islwyn and for Swansea, East contrasted his talk about the dynamic, thriving, prospering and wealthy economy of Wales with the impact that the settlement will have on people in Wales.

The rate of increase of the settlement is lower than the inflation rate. It is part of the plan to continue to reduce the revenue support grant and central Government support for local government. In the past three years, the revenue support grant has lost its real value by 7.1 per cent. With the savage capping criteria on top of that—except for last year—virtually every council in Wales has had to increase its council tax above the rate of inflation.

I carried out a survey to which 19 local authorities in Wales responded. In 12 of those 19, the council tax D band was being increased by between 3.5 and 15 per cent. A further four authorities were facing small increases, and three were making cuts, which, perversely, because of the capping criteria, also meant that they were having to cut the services that they provide to their people. This year's local government settlement really is a mess.

Let us look at the impact on the budget, and on services. Many local authorities are trying to protect schools budgets. Six are increasing them; seven have made sure that schools budget cuts are less than the cuts covering the whole authority. My authority of Bridgend will suffer a 2 per cent. cut in the schools budget, but there will be cuts of more than 6 per cent. in other departments. All that is being forced on authorities by the settlement that has been foolishly lauded by some Conservative Back Benchers.

According to the survey, 12 authorities estimated that they were likely to lose about 770 teachers. Four thought that they would have no losses; three had not yet settled the matter, and from three I had no information, but, having looked at press reports, I counted another 299 possible teacher job losses. That amounts to well over 1,000. Not all those losses may come to pass, of course, because some schools may choose to use some of their reserves to keep teachers in post for another year. Nevertheless, class sizes are increasing.

The Welsh Office's own figures show that in 1992, when the Prime Minister was re-elected, 56,411 children in mainstream primary schools in Wales were in classes of more than 30. In the last year for which figures are available, 1995-96, the figure had risen to 69,873. That is an increase of 24 per cent., or more than 13,000 children. That is how efficiency gains are secured in education: more children have to be put in front of teachers. There has been a reduction in the teaching work force, while the number of pupils has increased.

It is not just a case of increases in class sizes, however. Local authorities have not enough money for school maintenance or school security: the Government are not providing any additional funds. Transport costs are also a problem. We are told by the office of Her Majesty's chief inspector that the teaching of Welsh is hampered by a lack of resources, and we are told by the National Confederation of Parent-Teacher Associations that teachers and parents in England and Wales are raising more than £100 million a year for books and equipment. The nursery voucher rule changes have had an adverse effect on many Welsh authorities.

There has been a 20 per cent. increase in pupils with statements in respect of special educational needs. Other costs relate to the teachers' pay award, early retirement, the increasing number of free school meals, the requirements of the national curriculum, school transport, the Welsh Language Act 1993, the code of practice, changes in the superannuation rules and the administration of nursery vouchers. All that amounts to a bill of nearly £80 million, but the Government have taken no account of it.

Housing is also affected. There has been a 24 per cent. real-terms cut in housing renovation grants since 1994–95, and an 18 per cent. cut since last year. There has been a 24.5 per cent. real-terms reduction in housing capital provision over that three-year period, and a 16 per cent. cut since last year. As for homelessness, since 1979—surprise, surprise—the number of cases of people being accepted as homeless in Wales has nearly doubled, from just over 4,500 to just over 9,000.

Local authorities have a direct interest in housing association budgets, because of allocation policies. In December 1995, the Secretary of State said that he was giving Tai Cymru a social housing grant of £85 million, which would "globalise" into £150 million with private sector finance. Last December, he said that he was giving Tai Cymru £60 million, which would "globalise" into £100 million, yet in both years there were going to be 3,000 housing starts with 50 per cent. less money available. The right hon. Gentleman obviously needs to go into housing when he completes his time in Parliament after the next general election.

The fire service in south Wales is badly underfunded. It has problems over the pension scheme. The number of call-outs has been increasing annually at 10 per cent. Capital needs are not being met. It is going to have great difficulty in providing the high service level that is needed, particularly when its training needs under the Health and Safety Executive improvement notice will cost more than £1 million a year for the next five years, and that was following the tragic deaths of two firemen in Blaina. I would have thought that the Government would make provision for those needs, but they plainly have not.

I hope therefore that, even at this stage, the Government will reconsider the total of Welsh Office expenditure and decide that there is a case for giving greater priority to education and other local government services that are provided for people in Wales.

9.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones): I am grateful for the welcome that has been given to the settlement by my right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) and by my hon. Friends the Members for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney) and for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards). I even wish to note a rare appearance by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile).

The debate has removed what little credibility Opposition Members had. The hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) argues that a settlement that increases money for local government, providing councils with £1,000 per person to spend and £880 per person in grants to support that spending, is wholly inadequate, yet we are told that there would be no increase in public spending under a Labour Government. When the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) is asked how much extra he would give local government, he cannot or will not answer. Nor will he tell the House what other expenditure he would cut to give local government more, so as to stay within the reported spending plans of the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). We must not forget that funding for a Welsh assembly would also have to be found.

Concerns have been expressed about the council tax level and the iniquities of the capping system without any explanation of how council tax and public expenditure would be controlled if capping were abandoned. My right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy speculated on the cost in increased spending and increased council tax. I hesitate to give him an answer on that point. I fear that the sky would be the limit, with Labour local authorities let loose, but I rush to agree with him about the consequences of business rates again being the property of local authorities, as the Labour and Liberal parties want. The rates are going up only 2.2 per cent. this year, and that is for one fifth of small businesses. The rates of the other four fifths are being frozen. We can imagine how much rates would go up otherwise.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has made it clear that he is providing £16.6 million to limit council tax increases to 15 per cent. The majority of council tax increases will be considerably lower than that. I noticed that the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) was rightly concerned about unemployment and other social factors in his constituency. I was surprised that he did not welcome the £4 million to damp the increase that his council is imposing on his constituents. After all, the average Welsh council tax for 1997–98 should be about £200 less than in England, but, at 88 per cent. of total standard spending, Government support in Wales is already proportionately higher than in England and in Scotland.

Governments who adopt a prudent approach to public finances cannot operate on the basis of wish lists. That is the only way in which to describe Opposition Members' arguments tonight. As my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan reminded us, the obvious implication of their arguments is increased total standard spending, increased spending unstrained by capping and increased central Government support to keep down council tax levels. If the hon. Member for Caerphilly has any sums, I have to conclude that they do not add up, and the best thing we could do is give him a nursery voucher.

The nursery voucher scheme has been criticised. The scheme furthers our commitment to parental choice and it does not disadvantage local government. Local authorities still retain the discretion to provide pre-school nursery education for four-year-olds, but will benefit from the receipt of voucher income. If parents are content with the provision that is being offered by the maintained sector, there is every reason to suppose that they will send their children to council-owned establishments. There is already evidence to suggest that some local education authorities in Wales are expanding their provision.

The Government's decision to base the nursery voucher adjustment base budgets on the populations of one to four-year-olds in local authority areas rather than on the number of four-year-olds in maintained schools was taken only after two separate consultation exercises. Local authorities differed in their views on the most appropriate basis, but the majority of responding authorities took the view that the adjustment should be based on the one-to-four-year-old population. That is in line with the needs indicators that are used for under-fives in the standard spending assessment formula that was agreed by the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government Finance and it avoids penalising authorities that have chosen to invest in nursery education.

The hon. Members for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) and for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) spoke about education. I am reminded of Labour's stunt today of claiming that 1,000 teachers are to be sacked in Wales. That was a unique criticism by Labour of Labour councillors in Wales. There are exceptions, but they are the people making the decisions. The hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) was concerned about 100 teachers being sacked in his authority, but I fear that he is out of date. He should have read Saturday's *Western Mail*, because it stated that his council is seeking not to do that. If Rhondda Cynon Taff, Denbighshire and Carmarthenshire can seek to ensure that no teachers are sacked, why should any local authority in Wales choose to make sacking its priority?

I tried to intervene on the hon. Member for Caerphilly because I wanted to question him on statistics that he quoted. He said that local government spending over the years had gone up by only 43 per cent. and that education spending had gone up by only 36 per cent. If he had understood his own statistics, he would have recognised that he was giving evidence of cuts in education that have been inflicted by Labour councillors in Wales. He said that he wanted to help young people. I wanted to ask him why, if he is sincere in that, he does not join in condemning Labour councillors whose first priority is to cut the number of teachers. It is Labour's sacred cows that we should be sacrificing, not our children's future.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy was concerned about representation on the police formula working group. I happily tell him that I welcome such representation and that it is also welcomed by the Home Office. It is now a matter for Welsh authorities to take forward with their colleagues in the convention of local police authorities. Since 1 April, spending on the police in Wales has gone up by some 20 per cent. Before that date, spending was set by county councils, usually Labour. For some, the change over the past two years has been a rescue, especially in south Wales, because Labour starved the police of funding. The chief constable of south Wales has spoken about the extra officers that he could

take on with the money that he has available. The commander of the Vale division has been able to point out how he has reduced crime because of extra officers in the Vale of Glamorgan.

I recently attended a demonstration of the closed circuit television that is operated by the police in Cardiff city centre and I soon realised the desirability of extending that facility. On two successive Saturdays, schoolboys from Llanishen high school were robbed in arcades in Cardiff. I must not exaggerate the point, but my son was one of the schoolboys who were robbed. All that reinforces the fact that we were right to take over the funding of the police in Wales from Labour councils, which starved them of money.

The settlement is a prudent but right package that will enable local government to maintain essential functions, if they act responsibly and cost effectively. The hon. Member for Caerphilly has called it unfair and inadequate, but he offered no policy in its stead. We heard a diatribe about failed economic policies. I shall not reply at the same length, but if the hon. Gentleman is concerned to improve the economy how could he dare to impose the social chapter, the minimum wage, the Welsh assembly and all the other job-destroying policies of his party?

Let us consider the difference between what Labour says and what it does when it has power. Labour claims that education has priority, but it cuts teachers. It professes to be interested in law and order, but it starves the police of money. Labour says one thing, but it does another. It is hypocrisy to such an extent that Labour Members cannot even control their own temporal lobes. The Government are presenting the right settlement to the House today, in stark contrast to the absence of policy from the Opposition. I commend it to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 304, Noes 251.

Division No. 67] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hat'fd)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, John
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howell, David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'rne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard

Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Scott, Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whitingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'd)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Matthew Carrington and Mr. Anthony Coombs.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joseph
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alex *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stret'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
Macdonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Oliner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John

Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Robert
Shore, Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms R *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Ms Angela Eagle and
Mr. Thomas McAvoy.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Local Government Finance Report (Wales) 1997–98 (HC 218), which was laid before this House on 3rd February, be approved.

It being after Ten o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the remaining Questions required to be put at that hour.*

Motion made, and Question put,

That the Special Grant Report (Wales) 1997 (HC 219), which was laid before this House on 3rd February, be approved.—[*Mr. Peter Ainsworth.*]

The House divided: Ayes 254, Noes 124.

Division No. 68] **[10.14 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Cash, William
Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, John
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howell, David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Michael
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard

Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bexl'yn'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Matthew Carrington and Mr. Anthony Coombs.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allon, David
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joseph
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Bayley, Hugh
Beith, A J
Bermingham, Gerald
Bosteng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Burden, Richard
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Carlile, Alex *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Colley, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Corston, Ms Jean
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Flynn, Paul
Fraser, John
Gerrard, Neil
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Llwyd, Elfyn
McAvoy, Thomas
Macklnlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Stanley
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Rooney, Terry
Rowlands, Ted
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spearing, Nigel
Speller, John
Steel, Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Don Touhig and Mr. Martyn Jones.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Special Grant Report (Wales) 1997 (HC 219), which was laid before this House on 3rd February, be approved.

Local Government Finance (Wales)

Resolved,

That the Limitation of Council Tax (Relevant Notional Amounts) Report (Wales) 1997–98 (HC 220), which was laid before this House on 3rd February, be approved.—*[Mr. Peter Ainsworth.]*

Artists' Resale Rights

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 7050/96, relating to the resale right for the benefit of the author of an original work of art, and supports the Government which is not persuaded that there is a case for the introduction of this proposal into the United Kingdom.—*[Mr. Peter Ainsworth.]*

PETITION

Carers (Respite Breaks)

10.27 pm

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): There are an estimated 100,000 people in Birmingham who care for others and the petition that I am presenting has been compiled by the West Heath Carers Association in my constituency. It is in support of the right of carers to have short-term breaks. More than 350 people from Birmingham, Northfield and the surrounding areas have signed the petition, which reads as follows:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The Humble Petition of the people of Birmingham Northfield and the surrounding areas Sheweth That to ensure these essential services, disabled people and their carers have the right, following assessment, to short term (respite) breaks.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House pass a bill in like terms to the Disabled Persons and Carers Bill [Lords], presented in the last session of Parliament, to legally enshrine the right to assessment and subsequent short term (respite) breaks.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, &c.

To lie upon Table.

Rural Housing (Scotland)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Peter Ainsworth.]*

10.28 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I am pleased to have secured this Adjournment debate on rural housing policy in Scotland. Many of the organisations associated with housing in Scotland, such as Shelter, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations and the Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland, have been trying in recent months to raise the political profile of the housing issue. It is important to do so in a context that shows that housing is not an issue that operates in isolation.

Housing has implications for health, in that there is a proven link between poor housing and disease; and for education, in that children can lose time at school through housing-related ill health or difficulty in doing homework in overcrowded homes. There is a relationship between housing and crime, in that cheaply built and poorly maintained homes are more prone to break-ins; and between housing and employment—for example, in the costs to the construction industry resulting from any reduction in investment in housing. I hope that by holding this Adjournment debate on Scotland's rural housing policy, we can make some small contribution to the wider debate.

The problems of urban housing are usually obvious. Those of rural housing tend to be scattered over a large area, and are therefore not so obvious to view. But the figures highlight the serious extent of a problem that, unless it is adequately addressed, could quickly develop into a serious rural housing crisis.

I shall start by sketching in some of the background. Scottish Homes invests 20.2 per cent. of its annual funding budget in Scotland's rural areas, although 28.8 per cent. of Scotland's households are within those areas. About 22 per cent. of all rural homes require repairs costing £2,500 or more, compared to 10 per cent. of urban houses. Rural home owners are twice as likely as owner-occupiers in large towns and cities to live in damp conditions.

Despite the fact that they account for only 29 per cent. of Scottish households, local authority areas defined as rural account for 39 per cent. of dwellings assessed as below tolerable standard. Indeed, one of the most recent surveys pushed the "below tolerable standard" estimate in an area of Skye and Lochalsh from 8 per cent. to 22 per cent. of the housing stock; and in several other Scottish rural areas, more than 20 per cent. of the housing is below tolerable standard.

Officially recorded homelessness in rural Scotland rose by 63 per cent. between 1989–90 and 1995–96. The comparable figure for urban Scotland was a much lower, but still unacceptable, 36 per cent. Those are average figures, but especially high increases have been recorded in Western Isles, in Orkney, Angus and Lochaber, and in Kincardine and Deeside. In all those areas, homelessness has more than doubled in the six-year period that I mentioned.

Then there are the problems that can so easily be overlooked—for example, the number of people who are obliged to live in caravans. That can sometimes disguise

[Mr. James Wallace]

the real extent of housing need. A report prepared for Shelter in 1993, entitled "A forgotten problem", found that caravan dwelling was seen as a predominantly rural housing solution for about 4,000 Scottish households.

Caravans are seldom the accommodation of choice—a fact that my constituency surgeries often bear out. Apart from the heating problems and the dampness encountered in caravans, insurance cover can sometimes be impossible to find, with all the consequences that that brings for families trying to put things together again after their caravans, furniture and property have been destroyed by wind or other bad weather.

Recently, a constituent drew to my attention the fact that concessionary electricity tariffs were unavailable for some caravan dwellers, because their connection was via the council rather than directly with Scottish Hydro-Electric. People already disadvantaged by low incomes find themselves further disadvantaged when they cannot get access to concessionary tariffs.

Many of the problems of rural housing are associated with low income, especially with the combination of low income and higher costs, including higher housing costs. It is a well established fact that, in many rural parts of Scotland, the costs of transport and the general cost of living, including the price of ordinary household goods, is much higher. For people on low incomes, that means that there is even less of their income left to meet housing costs.

I am talking about areas of low income, of seasonal employment and of high living costs. Rural households have less income to meet those higher housing costs. Rural areas account for 20 per cent. of all homelessness applications, but 27 per cent. of those result from mortgage default.

In addition, the cost of owner-occupation is often increased because of the external demand for housing. Homes up for sale in rural areas are often advertised in the national rather than the local press. In the Argyll islands, one quarter of the housing stock consists of second or holiday homes, while social housing for rent accounts for less than 16 per cent.

Even when there is social housing for rent, the availability of less than 100 per cent. housing association grants makes private loan finance a necessity, so rents are pushed higher. To that we must add the consequences of recent and proposed changes in housing benefit. In Scotland's rural areas, the incidence of private rented accommodation is well above average, much of it at relatively high rents.

New rules from next October will restrict benefit for single people under the age of 60 to a single-room rent. I was advised earlier today by the housing department of Orkney Islands council that that has already prompted a number of private tenants in Orkney to do a simple calculation to work out that they will not be able to afford their current accommodation, so they will present themselves as homeless. In turn, that has implications for landlords, who have been encouraged until now to let their premises, but who may well find that they cannot attract tenants at the levels of rents that they have been charging until now.

Against that background, there are two key aspects of Government policy that I wish to challenge this evening. First, there has been a significant cut in funding for housing investment over the past year and next year. It is my understanding that the Scottish Homes approved development programme for housing associations and private developers will be down by 25 per cent., from £280 million to £210 million, in 1997–98.

I am sure—because I have been through these debates before—that the Minister will tell us in his reply that, on Budget day, the Secretary of State gave another £43 million to Scottish Homes, and that Scottish Homes has managed to find about £30 million through housing stock transfers. He has claimed in a letter to my right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) that, over this year and next year, Scottish Homes will invest over £500 million in housing development.

I understand that, if the investment had remained at the 1995–96 level, it would have been about £650 million. Certainly the information from the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, and from housing associations in my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), is that the associations all expect a decrease in the funding available for housing investment in the year ahead.

We cannot take that money out of housing investment without consequences in terms of the number of new units started, or without reducing what can be done to try to tackle the condition of Scotland's rural housing. It will also have consequences for construction firms—many of which are small community businesses—which are facing job losses as a result of cuts in housing expenditure. Linked to that is the problem faced by many local authorities, who see the capital receipts from the sale of council houses going up to 75 per cent. These sums have to be applied to pay off accrued debt on housing.

Surely it would be far better to allow the local authorities an opportunity to determine their own priorities. Under its own proposals—and without any prompting from the Government—Orkney would have paid off its housing debt within the next 12 to 14 years. It now finds that tenants who have waited patiently for some refurbishment and have been told that it would happen next year will be seriously disappointed. In Shetland, some £500 million is expected to be lost from the refurbishment budget, thereby knocking out of sync a long-prepared programme to try to catch up on the refurbishment that was not done at the time of the oil boom.

In Shetland, the Western Isles and Highland, the Government have indicated in principle a willingness to commute debt, and that is very welcome. A lot of the detail has still to be worked out, and I very much hope that whoever is sitting on the Treasury Bench after the election will honour that commitment in principle and ensure that the detail is satisfactory. Although the expectation with regard to investment through Scottish Homes is that the pain will be shared equally when Scottish Homes divides up the cake, may I ask the Minister tonight if he will consult Scottish Homes about showing a bias towards rural housing associations?

I do not think that I need declare an interest but—in case it is necessary—I declare that my wife is a vice-chairman of the Orkney housing association, and I have had my ear bent at first hand on this issue. However, I know that all rural housing associations in the Highlands and Islands, and other parts of rural Scotland, feel strongly about the matter.

Since Scottish Homes launched its rural initiative in 1990, it has—according to a recent review—invested £311 million in rural Scotland, resulting in more than 10,400 starts. It has made an important contribution to care and repair and it has managed to get leverage of private finance, which has increased over the years. Without that rural initiative, I accept that the position would have been worse.

Notwithstanding that, as I said earlier, the consultant who conducted that review of Scottish Homes' rural policy concluded

"that a rural share of 20.2 per cent. of Scottish Homes national investment is not commensurate with a 28.8 per cent. share of households, and a much faster rate of new household formation. Moreover, the disproportionate cut in rural investment approved for 1996/97 is hard to reconcile with these trends. It is recommended that Scottish Homes both increases the rural share of its spending and articulates a clearer rationale for the geographic distribution of its expenditure."

I extract two points to justify my plea for favoured treatment. First, it will reverse a disproportionate cut in 1996-97, and, secondly, it will address the issue of much faster rate of new household formation.

The review to which I have referred highlights trends projected into the next century, which show proportion and household numbers increasing faster in rural Scotland than urban Scotland. In the Highlands and Islands and Grampian district, household growth between 1992 and 2001 is estimated at 12.7 per cent., and in Lothian and Borders it is estimated at 10 per cent., compared with the Scottish average of 7.7 per cent. A rationale for geographical distribution would undoubtedly favour those areas; I ask the Minister to encourage such an approach.

The second key point concerns the Government's obsession with home ownership, and its target setting of 60 per cent. home ownership, against which it seems that all other objects must take second place.

I have no ideological objection to home ownership, which is a necessary feature of any liberal democracy. The objection is to an obsessive ideological pursuit of the aim. Liberal Democrats did not oppose the principle of the right to buy, but we have pointed out the wisdom of allowing local authorities flexibility to maintain a balanced housing stock. What I heard earlier today shows that that view is justified: Orkney Islands council must place a newspaper advertisement in an attempt to find suitable accommodation for a family with special but not exceptional needs, because it no longer has any accommodation suitable for adaptation in its own housing stock.

I ask the Minister, in the case of Scottish Homes, to allow much more local discretion and flexibility for districts and housing associations to determine the balance of their own areas between low-cost home ownership and public rented housing at affordable rents. The review of Scottish Homes' rural policy recommended

"that Scottish Homes gives primary emphasis in rural areas to the provision of affordable rented housing, although low cost home ownership should continue to be promoted in areas where there is sufficient and identified demand as a secondary priority. The guiding principle here should be local flexibility to respond to local circumstances, and efficiency targets should permit this."

In turn, the Scottish Homes district plan for Highlands, Islands and Grampian concluded:

"The highest priority district objective is to increase the supply of low cost rented housing whether through direct provision or bringing redundant dwellings back into use.

We will concentrate the provision of general needs housing for rent in rural areas where there is currently low provision of local authority or assured tenancy housing. This will be provided through the funding of housing associations/co-operatives."

I have received representations from the Orkney housing association and the Hjaltland housing association in my constituency to the effect that, although the local district office in Inverness is well seized of the point, and sees the need to increase the supply of low cost rented accommodation, the indications they get of directions from on high, either from the board of Scottish Homes or—probably more likely—from Ministers, are that the drive towards a greater share of home ownership must go on.

That is happening against the following background. In Orkney, owner-occupation already stands at more than 65 per cent., in Dumfries and Galloway at 60 per cent., in Argyll and Bute almost 55 per cent., in Highland 55 per cent., in Borders more than 53 per cent., in Shetland 52 per cent., and in the Western Isles almost 77 per cent. There are already substantial levels of home ownership in much of rural Scotland. I repeat the recommendation from the review of Scottish homes rural policy:

"the guiding principle should be local flexibility to respond to local circumstances".

There are many other connected issues, which we could discuss all night; instead, I shall write to the Minister about them. The problems relating to rural housing are deeply serious. The market has not brought about a solution, especially for people on low incomes, who cannot afford to rent or buy. For many, the alternative may be to leave their native community, with all that that means for rural services, such as education, in the areas that they leave behind. Investment in rural areas and a greater emphasis on affordable rented housing are two key ways of tackling that problem. I hope that the Minister will be able to give us some encouragement in this direction tonight.

10.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Raymond S. Robertson): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) on securing this Adjournment debate this evening. It gives us an opportunity to discuss, albeit briefly, rural housing. If he wishes to raise other issues, he should write to me, and I shall ensure that he gets a very speedy reply.

I shal begin by outlining some key features of the Governnent's approach to housing. Obviously, those involve extending choice and developing policies that address people's aspirations. That approach is the same for both urban and rural Scotland. Our objectives are to promote greater housing choice; to assist and enable the provision of an adequate supply of housing; to promote improvement in housing quality; and to seek a more effective use of resources in housing.

Our belief in home ownership is rooted in the view that to be a home owner is a fundamental aspiration of the vast majority of people. I was therefore somewhat concerned to hear what the hon. Gentleman had to say about home ownership. Surveys suggest that 70 to 80 per cent. of households would ideally like to be home owners, and we wish to enable as many people as possible to achieve that aim. We can therefore take

[Mr. Raymond S. Robertson]

great pride in the fact that owner-occupation in Scotland has increased dramatically, from 35 per cent. in 1979, when the Government first took office, to 58 per cent. at the end of 1995.

I am still firmly of the view that local authority tenants in rural areas who aspire to become home owners should have every opportunity to purchase their homes. However, we recognise that there are special housing problems in rural areas. The Government fully acknowledge those, and adequate provisions exist within the right-to-buy legislation to enable rural local authorities to re-purchase housing, should that be desirable in helping them to meet local housing needs.

The increase in owner-occupation has been achieved principally through the right-to-buy scheme and a number of schemes operated by Scottish Homes as part of their low-cost home ownership programme. Those schemes are available to people in rural areas who wish to become home owners, and we have also developed specific mechanisms aimed at assisting with the particular problems in those areas.

Rural home ownership grants help individuals to build a new house or renovate an existing one. Those grants bring empty houses into use, increase home ownership and reduce homelessness.

We recognise, however, that some people cannot afford—or, for whatever reason, do not wish—to buy their own homes. We believe that it is vital that there should be a choice of quality rented housing available for such people, and we want to ensure that the same choice is available in rural areas.

That is why we have promoted housing associations as alternative landlords and they are now the main source of new social housing. There are now some 290 registered housing associations and co-operatives, providing 90,000 homes for let at affordable rent. Housing association grant is the principal instrument for meeting the needs of lower income groups in rural Scotland.

An important feature of our policy to encourage greater choice of social landlords in Scotland has been the transfer of public sector stock to new landlords. That policy is not new, and we are now encouraging all local authorities to consider transferring their stock in that way. Such transfers free investment in the housing concerned from the constraints of public expenditure control, and increase the level of investment in the housing stock. There is no reason why transfers should not be used in rural areas as elsewhere in Scotland.

We recognise, however, that there are particular housing problems in rural areas, and we have made substantial resources available to both rural local authorities and Scottish Homes to enable them to tackle those problems. From 1979 to March 1996, rural authorities have been allocated £1,669 million for public sector investment. In addition, between 1989 and March 1996, Scottish Homes invested more than £360 million in rural areas, providing more than 12,000 new or improved homes. Scottish Homes aims to invest almost £60 million in rural areas this year to provide more than 1,500 new or improved homes.

We also asked Scottish Homes, as one of its first priorities after it was set up in 1989, to draw up a policy to address the special problems of housing in rural areas. As a result, it operates a number of schemes that can help with the problems associated with housing in rural areas. Those include shared ownership schemes, which are used extensively in rural Scotland, and can be particularly beneficial in helping local people enter home ownership in pressurised housing markets.

Rural home ownership grants are also available to help people on modest incomes to build their own homes or renovate an existing building.

The Scottish Homes empty property initiative and the lead tenancy schemes can also help with problems associated with housing in rural areas. Scottish Homes is currently reviewing its rural policy. As part of that review, it commissioned a research report on its rural policy, which was prepared by the Arkleton centre for rural development at Aberdeen university and published in November last year.

The report found that Scottish Homes had had a considerable impact on housing development in rural areas, acting as a catalyst for the development of strategies to meet the needs of rural communities. It also concluded that the formulation of an explicit rural policy is widely seen as a model for other Government agencies to emulate. By giving explicit recognition to rural issues while incorporating those into the main stream, awareness of rural issues has been increased.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): I appreciate that my question goes wider than the Minister's remit, but one of the difficulties that I notice facing rural local authorities in areas such as Alness and Easter Ross, parts of Inverness and, no doubt, other areas in Scotland is that urban-style housing problems exist in a rural context. There may be a concentration of less than satisfactory council housing, particularly in the highlands, built as a result of the industrial developments of the 1960s and 1970s and now in sub-standard condition. An urban approach such as urban aid is required. If the local authorities lose out in their applications, they have a real difficulty, because they must somehow apply an urban solution. Will the Minister undertake to encourage his Department to consider more imaginative ways of tackling the problem?

Mr. Robertson: If the hon. Gentleman has any specific examples or problems from his constituency, I should be delighted to discuss those with him in greater detail than is possible in a short Adjournment debate.

I return to the Scottish Homes review, in which I know the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland and his wife take a keen interest.

Scottish Homes announced its rural policy in September 1990. It had four broad objectives: to increase the housing supply in rural areas, to improve housing conditions in rural areas, to improve access to rural housing, and to increase resident participation and involvement as part of community development in dispersed rural areas. Underlying that approach were general principles of working in partnership, supporting sustainable regeneration and supporting economic development.

As I said, the Arkleton centre at Aberdeen university reviewed Scottish Homes rural policy in the light of experience, the White Paper entitled "Rural Scotland: People, Prosperity and Partnership", and the reorganisation of local government. Of course the review identified a number of aspects in which improvements might be made, but the thrust of its findings was mainly positive.

The review found that Scottish Homes rural policy has had a considerable impact on rural areas, acting as a catalyst for the development of strategies to meet the wider needs of rural communities. Investment in housing association provision has made a major contribution to improving the variety of housing options for people in rural Scotland. The policy has succeeded in encouraging private developers to build in rural areas, where they would not otherwise have operated because of narrow profit margins.

Scottish Homes support for local housing associations and local housing agencies has played an important role in supporting community development and involvement. The rural programme contributes directly to employment and economic development in rural areas, and has the potential to support economic development strategies indirectly. The formulation of an explicit rural policy is widely seen as a model.

The review is on-going. If the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland wishes to contribute to it, he may do so directly to Scottish Homes or through me. He mentioned the need for investment in rural council housing. Housing has had to play its part in a tight public expenditure round.

Mr. Wallace: Before the Minister leaves the rural homes policy review, how does he respond to the clear recommendations in the review? Scottish Homes does not seem to be giving resources to rural areas commensurate with the number of households in Scotland's rural areas. It is recommended that the primary emphasis must be on the provision of affordable rented housing, with local flexibility to take account of the need to achieve a proper balance between low-cost home ownership and rented accommodation.

Mr. Robertson: As the hon. Gentleman knows, Scottish Homes has considerable licence as to how it operates. I meet the chairman and board twice a year to review the strategic objectives. The rural review is one of the subjects that will be discussed when we meet soon. I am happy to feed in the hon. Gentleman's comments.

As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, this year's public expenditure survey is tight, and housing has had its share of cuts. The reduction in resources arises from the requirement for local authorities to set aside 75 per cent. of the receipts from house sales next year rather than 50 per cent., as we envisaged originally. That change results from the overriding need to tackle the burden of debt. Despite the controls on the use of capital receipts that were imposed last year, local authority housing debt has continued to rise, and the average debt per house has also increased. We believe that further steps should be taken to reduce the burden of indebtedness.

Following that change in the receipts rules, I decided that it was no longer sensible to issue housing allocations on a gross basis. In future, local authorities will receive a net allocation for housing investment, and I announced the allocations for 1997–98 before Christmas. That brings capital allocations for council housing into line with the position on non-housing capital. It has an added advantage in that, for the first time, I was able to respond to the request by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to issue housing capital allocations before authorities set their rents.

The total net allocations for 1997–98 amount to £171.9 million, and are higher than those issued to authorities in 1996–97. In addition, on the basis of councils' own estimates, I would expect them to generate useable receipts of between £50 million and £60 million next year in order to augment their investment. The change in the rules on receipts set-aside means that some redistribution of resources has been necessary to protect those authorities, such as Orkney, that are most reliant on receipts. That has worked to Orkney's advantage, because the gross estimated resources available are higher than the central planning assumption on which the council planned its forward capital programme.

I accept that that change has reduced the net resources available to Shetland by some £266,000. In determining the distribution of the resources available for investment, I decided that it was necessary to spread the impact of the change in set-aside rules equitably over all authorities. The redistribution of the net ensures that all authorities are able to meet their forward legal commitments, taking account of each council's own estimate of the capital receipts that it expects to generate next year. In the main, the councils' estimates were consistent with our own, but my Department will continue to monitor the situation to ensure that no council can exploit the new method of allocating resources by deliberately underestimating receipts.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that it would be sensible to link set-aside to the level of debt in each authority, but I cannot accept that, as it would be too complicated to operate a different regime for each authority. In any event, authorities with lower debts, such as Orkney, stand to benefit if they become debt-free more quickly. I believe that considerable scope exists for authorities to increase investment levels by involving the private sector to a greater degree than occurs at present. Authorities should therefore be considering the potential for transferring stock to other landlords outwith the necessary constraints of the public sector.

As the hon. Gentleman is aware, I visited Orkney last September, and this was one of the main items of our discussion with the council. I welcome the consideration that the council is giving to transferring its stock to a new landlord, and I hope that it will take forward that idea in consultation with my officials. After all, the transfer of the council's stock to a new landlord not only would facilitate increased investment in the existing stock, but potentially could produce a substantial receipt of which any surplus remaining after debt redemption could be invested in the provision of new rented housing.

I appreciate that the transfer of housing stock to an alternative landlord would be a difficult matter for Shetland Islands council at present.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 5 February 1997

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Ford (Halewood)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mr. Ottaway.*]

9.34 am

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): This debate, which I am grateful to have been granted, is about Government assistance to the Ford plant at Halewood. I welcome the impressive support of colleagues from Merseyside and beyond. I note the presence of my hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing), for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller), for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle), for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), for Leigh (Mr. Cunliffe), for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth), for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall), for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy), for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) and for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle), and that of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton). I understand that others may be coming later to support me. I must also mention my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle), who is here but subjected to enforced silence. Such support is indicative of the severity of the crisis now facing the Ford plant at Halewood.

Everyone knows Ford, but not everyone knows Halewood. Halewood is at the extreme south of Knowsley, abutting Liverpool to the west and Widnes to the east. It is situated conveniently on the motorway network—the M62 goes to east Lancashire and across the Pennines to the east coast ports, the M56 links it to Greater Manchester, Manchester airport and north Wales, and the M6 leads to the far north and the south.

Halewood is home to Ford (UK), which is by far the biggest employer on Merseyside. On Thursday 23 January 1997, Ford made an announcement that cast a shadow over the future of this important factory. I intend to spend a few minutes tracing the history of the factory and describing the detail of the announcement, the background to it and its severe implications for Merseyside and beyond. I shall question Ford's decision, draw some conclusions as to why it should be resisted, and seek Government support to persuade Ford to change its mind.

The plant was founded in 1960. Ford was attracted to the 346-acre site by the excellent communications that I have just described. Between 1960 and 1963, Ford spent £30 million on building what was then the world's biggest car factory under one roof. The official opening was on 8 March 1963. The first car off the assembly line was a 997 cc Ford Anglia, which is still in the Liverpool transport museum as part of the industrial heritage of Merseyside.

In 1968, another important event took place—the unveiling of the Escort Mark I, 1.1 litre. Six generations of this car have since been built at Halewood. The plant has also produced the Cortina, the Capri, the Corsair and the Orion, which are variants of the Escort. In 1969, the millionth car came off the production line.

In 1981, the Escort received the European Car of the Year award, and was the world's best-selling car. It retained the latter record in 1982 and 1983. Between 1986 and 1996, the Escort topped United Kingdom car sales for all but three years, and 129,000 Escorts were sold in the UK in 1996. Total world sales since 1968 have been nearly 18 million. Of course, the Escort is now made in Saarlouis in Germany and Valencia in Spain—names that will crop up numerous times in my speech.

Such sales owe much to excellent design and marketing, but they also owe much to the work force. Continuous improvements in productivity have been achieved not only through capital investment by the company, but through changing work practices and successive tranches of job losses at Halewood, from a peak of employing 14,500 people to its present level of 4,500 in the vehicle assembly plant. The company admits that the production costs per unit are better than those of the nearest comparable plant, in Saarlouis. Continuous improvements in quality have led to the award of Ford's Q1 standard in 1995—the cordon bleu in-house quality mark.

In addition to those 4,500 workers in the vehicle assembly plant are the 1,000 in the transmission factory on the same site, which makes transmission units for the Escort, the Fiesta, the Scorpio and the new Ka—those for the Scorpio and the Ka are for export—making Ford Halewood a key component in the industrial infrastructure of Merseyside and the wider region. High-volume family car production makes it by far the largest manufacturing employer in Merseyside, with a footprint of employment covering the whole of the Merseyside area—north, south, east and west—as well as Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Cheshire and north Wales.

In addition to those directly employed by Ford, the number of jobs provided in the supply of goods and services to the factory is unquantifiable but massive. Then there are the jobs provided in the local economy by the spending power of all those employees, from the local shops, large and small, to Halewood Labour club.

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): My hon. Friend touches on the important issue of the wider spread of jobs in Merseyside. Is he aware that much of the glass installed in Escorts is produced at the Triplex factory in St. Helens, which has also struggled over the past few years? The potential loss of that valuable order could have a major impact on the employment prospects at Triplex in St. Helens.

Mr. O'Hara: Indeed. I thank my hon. Friend for that practical example. The effects that he describes could be repeated many times elsewhere.

[Mr. O'Hara]

On Thursday 23 January 1997, the announcement hit Merseyside like a bomb. In round figures, 1,300 jobs were to go on the Escort production line at Halewood, reducing the work force from 4,500 to 3,200. The new Escort would not be made in Halewood, but would be produced solely at the German and Spanish plants. Production of the old Escort would continue at a scaled-down rate until the end of the century. Thereafter, a new multi-activity vehicle, which I shall refer to as MAV, would be built on the platform of the Escort, supplying the European niche market of people carriers—cars such as the Renault Megane Scenic. At the moment, the MAV is little more than a computer-generated schema.

The announcement had been extensively trailed against the background of declining sales of the Escort in this country and worldwide, and losses suffered by Ford across its European operation. The company announced a loss of $291 million on its European operations in 1996. However, it should be noted that those losses cover the whole European operation, not just production of the Escort, and were certainly not down to Halewood alone. The figures for any losses that may have been incurred at Halewood are not, as far as I am aware, available.

Within a fortnight of announcing 1,300 job losses at Halewood, Ford announced a profit of $39 million for the final quarter of published figures. The company claims that that is reduced to losses of $88 million after a one-off payment is taken into account. I wonder whether that one-off payment is the cost of writing down Halewood.

The declining sales of the Escort must be a factor. Halewood is currently dedicated to Escort production. However, the sales performance of the Escort must be taken in context. First, the United Kingdom sales figure of 129,000 is a serious decline from the 1990 peak, but all car sales declined during the recession. Those 129,000 sales still made the Escort the second best seller in the UK market in 1996.

Secondly, the UK is the Escort's best market. Comparisons with sales in Germany and Spain make interesting reading. United Kingdom sales between 1990 and 1995—remember that our recession was deeper than that in the rest of Europe—went down by 27 per cent. In Germany, sales went down by 37 per cent., and in Spain they went down by 24 per cent. The company's figures for sales in Germany are different, but they fail to make the adjustment for West German sales only in 1990 and sales in the unified Germany thereafter.

Even more interesting comparisons can be made between national production and national sales of the Escort in the three countries. United Kingdom sales are 85 per cent. of domestic production, according to figures that I have been given. That means that we are a net exporter. The figure for Germany is 132 per cent., and that for Spain is even higher. Germany and Spain are net importers of Escorts.

Thirdly—this is a crucial point—the new model Escort is designed to arrest the recent decline in sales across its markets. It is timed to ride the upsurge in the market as we emerge from recession.

In spite of all this, production of the new model has been assigned to Saarlouis and Valencia, not to Halewood. The implications are serious. The loss of the new model Escort takes Halewood out of high-volume, two-shift family car production—the big stuff in the automotive industry. The concession that the old model Escort will be produced until 2000, concurrently with the new model coming off continental production lines, is meaningless. Old models do not sell when the new model is available. The only car that ever bucked that trend was the Fiesta. That was in the context of rising sales. The Escort would have to do so in the context of depressed sales.

The promise of the MAV as the basis of the future survival of the Halewood plant is to be treated with the utmost reservation. It is still at the earliest stage of development—little more than a gleam in the designer's eye. As of last Monday, when we met management, it had not been put to the board for approval of development costs. It appears that development may be dependent on a large grant from the UK Government. Even if it gets off the drawing board and into production, there are further reservations about the MAV, because it serves a niche market, with low-volume production and sales in comparison with those of family saloons such as the Escort.

Putting all that together, the prognosis for Halewood is difficult. It must struggle to buck the market trend, with the old Escort competing against the new, followed by dependency on the MAV in low-volume production. Make no mistake: we want the MAV and we want it to be a winner in its niche market, but we also want and need the high-volume production of the new Ford Escort. The two are not incompatible. If the MAV is based on the Escort platform, there is no reason why the two could not come off the production line.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): On behalf of the hon. Members from the Wirral area, one of whom has had to take a trappist vow for the debate, may I draw to the attention of those following our proceedings the fact that there are more hon. Members present in the Chamber than there often are for debates subject to a three-line Whip? We could obviously take up the whole day debating the issue if that were possible. That is how seriously we take the problem.

We in Wirral have suffered from huge job losses—not just any jobs, but jobs paying decent wages. I want to stress the link between wage levels and families. Much emphasis in public debate is put on the desire for stable families. It is difficult to have stable families without decent family wages. For many of us, my hon. Friend's speech has another dimension. Jobs are important, but people usually require them so that they can nurture children, so it is also a blow for them.

Mr. O'Hara: I shall make some observations about the point my hon. Friend has raised later in my speech, when I turn to the direct financial costs of supporting an additional 1,300 unemployed people. I am sure that my hon. Friend and all hon. Members are aware of the indirect costs of unemployment and its associated deprivation.

The prognosis for Halewood is difficult. We want the MAV to be a winner in its niche market, but we also want the new Escort. The MAV represents only half the future that we would expect if Halewood were to produce the new Escort. Virgil's expression,

"Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes"

is apposite in respect of the MAV. It means, "I fear the Greeks when they bear gifts," and refers to the Trojan horse. Arguably, the Trojan horse was the first ever people carrier.

Why then was Halewood singled out for an uncertain future? What can be the reason for effectively exporting 1,300 jobs from my constituency to Spain and Germany in order to manufacture the new model Escort for import into the United Kingdom, the market where the Escort is the second best seller, where it sells in greater volume than any other market, and where, in a declining trend, its sales have held up better than elsewhere? The United Kingdom is the only country that exports more Escorts than it produces.

Can the reason be productivity levels at Halewood? I have referred to the heroic achievements of the Halewood work force in improving productivity to the point at which the Escort is cheaper to produce per unit than in Saarlouis. I am advised that production costs per unit are cheaper in Valencia. That depends on how one calculates the statistics, and one would expect that of such a relatively modern factory.

It should also be remembered that current assessments of productivity at Halewood are based on a long period of single-shift working during the depressed car market, when Halewood had to carry the costs of down-time payments and the other diseconomies of scale when a production line designed for double-shift working is reduced to a single shift. The factories at Valencia and Saarlouis did not suffer the same disadvantage when productivity assessments were made.

If Escort production capacity has to go—I shall qualify that "if"—there is a strong case in terms of productivity for consolidating production at Halewood instead of cutting it there.

If the problem is not productivity, can it be quality? Again, there have been heroic achievements by the work force at Halewood, leading to the award of Q1 status in 1995. That was also against a background of single-shift working and interrupted production runs which can affect quality, as the management told us last week. Despite that disadvantage, the work force achieved Q1.

Thus, in terms of commitment, productivity, quality and sales, the work force at Halewood are not agents of their own misfortune as has been suggested in some misguided sections of the press; they are innocent victims.

Can the reason be over-capacity across the three plants at Halewood, Saarlouis and Valencia? Some journalists have suggested that Ford has half a plant too many producing the Escort, that the company needed to amputate one plant, and that Halewood was the weakest. My evidence on productivity, quality and market performance of Halewood Escorts gives the lie to that. In any case, the argument about over-capacity is open to question. If the new Escort is as successful as Ford intends it to be, the capacity of the plants at Saarlouis and Valencia will probably be inadequate to meet the expected demand.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): My hon. Friend mentioned over-capacity. Did he hear the reported comments of Mr. Jac Nasser on Radio 4 today, when he said that Ford Halewood has to compete not only with southern Europe, but with eastern Europe? Is there not an argument to be made about the fact that Ford is increasing its capacity in areas that do not have the same employment and working conditions that are expected in western Europe?

Mr. O'Hara: My hon. Friend has raised an interesting point that I hope the Government will bear in mind in discussions with Mr. Nasser, when considering their commitment to production in Britain.

I return to over-capacity, and the inadequacy of the Saarlouis and Valencia plants to meet expected sales of the new model by possibly 100,000. If Halewood were to lose the new Escort, the 1,300 jobs would be exported to provide expanded production—possibly a third shift in the factories in Spain and Germany—to produce cars for import into the United Kingdom.

If over-capacity can be ruled out, why did Ford single out Halewood and not share the pain across all three plants? There are several possibilities. An article in *The Observer* on 19 January compared the difficulty and cost of making people redundant in Britain, Spain and Germany. It showed that it is easier to make people redundant in the United Kingdom because there are fewer legal hurdles and binding agreements to overcome. It is also cheaper to make people redundant in Britain, because redundancy terms are more generous in Spain and Germany, where all employees are entitled to redundancy payments, not just those who qualify under the two-year rule.

The company argues, with some justification, that the severances will be voluntary and the terms generous, but leaving aside the economic abstractions, every redundancy is a personal tragedy for a family—1,300 tragedies in this case. The pill has to be sugared, because the age profile of the Halewood work force is such that, after all the successive job losses, it is a difficult life decision for a worker to take the money knowing that he is most unlikely to have a comparable job ever again. Finally, once the redundancies have been made, the jobs will no longer be available to the local and national economy.

A further argument is that greater financial inducements have been provided by the Governments of Spain and Germany to the company to keep production there. I have no hard evidence for saying that, but I would not be at all surprised if there were evidence to support it. I simply ask the Minister to bear that in mind in his discussions with Ford.

I shall not make political points about the cost and the ease of making people redundant in Britain. Others may wish to do that. I confine my remarks to the effects of the announcement about Halewood on my constituency in Knowsley and the surrounding region.

In conclusion, the announcement that the new Escort will not be produced at Halewood is catastrophic to the economy in my constituency, and those of many of my hon. Friends who are here today. I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) is now in his place.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): My hon. Friend drew attention to the effect on the local and

[Mr. Andrew Miller]

regional economy. The people of Ellesmere Port where the Vauxhall Astra is made are deeply worried by the announcement. There is no glee in Ellesmere Port. My constituents recognise that it is a serious blow to the regional economy following the job losses at Gallaghers, H. H. Robertson Ltd. and Prestige. Manufacturing jobs are being lost throughout the north-west, and, whatever the product, they are creating serious crises for many thousands of families in the region.

Mr. O'Hara: Absolutely. There could not be a better demonstration of the objectivity of the case that I am presenting than the fact that car workers in a factory just across the Mersey are supporting their opposition in the market. I note that my hon. Friends the Members for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) and for Bootle (Mr. Benton) have joined the debate.

We are talking not only about 1,300 jobs but about the knock-on effects of job losses in a myriad of suppliers—great and small—of components and services to the Halewood factory. There is a further knock-on effect of such wages and salaries across the retail economy of my area, and a social cost in an area where unemployment is far higher than the national average.

There are hard financial costs as well. There is the cost to the Treasury of sustaining with benefits those who lose their jobs and the indirect and wider cost of the consequences of unemployment, and the attendant social deprivation. Such arguments are, of course, of general application when unemployment occurs, but I ask the Minister to take particular note of this incidence.

Merseyside is an unemployment black spot. It has suffered more than its fair share of job losses in the two recessions of the 1980s and 1990s. It is the only industrial region of mainland Britain that has objective 1 status. This is not a scouse whinge; our heads are not down on Merseyside. Indeed, we are energetically regenerating Merseyside. A blow such as the Ford decision, however, is a severe setback.

Moreover, Ford is the sort of flagship multinational inward investor whose investments do two things in an area such as ours. It not only gives a big boost to the local economy with its own jobs and the piggy-back jobs that it brings with it: it punches a hole through which lesser investors follow, on the principle that, if Merseyside is good enough for Ford, it is good enough for them. There is a confidence factor, and if Ford disinvests, that is damaged. We scousers have plenty of pride and confidence in ourselves, but we need others to have confidence in us, too—notably Ford.

The argument that I present to the Minister is for selective regional assistance and affirmative action for Merseyside. Some might call that special pleading, but it is an argument for the balance of trade in the automotive industry.

It is predicted that the four best sellers in the UK family car market will be the Fiesta, the Escort, the Mondeo and the new Ka. If Escort production is taken from Halewood, all those but the Fiesta will be produced abroad and imported into this country. A conservative estimate is that that will involve 360,000 units, or £2.8 billion, on the debit side of the balance of payments. The social costs, the regeneration of Merseyside and the balance of trade are hard financial reasons for keeping the Ford Escort and the 1,300 jobs at Halewood.

I know that the Minister is seriously interested in the issues that I have put before him: the impact of the announcement on Merseyside and the danger of the domino effect on the Halewood plant, the Merseyside economy, and other Ford plants about which I could have said much—I could have mentioned Iveco in Langley or Bridgend.

I know that there is on-going dialogue between Ford and the DTI at the highest ministerial level and through officials, and I urge the Minister to pursue those discussions with vigour and commitment. I suspect that they will touch on support for investment in the MAV. I encourage him in such discussion. We want the MAV, and if any work force can make it succeed, Halewood can. Compared with production of the Escort, however, the MAV offers Halewood only half a future. I urge the Minister to explore any and every avenue with the company that could lead to the award of the production of the new model Escort at Halewood.

I end by quoting the motto of Liverpool: Deus nobis haec otia fecit—God gave us all these leisure pursuits. It refers to the parks and gardens of Victorian Liverpool. We in Knowsley, South, we in Liverpool and on Merseyside have had enough of enforced leisure. We want jobs—specifically the 1,300 at Halewood.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Understandably, many hon. Members wish to take part in the debate. May I therefore make an appeal for short speeches?

10.4 am

Mrs. Jane Kennedy (Liverpool, Broadgreen): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) on securing the debate. I am conscious of time, and shall not detain the House.

I am slightly disappointed that none of our Conservative colleagues who represent Merseyside has been able to be present, but I welcome the presence of the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire), who has responsibility for Merseyside.

My hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South described the effect of the decision on confidence on Merseyside. I do not believe that that can be overstated. The decision comes at a quite critical time for us on Merseyside. We have been living with objective 1 status for three or four years. It is a double-edged sword. It provides very much needed European aid, which is essential in the region if we are to regenerate the local economy and improve economic activity, but its downside is that it is a recognition of just how bad things have become.

We on Merseyside are making many improvements. A new city centre is emerging from the ashes of the 1970s and 1980s, when manufacturing fled the region, and hopes for the future of the region have been growing. There has been some success in the campaign to attract new jobs in my constituency, which borders with the

constituency of the hon. Member for Mossley Hill. The Wavertree technology park is one of many examples of success in attracting new businesses and generating new jobs on Merseyside.

Just as we were hoping to come to the end of objective 1 status, Ford's decision has been a huge blow to the confidence of Merseyside people and their work in partnership with local authorities—and in many respects with the Government—in lifting the region and pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps, demonstrating the skills, ingenuity and resilience of the people, who have had to face and grapple with such economic difficulties.

Ford's decision has had a major impact on the image that people have of Merseyside. I criticise the company for the way in which it handled the decision and remained silent about the reasons why it had arrived at it. That left commentators, the press and others around Britain and in Europe to draw their own conclusions based on images—often the wrong images—of Merseyside. The way in which the decision was taken did not allow for any clear analysis. Everything was privately indicated in meetings with Members of Parliament, the unions and the Government.

It is clear that Ford has been facing serious problems. There is no question but that the Escort has been losing its position in the car market. It has made its case to Members, the Government and the unions, and explained how it has been losing money hand over fist with that product. Hon. Members understand the difficult competitive world facing car manufacturers; we appreciate that, when people buy their cars, they base their decision on different judgments than those they made in the past; we understand the problems facing volume car producers such as Ford when they are deciding what new products to bring on stream.

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): The hon. Lady referred to Conservative Members from her region. I represent an area further south that makes motor cars. Rover and Land Rover are virtually within spitting distance of my constituency, although not in it. She does her own region proud in her defence of it.

I do not feel that the decision is so much a reflection on Merseyside itself, as the hon. Lady seemed to be saying. It is, as she is now beginning to say, more of a reflection on Ford, which has had problems in attracting buyers of certain designs of car over the past five years or so. That has been a problem for Ford Europe, and I am sure that the hon. Lady will go on to say that that problem is not reflected in some of its competitors, such as Rover and Land Rover. The decision is therefore to some degree a reflection on the company, rather than on the area or the work force of Merseyside.

Mrs. Kennedy: That is my point precisely. As my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South has explained, the workers at Ford Halewood have demonstrated their capacity to grapple with the problems that the company faces and to work in partnership with it. There has been an unprecedented period of freedom from all kinds of industrial problems at the plant. The workers have demonstrated their commitment to the company, and shown that they are prepared to work with it to rise above the challenges that it is telling us about.

I believe that Ford's decision was based on reasons other than those about which it is prepared to come clean. As a country, we must face up to the fact that Ford has three plants in three European countries, that it has taken that decision, and that, in doing so, one factor that it has taken into account is the difference between the employment requirements in the three countries. There is a strong belief on Merseyside that we have suffered because it has been easier and cheaper for Ford to make 1,300 people redundant at Halewood than it would have been at either of the other two plants.

My hon. Friend has talked about those 1,300 jobs, and I want to talk about the consequences for the 1,300 workers. Every week at my surgeries, I see the consequences for the health of men who stop working at 50 with no prospect of further work. There are also important consequences for the job opportunities of young people on Merseyside, who hoped to find employment and develop their skills at the plant.

We are aware of the problems that Ford has faced, and of the changing car market. Why does the Department of Trade and Industry appear to have been taken so much by surprise by Ford's decision? Given the major impact that it will have on our trade deficit, why was the Department caught on the back foot? It seems to me that the German and Spanish Governments had been working more closely with the company in trying to prevent the decision from going against workers and businesses in their countries. I greatly regret that.

A view is developing on Merseyside that objective 1 funding should be used to support Ford's decision to bring new manufacturing to Merseyside, but I believe that that would be a mistake, and that other funding should be used instead. We should use DTI funding rather than European money, because clearly most of that has already been earmarked for other projects, and we are coming to the end of it.

I am conscious of the number of people who want to speak, so on that point I shall finish.

10.12 am

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): I too shall be brief, because I realise that so many people want to make contributions.

In 1982 there was a similar problem, which had largely been caused by bad management-labour relations. I shall not say who was to blame, because that would be futile. I was the chair of economic development at Merseyside county council at the time, and we had four hours of discussions with Bill Hayden, who was then the chief of Ford Europe.

As a result, agreements were made within the company between the work force and the management, and the workers agreed to co-operate in the changes in productivity and works practice. This time, however, Ford has not consulted anybody. I presume that it did not even consult the Government before making its statement.

Since 1982, the labour force has carried out all its promises to improve productivity—so much so that, on 17 January, *Ford News*, the house magazine of the Ford company, said that Halewood workers had reached their productivity objectives under the company's total productivity maintenance scheme in record time.

What was the reward for that? It was the notices sent out to the effect that 1,300 workers are to be made redundant. What message is the Ford Motor Company sending to other workers in this country who may also

[Mr. Robert N. Wareing]

be asked by management to agree productivity deals and changes in works practice? My hon. Friends suggest that the company chose Halewood for the cut—

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North) *rose—*

Mr. Wareing: I shall give way in a minute.

I think that Ford chose Halewood because it believes that, unlike other Governments in Europe, the British Government are a soft touch. That comes across in all their actions in connection with Europe. They are not at the heart of Europe. Ford and other companies—a recent example is Toyota—have shown that they want to be at the heart of Europe.

Mr. Howarth: Does my hon. Friend agree that the work force at Ford are not asking for special treatment? However, there is something that the workers do expect—this is something that the Minister will have to address when he sums up.

They expect not to be put at a disadvantage compared with those in Spain or Germany simply because it is cheaper for the company to get rid of them than to get rid of workers in other parts of Europe. If that is what lies behind the decision, all the Government's claims to be friendly towards industry and employment go out of the window. If work protection in this country is so weak that it makes us vulnerable, it is time that the Government thought again about their approach to the social chapter and other such issues.

Mr. Wareing: I am fully in accord with that. Not only is it cheaper to lay off workers in this country: there is also the whole body of employment law in Germany.

Mr. Hargreaves: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wareing: No, I shall continue, because I want other hon. Members to be able to make their speeches.

There are works councils in Germany. In Saarlouis, one can see the management and the workers constantly discussing the problems of the company. Firms can also be taken before labour courts in Germany; in Spain, public inquiries have to be held, and there are local and regional labour authority controls.

I am not asking the Government to pick up the bill, because they will have to do that anyway. However, they have an option about the way in which they pick it up. One way would be to help the Ford workers by investing and giving encouragement to ensure that production of the Escort continues at Halewood. Otherwise, they can pick up the bill in another way—by paying out an estimated £50 million in redundancy payments, unemployment pay and other social benefits.

If the Government choose the second option, they will blow a huge hole in this country's foreign and gold currency reserves. The price, on top of the social costs, could be £2.8 billion. I ask the Government to weigh those options, and to ensure that they take into account the fact that a failure to support Ford will mean that about 10 per cent. of the economic activity on Merseyside will be affected. Not only the Ford company and its workers, but workers elsewhere on Merseyside, will suffer.

10.18 am

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): The hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) has rendered the House a service in so ably painting the depressing picture of what will happen as a result of the job losses at Halewood. It is for the rest of us to put some brush strokes on that canvas, to try to support the points that he has made.

During the 25 years that I have been representing the people of Liverpool—first as a councillor, followed by 18 years in this House—there has been a depressing litany of job losses. I have stood alongside the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) and others on many occasions when we have been to see Ministers and employers to plead for jobs.

All of us know that, for the past quarter of a century—almost since it was founded—a sword of Damocles has been hanging precariously and threateningly over the Halewood plant. In turn, that has sapped morale and led to a loss of confidence. Despite the corrosive effect of such prolonged uncertainty, the employees have delivered substantial improvements in output and quality. Their reward has been the loss of 1,300 jobs. It is no wonder that, not unreasonably, they want to know what they had to do to secure their long-term futures.

My late father, having left the Eighth Army at the end of the war, went to work on the Ford shop floor for the whole of his life. For that personal reason, and because I know that many Liverpool families depend on Ford, I am completely aware of how devastating the effect of this announcement will be—as the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy) and others have said—on those families who depend on employment at Ford for their homes, their futures and their livelihoods.

Ford is a giant employer in an area which has always had a weak manufacturing base. The knock-on effect into the local Merseyside economy on suppliers and retailers is incalculable. What a mockery this makes of myriad job creation initiatives and the conferring of objective 1 status if jobs such as these continue to haemorrhage and flow away. I had assumed that objective 1 meant inward European investment. Instead, this haemorrhage in employment represents disinvestment and the export of jobs to much more affluent parts of Europe. There is no logic—and no sustainable or coherent strategy—to this, let alone any sign of social responsibility towards the people involved.

Even the most ardent European would be hard put to explain why—despite being specially designated as objective 1—Merseyside should end up exporting jobs rather than cars. It also makes a mockery of the Government's claims that the lack of employment protection through the non-application of the social chapter has made the United Kingdom a mecca or a honeypot for inward investment.

We have the worst of all worlds. We have a lack of minimum standards for employees, and when employers are choosing whether to make German or British workers redundant, they inevitably go for the cheaper British option. That doubly fails British working men.

Mr. Hargreaves: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Alton: I have literally five minutes. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, but I know that other hon. Members want to get in.

It is no good the Chancellor of the Exchequer merely shrugging his shoulders and saying, "You win some, you lose some." Losing one's job is not like the roll of a dice—it is not like losing a bet. Unemployment means having nothing to do, and that very rapidly ends up meaning nothing to do with the rest of us. Unemployment leads to alienation, depression, isolation and suicide. These are the consequences that one sees in communities riddled and racked with high unemployment.

In the 18 years that I have been in the House, I have seen all too many job losses without commensurate job gains, and that has had a devastating effect on family and community life. It saps the lifeblood of the community. We have been promised—as the hon. Member for Knowsley, South has said, by "Greeks bearing gifts"—the prospect of a new model at Ford. That is all well and good, and the work record of the people at Halewood more than warrants the bringing of that new model to Ford. But what about the 1,300 jobs on which the hon. Member concentrated our minds this morning? What about the continued production of the Ford Escort on Merseyside?

There is no reason why those two things should not go hand in hand, or why the burden of job losses should not be shared across all the plants mentioned by the hon. Member for Knowsley, South. The Government must do whatever needs to be done to secure that opportunity. The workers undoubtedly feel anger, and one can understand their sense of frustration. What the Government and the House must do is to give them the opportunity they are looking for to use their talents, their energies and their dynamism to build cars—something that they are good at.

Merseyside's biggest problem has been its industrial image. Sometimes that has been unfair, but it has undoubtedly turned away some investment. The last thing we need now is a long-term crippling industrial dispute, and we must do all we can to prevent it. Leadership is needed from this House, the Government and all parts of the Merseyside community to ensure that a constructive solution comes out of this. We must harness and channel the energies and dynamism of the community, not negative and destructive purposes.

10.25 am

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): I declare an interest, in that many of my friends and those with whom I work in St. Helens are shop stewards and employees at Halewood. One can actually see the Halewood plant from St. Helens, South, as it is only just down the road, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara). People who live in St. Helens and Knowsley know what unemployment means, and it is not just the loss of a job.

In the 14 years that I have represented St. Helens, South, I have watched the Government wipe out the mining industry. My hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) knows about this, as his constituency has suffered in the same way. We have watched the glass industry shrink, and we have watched friends lose their jobs at 40, with no jobs to follow. They are on the scrap heap at 40—can one imagine it?

Now we are watching it all happen again at Halewood. It is more than a tragedy—it is almost the final act of desecration. It need not happen. In the north-west, the workers provide skill, hard work and a commitment to jobs. Many thousands of men will be sitting at home this morning watching television because they have nowhere to go and nothing to do. Those men are skilled in glass work, engineering and mining, and they have talents and training. All they want is an opportunity to use their skills. "Get on your bike," said Lord Tebbit many years ago, but if one rides out of Merseyside, one either goes into Greater Manchester or into the sea. But one will not find a job, because beyond us lies more unemployment.

What do we have on Merseyside? We have communications, and a road structure that is second to none. Funnily enough, we have the money. My hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) knows the saga of Vauxhall and about getting the company's money out of the Government. The DTI nearly blew the whole scheme because of its incompetence.

The Government do not give a toss about Merseyside—let us be truthful. Where has the objective 1 money gone? There are buckets of it—an ocean of it—left. Where has the RECHAR money gone? It has not been used. It is all there. I have spoken to local European Members of Parliament on the matter. All we want is a change in the rules so we can rely not on a Government who will not give us anything, but on third-party funding. Those discussions have now begun.

This is not just a tragedy: it is a disaster. We could re-tool and reinvest—the money is there. All we need is willpower on the part of the Government of the day—please God, the present Government will not remain "the Government of the day" for long. We need them to show willpower and to get in there, to do something about an area whose skills are undoubted.

I leave the Government with one interesting thought. They tell us that we live in a world of increasing prosperity, and that the British public are better off. I suggest to them that they read *The Independent* this morning, which shows that—contrary to all their comments—the average weekly wage has fallen from £228 to £225 a week. But on Merseyside and in the north-west, our prosperity has fallen by 12.7 per cent. Now this has come upon us, and it is yet more disaster. We have the money, but we do not have prosperity—we are not given a chance or a fair deal. It is time that the Government began to realise that millions people in the north-west of England deserve a chance.

10.29 am

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): I make two points. First, the Government appear to have been caught on the starting blocks by this decision, yet they have key responsibilities, not only because of the effect on the balance of payments and regional employment levels, but because their decisions on employment policies have made the United Kingdom a soft touch as opposed to Spain and Germany, when multinationals make difficult decisions about which plants to close.

This morning, I spoke to Andy Richards, the district secretary for the Transport and General Workers Union for Ford workers in south Wales. He told me of the sense of betrayal in the plants at Bridgend and in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain), who is on the Opposition Front Bench and who would have liked to speak in the debate—his constituency adjoins mine. As he knows, the workers in

[Mr. Donald Anderson]

south Wales have done everything that the Ford company has asked. Delegations have been brought from the United States and elsewhere to marvel at the efficiency of the plant. The workers feel let down.

Secondly, the decision does not affect only Halewood. We feel sorrow and anger on behalf of those at Halewood, but the decision will have consequences for the plants in south Wales. At Bridgend, the new Escort engine—the I4, I5 investment—is in question. If Halewood production is transferred to Saarlouis, engine production for the Escort at Bridgend will almost certainly transfer to the German engine plant at Cologne, and 700 jobs could be lost at Bridgend. There is no other product at Bridgend, the overheads would remain constant, and there is a real danger to the plant as a whole.

The Swansea plant produces drums and discs for the Escort and engine parts for Bridgend, and it has lost the air conditioner investment through the Ford decision. We are now seeking to produce the worldwide fuel pump for the Escort, and the scenario that is relevant for Bridgend also applies to Swansea. When production of the Transit axle finishes in 1998–99, or possibly a year later, there will be no programme at that plant, which could have disastrous consequences for south Wales.

The Bridgend plant employs 1,500 men, and the Swansea plant 1,200. Both plants are effectively tied to the Escort. Those jobs are high-wage, high-quality, London-wage jobs, and it will be disastrous for south Wales and for Halewood if the decision goes ahead and the Government do not fight it, even at this late stage.

The air-conditioning production plant that was promised to Swansea and Neath was lost to Portugal in the same announcement, because the Welsh Development Agency could offer only £6 million, whereas the Portuguese Government offered £49 million. That gives some indication of the auction that is taking place among European Union Governments and of the fact that multinationals can blackmail national Governments. I hope that that lesson will not be lost on the Government.

We need some agreement at European Union level—just as there is with export credits—to ensure that national Governments are not picked off in that way. My hon. Friend the Member for Neath and I share the concern about the dire consequences for south Wales if the decision goes ahead.

10.33 am

Mr. Joe Benton (Bootle): Much of what I wanted to say has already been said, so I will confine my remarks on behalf of the people of Bootle and the Ford workers to supporting the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara). I am glad to have the opportunity to do so. We are talking about the loss of 1,300 jobs in Merseyside—a loss that we can ill afford. My constituency will share that loss.

I had occasion to meet some of the Ford principals with other hon. Members at a meeting in the House. A number of hon. Members have mentioned the implications of the social contract, which figured highly at the meeting. I asked the Ford management a question about it, and it seems strange that there has been no reference to this in their written response to us. In my opinion, there is no question but that the non-existence of the social contract has worked to the detriment of the Ford workers at Halewood. I am convinced of that.

Another matter that has not been mentioned is the Ford company's moral obligation. I urge Ford to consider that obligation. The record of the work force has been mentioned, but Ford also has a strong moral obligation to the Merseyside community at large. As has been said, the decision will have a devastating effect across that community.

Ford has an obligation because the records will show that the work force, the local authorities and the community have supported the company on Merseyside and have made it a highly successful operator, despite the current profit and loss indications. It is time for Ford to say that it will reconsider the matter and come back with something better to support the people to whom it owes a debt of honour.

I take this opportunity—it is probably the last one I shall have—to ask Ford to reconsider. There must be a way around this. Life is not all about profit. I would advise Ford to read a little booklet called "The Common Good"—the recent statement by all the Churches on what profit and loss is all about. That is the key. Profit is fine and Ford is entitled to expect it, but we are entitled to expect from Ford fair and just treatment for its workers, particularly those who have worked so hard and long, and have co-operated with all the adaptations in working practices that the company has suggested. The company owes a debt to those people.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South that the severance terms are generous—they are certainly far better than what the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company is offering the dockers, but that is another argument—but severance is not everything. The company has another duty—to secure the common good, and the good of the Merseyside community.

10.38 am

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): I have only a few minutes to make my case, and the issue that I want to raise is as important as the Ford decision. Merseyside Members of Parliament will know that the economy of the area has been based for the past century and beyond on the port. Think of the factories along the dock road in the last century—Tate and Lyle, Silcocks, the British American Tobacco company—and the host of ship repair yards on both sides of the Mersey. All that has gone.

When Ford and other parts of the car industry first came to Merseyside, it was hailed as a new dawn for the area: we were moving from a port-oriented to a broader industrial economy. In the 1970s, there was a similar situation to today's, when two plants in my constituency left Merseyside, along with other industry.

The Government must consider the alternatives. The fact that Liverpool happens to be on the wrong side of the country and is therefore affected by the European Economic Community means that the Government have a responsibility to consider areas such as Merseyside, and the north-west as a whole, and to ensure that industry goes where it is needed. They have failed absolutely in that responsibility.

The work force at Ford have been as good as any set of workers in the Ford companies here and abroad, and there is no reason whatever for the decision.

The uncertainty will be devastating for Merseyside's future. Ford's decision is a blow to the area, a blow to Merseyside and a blow to the north-west. We hope that the Government will turn their attention to the problems facing areas such as Merseyside.

The economy of the port has changed dramatically. At one time, 20,000 people were employed on the docks, but today there are fewer than 500. There are no companies left along the dock road. The whole economy has to change, and the Government's influence should be seen on a daily basis. They should not leave the place to rot. Government intervention is of prime importance. The Ford workers have done all that was required of them, and it is a scandal that they should be left in this situation.

10.41 am

Mr. Adam Ingram (East Kilbride): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) on securing this debate. He has done us all a service. All who spoke in the debate did so passionately and constructively about the immediate and long-term effects for Merseyside and other places in the United Kingdom of Ford's plan for Halewood. They were right to record the dismay and anger of those directly affected by the announcement of the 1,300 job losses, and the added uncertainty about the remaining jobs. They were also right to spell out the impact of such job losses on the already fragile manufacturing base of Merseyside.

If the decision remains and the worst scenario comes to pass, it will eat into the very heart of the community, and undermine attempts to regenerate Merseyside's regional economy. The redundancies have not been brought about by a lazy, unco-operative and unproductive work force; on the contrary, as my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South and others so graphically showed, the workers responded positively to every new idea and work practice introduced by the company.

Indeed, there is evidence that the unions and the work force have been ahead of the local management in accepting and promoting new manufacturing techniques. The productivity increases and the high quality of product at Halewood bear witness to that. Cars are being produced to the highest standard set by the company.

It is significant that not one Conservative Member spoke in this debate other than by way of intervention. I suspect that that is because they were, and are, embarrassed about the policies that they advocated through the 1980s and into the 1990s. Those policies were predicated on the belief that manufacturing industry was of secondary importance to this country. They clung to the view that Britain had a great future based on the service sector alone.

Over the past 17 years, Conservative Members have argued that we need a low-wage, no-skill economy, with minimal protection for those in work and reduced support for the millions who have been thrown out of work with no hope for the future.

Sir Malcolm Thornton (Crosby): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ingram: No. The hon. Gentleman was not here for the whole debate, and as a local Member of Parliament he should have been.

In case Conservative Members have forgotten, I want to remind the House of what has happened to manufacturing jobs. When the Government took office in 1979, there were 6.6 million jobs in the manufacturing sector in Britain; by December 1995, that had fallen to fewer than 4 million. Each year, 172,000 people were thrown on the scrap heap in pursuit of a failed and destructive policy.

What happened in the United Kingdom generally was visited on Merseyside with a vengeance. In 1983, more than 650,000 people were employed in manufacturing on Merseyside; nearly 200,000 of those jobs were lost by 1996. Today, there are 10 people chasing every job on Merseyside. There is little hope of finding alternative employment for those thrown out of work, no matter how skilled or talented they may be. Long-term unemployment is, sadly, a fact of life on Merseyside. It scars the community and damages its social fabric.

We need a united approach to Ford's closure announcement for Halewood and its proposals for the long-term future of its other operations in the UK. We all recognise that Ford is important to the UK, but set against that is the fact that the UK has been important to Ford, which has done well out of us in terms of grant aid over the years, and has been provided with a strong home market for its products and a base for its export activities.

We all want the relationship to continue, so we must look for ways in which to preserve Ford's presence in the UK at a higher and more definite level than the company currently projects. That is why the Labour party should be kept fully informed of the Government's discussions with Ford. After all, the Labour party may be in government in a few weeks' time.

The Minister for Industry (Mr. Greg Knight) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Ingram: It is no good the Minister dismissing that by claiming that discussions with the company are confidential. We all know that, but the problem can be got round on Privy Council terms. If it was good enough for the Deputy Prime Minister to beat a path to the door of the Leader of the Opposition about the Greenwich millennium project, surely the current negotiations with Ford should be given at least the same priority.

The negotiations will cross over a general election period; the Government may fall, and the responsibility would then pass to an incoming Labour Government. Thousands of jobs are at stake and the car manufacturing base on Merseyside is at long-term risk. It is therefore important for the Government to get it right, which they could do by showing willingness to be inclusive and to put the country's interests before their political survival.

There can be no question about the fact that Ford has been planning its global strategy for some time. The moves it is making are born not of panic and short-termism but of what it considers its strategic need to respond to new markets and new competitors. There is strong evidence that the German and Spanish Governments have been closely involved with Ford in looking for ways of meeting that need. The same cannot be said for the UK Government.

It would clearly be wrong to overstate the power of Governments to influence corporate decisions or investment strategies, but they can have an effect if they

[Mr. Ingram]

try hard enough and early enough. The Spanish and the Germans have been doing that. We need to know when the Department of Trade and Industry first became involved with Ford, and what efforts it made to retain the new Escort model for the production facility at Halewood. The Minister should tell us today.

This debate will be studied not only on Merseyside but elsewhere; it will be examined by others who work in the automotive and manufacturing industries. They will want answers about why the Prime Minister claimed to be surprised by Ford's announcement, when anyone with half an inkling about the company's global strategy could have told him that such a decision was a possibility; they will want to know who did not tell him about Ford's likely strategy for its European car operations and the possible effect on the UK; they will want to know when, if ever, DTI Ministers first engaged with the company to consider ways in which to keep production of the new Escort model in the UK; they will want to know what is on offer to the company, how many jobs it will bring, and over what term; and they will want to know why the Prime Minister is prepared to put his trust in a Chancellor of the Exchequer who, when told of the 1,300 job losses at Halewood, shrugged his shoulders and said, "You can't win them all." They will want answers from the Minister today on why the country should put up any longer with a Prime Minister who does not know what is going on and a Chancellor of the Exchequer who does not care. Their actions and indifference have hurt Merseyside. The tragedy is that fewer people are likely to be working as a direct result of their mismanagement of the country and the economy.

10.49 am

The Minister for Industry (Mr. Greg Knight): I place on record my appreciation of the presence of my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire), the sponsor Minister for Merseyside. I also appreciated the restrained and constructive way in which the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) opened the debate. Clearly, he is concerned about the matter, as I am. He wants to ensure that there is a satisfactory outcome, as do other hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton).

On the comments of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy), I have received an explanation and an apology from my right hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt), who cannot be with us today because he has a long-standing prior engagement. My right hon. Friend took part with the hon. Lady in the delegation that visited me at the DTI, and he is clearly concerned. I have no doubt that, had death not intervened, Barry Porter, the former Member for Wirral, South would also have attended the debate.

I regret Ford's decision and the impact that it will have on Merseyside. However, the House should recognise that Ford has made it clear that its decision was commercial, and that it will allow it to put in place measures to improve the plant's competitiveness, and, I hope, to secure its long-term future.

With the hon. Member for Knowsley, South and other hon. Members, including the hon. Members for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) and for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram), I pay tribute to Halewood's good progress in improving productivity and quality. However, the House should appreciate that the continental plants with which Halewood is competing have not been standing still. The battle for productivity, like the battle for inflation, is never over. One must always re-examine work practices to stay ahead of the competition.

We should take encouragement from the fact that Ford has not, despite some comments to the contrary, been talking about closure. It has made it clear that it considers that the plant could become the home, and sole European source, for a new sort of vehicle at the turn of the century.

Irrespective of any grant application that might be received by the Government—we have not yet received an application—we are working with the company in assisting the plant to achieve levels of performance that would help it to compete both in the marketplace and for new investment. As the hon. Member for Knowsley, South—and, I hope, other hon. Members—know, impressive efforts are being made by the local agencies, co-ordinated by the Government office for Merseyside, to support the plant. The work on a proposed supplier park is a good example.

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): I was interested in what the Minister said about productivity. Does he agree with figures that show that it is £600 cheaper to produce the vehicle in Britain than it is in Germany?

Mr. Knight: The information that we have from Ford is that those figures are incorrect. Ford says that Halewood is more expensive than Valencia and only marginally cheaper than Germany. If transport costs are considered, as has been said, Halewood is not cheaper. According to Ford, measured by man hours per car, Halewood is 10 to 20 per cent. more expensive than Ford's continental plants. We must address that, not brush it aside.

The Government are firmly committed to supporting and developing the competitiveness of the automotive sector in the United Kingdom, at Ford and elsewhere. We are working with companies at local, regional and national level. Only last year, I officially opened the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders industry forum, which is designed to help companies based in Britain compete with other companies based in Europe and the rest of the world.

We are already listening to Ford's concerns. The House probably already knows, but I place it on record, that my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and I recently met Jacques Nasser, the president of Ford Europe. My officials are discussing the possibility of financial assistance to support future investment at Halewood. Those discussions are continuing, but they are at an early stage, and I can make no promise about their outcome. We have an open mind, and are listening to what Ford says. I hope that the House will welcome that.

One of the most fundamental contributions that a Government can make is the provision of a sound macro-economic climate, with low inflation, low taxation, sound public finances and a flexible work force. When I met a delegation of hon. Members last week, I made it clear that the matter involved two issues. The first was the 1,300 job losses announced and the second was the long-term future of Halewood. I expressed the hope that

the 1,300 job losses could be addressed in some way by Ford. That is the basis upon which we have been proceeding in our discussions.

I regret to tell the House that, at present, all discussions with the company suggest that it is unlikely to revisit the 1,300 job losses. To date, no proposals for reducing the number of job losses has been put to me or my officials by Ford.

Mr. O'Hara: Will the Minister bear in mind the fact that the multi-activity vehicle is based on the platform of the Escort? It is likely that there will be under-capacity for Escort production for the market beyond the millennium. Will he investigate with the company the possibility of investment not only to bring the MAV to Merseyside but to retain the Ford Escort? There is a case for having both.

Mr. Knight: I do not rule that out. Yesterday, I met Tony Woodley, whom many hon. Members will know. I was impressed by his constructive position. I understand that he is having further discussions with Ford tomorrow. We intend to have further discussions with Ford next week. We will bear the hon. Gentleman's point in mind. However, he must appreciate that it is ultimately a matter on which Ford must make a commercial decision.

Sir Malcolm Thornton: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Knight: This must be the last time, because the debate must finish at 11 am.

Sir Malcolm Thornton: My hon. Friend knows that there have been all-party discussions on this. With the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara), we have been able to meet Ford and the unions. Will my hon. Friend ensure that the information we get is thoroughly checked, because there is a huge dispute between what Ford says about productivity and cost and what Mr. Woodley and his colleagues presented in our discussions. That is fundamental to any discussions that the Government might have.

Mr. Knight: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Some hon. Members have said that they have evidence that disputes Ford's figures. If that evidence is available, I would like to see it. I shall consider it. To date, such evidence has not been supplied to me.

Many hon. Members mentioned our employment laws. In making a product, what matters is the productivity of the plant. One does not close down, or reduce output at, the most productive plant. That is the position that Liverpool has to address. Ford has also suffered a setback in the markets, as some hon. Members rightly acknowledged. That has added to the problems that have had to be grappled with.

I cannot deal with all the points raised in the debate, owing to lack of time, but I shall answer the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) who commented on objective 1 status. Only last month, the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch, who is with us today, met the council leaders of Merseyside, and they all agreed that matters were progressing much faster. There seemed to be no dispute about that, so the hon. Gentleman's comments were out of date.

Many fine cars and memorable names have rolled off the production line at Halewood since the first 997 cc Anglia. I have owned two cars built at Halewood: a Ford Anglia and a Ford Capri—they were among the best cars that I have owned. I hope that, for many years to come, others will be able to say the same of new models that have yet to be made at Halewood.

Revenue Support Grant (Kent)

10.59 am

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): I am grateful to have secured today's Adjournment debate on revenue support grant for Kent county council. Such a debate is timely, and I welcome my parliamentary colleagues from across the county here today. Among those whom I welcome are my right hon. Friends the Members for South Thanet (Mr. Aitken) and for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley), and my hon. Friends the Members for North Thanet (Mr. Gale), for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman), for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold), for Faversham (Sir R. Moate), for Dover (Mr. Shaw) and for Medway (Dame P. Fenner).

We also have a message of support from ministerial colleagues—the Secretary of State for the Home Department, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Sir P. Mayhew) and the Minister of State, Home Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), who cannot be here today owing to ministerial duties.

No Government cuts have been forced on Kent county council's budget. That fact must be clearly identified as a thread that will run through the debate. Kent received a fair settlement in recent announcements on local government finance—Kent county council will receive a £22 million increase for the year 1997-98. That increase allows it to spend a massive £1,029 million and makes it one of the highest spending authorities in the country but, controlled by a Labour and Liberal Democrat coalition, it is imposing more severe service cuts than any other county in England while refusing to implement efficiency savings or embark on a restructuring programme, as it has been advised to do by professional financial commentators, Price Waterhouse.

The council's failure to acknowledge the fair Government settlement, and its failure to slim down bureaucracy, leads it, allows it and enables it to attack services for the most needy and most vulnerable people in our county. To exercise a different philosophy and different policies from the Conservative party is one thing, but to fail to take action in any one of the past four years to reduce bureaucracy and administration is incompetence. It is nothing less than a declaration of war by the county council majority on the people of Kent.

The socialist alliance at Maidstone cannot say that it did not see the problem coming. The problem was as evident to us as it was to the alliance: it was as clear as the appearance of a juggernaut on a straight country lane. If not negligent or incompetent, the behaviour of the Labour and Liberal Democrat members on Kent county council is wilful and malicious, and the people of Kent will have none of it.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): I am listening carefully to what my hon. Friend says. Does he agree that the Liberal and Labour regime's adoption at county hall last autumn of the old highwayman's call to stand and deliver was most appropriate? Does he further agree that the county council was dishonest to pursue a campaign demanding an outrageous 10 per cent. increase in grant while knowing that it would receive only an inflation-rate increase, then to brand that increase as a cut? Does he agree that the behaviour is akin to Saddam Hussein's human shield in terms of using the elderly and vulnerable—those who use adult centres, the youth service, libraries, the fire service and the Kent music school—as a human shield to create as much mayhem as possible across the county?

Mr. Dunn: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. He is right, and he will know that Conservative representatives on the local education authority voted against cuts to Kent music school. That is on record and can be seen by those of our constituents who support the music school. I shall refer to other matters raised by my hon. Friend in a few minutes.

I take this opportunity to welcome into the Chamber my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department and my hon. Friends the Members for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) and for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe). The intellectual power on this side of the Chamber is increasing massively by the hour.

The political majority on Kent county council has signally failed to act responsibly. That is no surprise to Conservative members, as the political leadership of the council is clearly well beyond its second best.

I was asked by Sandy Bruce-Lockhart, the excellent leader of the Conservative group on Kent county council, to make something crystal clear. When the Conservative party retakes control of Kent county council on 1 May—and restores a political pattern that has served our county well for more than a century—the Conservative-controlled Kent county council will, first, reinstate any fire stations that have been closed; secondly, reverse any cuts in the adult education service; thirdly, reverse cuts in the youth service; fourthly, restore full library opening hours. Those are absolute commitments from the leader of our group on Kent county council.

Dame Peggy Fenner (Medway): I am heartened by the pledge my hon. Friend has just made on behalf of the Conservative members of Kent county council. The area that my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) and I represent is about to become a unitary authority. That is a sign that the area is the largest conurbation in Kent and its most industrial part. It unwittingly contributed to the peace dividend when it lost its major employer in the dockyard in the early 1980s. Adult education is essential—I am sure that all hon. Members know that it is vital to have a centre where the young can go to develop their education and their skills, where those who took early redundancy from the dockyard can go to develop new skills and where our considerable elderly population can go for exciting recreational and educational facilities. I am sure that people of all political persuasions agree with that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. This intervention is becoming a speech.

Mr. Dunn: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend, whose record of service to our county is distinguished. Conservative Members would like to pay tribute to her for the battling way in which she has fought for her constituents, whom she has represented so well and over so many years. I should particularly like to pay tribute to her on her contribution to the future of the adult education service.

The commitment that has been given by the Kent county council Conservative leadership is so good that I must repeat it. We will reinstate any fire stations that are closed, reverse any cuts to the adult education service and to the youth service and—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would address the Chair rather than the Doors at the end of the Chamber.

Mr. Dunn: Your glow is so strong that I dare not look at you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—but I shall from now on.

The announcement that I have just made will be welcome news for Kent residents.

I shall now revert to Kent's budgetary position. I have a copy of a confidential memorandum—

Ms Hilary Armstrong (North–West Durham): From Conservative central office.

Mr. Dunn: It was sent to all Liberal Democrat members. The hereditary Member should keep her mouth shut and learn to listen.

I have a copy of the confidential memorandum sent to Liberal Democrat members which contains what is, for them, an honest statement. It states:

"Nevertheless a large part of the budget pressures are as a result of our own policy decisions."

Mr. Couchman: I shall not take long, because my hon. Friend has much to say. That interesting document, of which we have copies, also makes it clear that the current state of Kent's roads maintenance is due to the present regime's neglect. The council wants to spend money on other things, such as twinning with Hungary or trips for the councillor who represents Dover.

Mr. Dunn: Exactly so—my hon. Friend anticipates a later part of my speech. The realism that suddenly swept through the Liberal Democrat group was a bursting of new flame. It recognised that it has, by its decisions, contributed to the present financial situation of Kent county council. Given that rare burst of political honesty, why are the Liberal Democrats so committed to cutting front-line services, instead of reducing bureaucracy and administration? Why are they frenetic in their desire to establish new committees, new forums and new talking shops, and why do they indulge in a wide range of non-core activities?

In an excellent article in *Kent Today* by Paul Francis, we are told that Kent county councillors are considering awarding themselves extra expenses to pay for babysitters. I am informed that the Labour co-chairman of the economic development sub-committee went on 14 trips overseas between 20 April 1994 and 6 to 7 June 1996. [HON. MEMBERS: "Name him."] I gather that his name is Mr. Prosser, and that he is the parliamentary Labour candidate for Dover.

What were those trips for? The answer that is usually given is that they were in pursuit of European Community grants. My geography was learned a long time ago, but as I recall, Philadelphia is not in the European Union and, at the time when the trips were made, neither was Hungary. Constituents who run voluntary organisations to help the handicapped tell me that they have lost £1,000 in grant, which was the only grant that they received from Kent county council. How can those trips be justified, when any one of them was worth at least £1,000 in grant to a voluntary organisation in my constituency?

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that very point?

Mr. Dunn: I shall not give way.

The money for those trips—however important they may turn out to be—could have been given to voluntary organisations in Dartford, Swanscombe or any other community in Kent, and would have been warmly welcomed by voluntary workers and carers.

The main thrust of Kent's socialist coalition's argument is that the council faces a £79 million Government cut in funding. The House knows that Kent's funding was not cut; it received a 2 per cent. increase of £22 million. That is hardly a cut, yet the council comes up with the figure of £79 million as the amount that has allegedly been cut. How come? It is simply explained, though deceitful in origin.

The county council wants to spend an extra £101 million. It announced that it needs an extra £101 million to fund its wish list.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): More foreign trips.

Mr. Dunn: That may well be. The Government announced an increase of £22 million—which everyone recognises is a fair settlement—thus leaving Kent county council to claim a shortfall of £79 million. By black art spin-doctoring, it converted its wish list into Government cuts. How deceitful, dishonest and cruel.

Mr. Couchman: I believe that my hon. Friend has done some research into what other counties propose for the forthcoming year. Can he name another county that has proposed such deep cuts as Kent is proposing?

Mr. Dunn: On the evidence available to me, Kent's behaviour is worse, in that it has failed to cut bureaucracy and administration and to honour its commitment to maintaining front-line services.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Does my hon. Friend recall that, just two years ago, we had the spectacle of £4.5 million being taken out of the schools budget when some schools, such as my children's primary school in Kent, were short of chairs? In that very same year, the council spent £3.5 million on fixtures and fittings for education administration offices.

Mr. Dunn: The list is endless. One of my favourite items of Kent county council expenditure is the £700,000 it spends each year on magazines and periodicals for the use of administrative officers.

I shall return to my point about the alleged £79 million cut. The House will appreciate that the council cannot cut what it never had: it was always speculation and deception. Kent county council's plan to spend 10 per cent. more flies in the face of political reality. No Government in the western world, local or national, are planning a 10 per cent. spending increase.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid–Kent): It is my perception that, of all the counties in the country, Kent has the largest

[Mr. Andrew Rowe]

percentage of grant-maintained schools—schools taken out of the local education authority. Can my hon. Friend assure me that county council administration has been cut pro rata to take account of that extraordinary devolution?

Mr. Dunn: No, I cannot give my hon. Friend that assurance, because it is not there to give. The council has lost control of many services, but it has failed to cut bureaucracy. Administration has increased in the past four years, rather than reduced to reflect the position to which my hon. Friend referred.

Sir Roger Moate (Faversham): In my constituency, we are faced with the prospect of the closure of fire stations, dramatic cuts in library services, cuts in desperately important youth services and a dramatic cut in adult education. Severe pain is being inflicted on the people who need those services, whereas administration is not being cut. The county council has lost control of administration of the police and further education colleges, and secondary schools administration has been reduced by 50 per cent. Why should my constituents be faced with cuts when no comparable effort has been made by the county council to cut bureaucracy and administration?

Mr. Dunn: My hon. Friend makes his point eloquently, and he is right.

What I find most disconcerting about this sorry episode in the history of our county is the failure of the parties that control Kent's destiny to be honest. I dislike the deception that is being practised. In recent weeks, we have seen the use of the county's propaganda machine for party political purposes.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): What does that cost?

Mr. Dunn: I dare say we shall find that out in the fulness of time.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose—*

Mr. Dunn: What the authority's officials are doing is quite wrong. I have a letter from a constituent: he is a resident of Dartford, to whom I wrote on 23 January. He says:

"I am still confused as to why KCC has had to reduce its services to those who need and depend on them. On the evening of the 27 January 1997, I attended a meeting of a local charity. A Spokesperson from Social Services outlined how the cuts in KCC's budget will affect the many services used in the local area. Again Central Government is blamed! I informed the meeting that you had informed me that Central Government had not cut the funding to KCC but had given a 2.2 per cent. increase on the previous year. The Spokesperson told the meeting that this is not correct and the cuts that KCC had to make are as a direct result of Central Government spending targets."

Mr. Gale: Is it not a fact that the lie machine at county hall has been so misrepresenting the facts that Mr. Keith Ferrin, one of our Conservative colleagues on the county council, found it necessary to write to Conservative candidates and sitting Members to ask whether they could please try to explain to the press that the situation is actually a result of the county council's mismanagement rather than a Government cut—something that the hon. Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong) will, I suspect, try to produce like a rabbit out of a hat later today? Is it not also a fact that the same team sought to rig the *Kent Today* opinion poll? Is not that yet another example of its members trying to rig the facts?

Mr. Dunn: My experience as a long-serving Member of Parliament has shown me that the Labour party and the truth have long been strangers.

I am very grateful to Keith Ferrin, who is a well-respected member of the county council, for the information that every household's share of Kent county council's debt has risen by £216.89, to the massive sum of £762.83. We should get that message across.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (South Thanet): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his splendid recitation of the high economic crimes and misdemeanours that the Lib-Lab county council leadership have inflicted on the people of Kent.

My hon. Friend has mentioned borrowing. May I point out, as a former Chief Secretary to the Treasury, that there has been mismanagement not only by Lib-Lab councillors but by Lib-Lab financial alcoholics. They have increased Kent's borrowing by 40 per cent.—£140 million—up to a record-breaking £496 million. That means that a debt burden of £9 million or £10 million per year has been inflicted on the people of Kent in the form of extra interest charges.

Perhaps the most bitter drink of all in this financial alcoholism is the way in which salaries have risen. Is my hon. Friend aware that Kent's director of education, who is presiding over the unkindest and harshest cuts of all, is now drawing a salary of £99,000 a year? That is more than many permanent secretaries receive for much bigger responsibilities. Surely it is time to halt this wicked mismanagement at all levels.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend has put his point effectively and well. That is the point of this debate. All Conservative Members are conscious of the massive disinformation campaign that has taken place by means of Kent county council's publicity and propaganda machine, aided and abetted—indeed pushed—by the Labour and Liberal Democrat leadership at county hall.

What I find so inexcusable is the use of fear in the campaign. Residents are told that their fire cover may not be guaranteed, and that retraining and adult education services may be curbed.

Dame Peggy Fenner: It is an indescribable insult to Medway residents that the list of proposed cuts includes two retained fire stations and another fairly large station in Stroud—three fire stations in one area. We are talking about the largest conurbation and, indeed, the largest industrial area in Kent, which is about to become a unitary authority. It is disgraceful to do that to three fire stations.

Mr. Dunn: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. I am sure that she will waste no time in telling her constituents of the commitment given by the Conservative leadership in Maidstone. Indeed, the message that emerges from this debate is that those who wish to guarantee their services must vote Conservative on 1 May.

It was suggested at one stage that fire cover at Dartford fire station might be reduced by one pump, and that the retained fire station at Horton Kirby might disappear entirely, but those proposals have been withdrawn—for the time being. Given the huge development that is taking place in north Dartford, in the Thames gateway area, is it not extreme lunacy to speculate for a moment about reducing fire cover when the population is set to increase by thousands, and many millions of people will be coming into our county at Bluewater and Ebbsfleet—an interest that I share with my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham?

This is lunacy of the knee-jerk kind, but it is not actually a knee jerk. Four years ago, when the county council passed into the hands of the evil empire, I predicted that, come the county elections, it would do precisely what it is doing now: attack the elderly, the young, the disabled, voluntary groups and those who enjoy cultural and leisure pursuits through our library services. Why? Because that is the only way in which the council can hang on to its administration at county hall—by the use of fear.

Mr. Brazier: My hon. Friend is making his points about a matter on which we all feel strongly with characteristic understatement. Will he emphasise the extraordinary divide between Labour and Liberal politicians at local level, and the Opposition Front Bench? We have heard from the shadow Chancellor that no extra money from the centre will be provided in the form of revenue support grant. Indeed, if the Labour party phases out the area cost adjustment, as it proposes to do, Kent will have £10 million or £15 million a year less. Is there not a certain discrepancy here?

Mr. Dunn: I entirely agree. The loss of the area cost adjustment would affect Kent to the tune of at least £10 million. That may please members of the Opposition parties, who never understand such matters.

Ms Armstrong: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dunn: No, no, no, a thousand times no.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That was exactly what I was waiting for. You will be aware that 10 Conservative Members representing Kent have either spoken or intervened in the debate, and you will have heard that denial of the right of a Labour Member to intervene. Would you say that that—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Hon. Members know that it is entirely up to the hon. Member who has the Floor to decide to whom he does, or does not, give way. I call the hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn), and ask him to address the Chair.

Mr. Dunn: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I mean no disrespect to the hon. Member—the hereditary Member—for North-West Durham; I have no desire to stop her from speaking. Would that I could. I believe that, when she is put in her coffin, she will still be talking when they nail the lid on.

During the past four years of socialist rule at Maidstone, there has been a ballooning of staff. Staff numbers have risen by more than 1,000. That is profligacy in the extreme, and takes no account of the auditor's recommendation that the council should restructure itself and redress the staffing imbalance to reflect the moving out of the county of the police service, further education colleges and the career service, and the fact that many primary and secondary schools are to become grant-maintained.

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): My hon. Friend rightly referred to the direct connection between the maintenance of good-quality services in Kent and the Conservatives' winning back control of the county council. Only yesterday, I received a copy of a letter from the chairman of the governors of the outstanding Judd grammar school in my constituency—one of many outstanding grammar schools in our county—to those who style themselves the "co-chairpersons" of the education committee.

The letter complains bitterly about the draconian cuts that the Labour and Liberal-controlled county council is seeking to impose on the school. In his letter, the chairman of the governors describes the cuts as "nothing less than scandalous" and "totally irresponsible." Does my hon. Friend agree that everyone in Kent with a child at a grammar school, and every person who has the prospect of having his child at a grammar school, knows that, as long as Kent county council remains in Labour and Liberal Democrat control, he can have no confidence in his child's future grammar school education?

Mr. Dunn: I agree with my right hon. Friend and declare an interest, because my son is a pupil at the Judd school, as is the son of my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Gravesham. My right hon. Friend's point applies not just to grammar schools, but to high schools, the city technology colleges and all primary and secondary schools that become grant-maintained. They would lose all the freedoms that they currently enjoy as a result of Conservative legislation, because Labour and the stalinists at county hall wish to take back into local authority control all the schools that dared, as a result of parental ballots, to go outside local education authority control.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): My hon. Friend has spoken about the wasteful use of staff in Kent. At a recent constituency surgery, I met two parents and their disabled son. They were almost in tears because they were being asked by Kent county council to pay higher social services charges. The council plans to increase staffing in social services by 80 people, but it is hitting disabled people and their parents.

Mr. Dunn: That is a wicked example of precisely what is taking place. I use the word "wicked" in the old sense and not in the fashionable modern sense. It is also unforgivable that senior county council officers—well-respected professional men and women—are being forced to act politically in the public domain because of the inadequacy and incompetence of the Lib-Lab regime at county hall.

In the past four years, there has been tremendous dereliction of duty. A left-wing, old Labour party has been trying to work alongside a weak Liberal Democrat party, and they want to be all things to all persons—I think that that is the politically correct way to say it. Instead, there

[Mr. Dunn]

is chaos, anarchy and incompetence. I might be accused of using strong words, but they express what my constituents feel.

The Opposition parties have misjudged the mood of Kent people, who better understand the problems and the debates than they are given allowance for. They know that the county council has pulled the roof upon its own head by failing to deal with the rising damp in the foundations. That is a lovely metaphor which I might use again in another speech. We are debating the future of our county. The present administration has lost police, further education colleges and the careers service, and many schools have become grant-maintained.

Mr. Gale: Will my hon. Friend add to his list the fact that the Labour-Liberal coalition is targeting the most vulnerable people in Kent—the elderly and the disabled?

Mr. Dunn: As I have said in the context of all the other services that I have mentioned, it is cruel and wicked to focus on people who are least able to defend themselves and who need essential services to preserve their quality of life. For us, that is unforgivable.

Sir Roger Moate: It is not just that such measures are wrong, but that there is a hopeless distortion of priorities. It is extraordinary that the council proposes to close some fire stations, not on the justification that fire cover can be reduced, but simply to save about £200,000 to £300,000. The saving is less than the council is spending on conferences for its officers and leaders at county hall. It is a muddled approach to administration. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is a taste of what the country might get if a Labour Government were ever inflicted upon us?

Mr. Dunn: My hon. Friend is right. If people want to see the Labour party and its minor allies, the Liberal Democrats, in action, and anticipate what they may be like in government if they get the chance—which they will not—they are welcome to come to Kent county council, where we shall give them individually guided tours around the philosophy of the present administration. In Kent, we see Lambeth below the Thames. It holds not to responsibility and decency and the application of services in the name of the people; rather to narrow, petty, political garnering of points. That could have been avoided, and in the name of the people whom we represent it must be avoided.

For some years, the Conservative group on Kent county council has pointed out the error of the ways of the present administration and offered ideas, programmes and solutions for restructuring and slimming bureaucracy in the light of the services that have left the county. Have those Conservative been listened to? No, they have been ignored, and the problem faced by the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties in Kent is now our problem—but there is a solution; the election of a majority of Conservative county council candidates across the county on 1 May. That will bring back responsibility, decency and honest application in the name of the people. That is why I felt it right to initiate this debate.

11.35 am

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Kent has had 100 years of relative stability under the Conservatives. Incredibly, Kent survived one economic crisis after another under Labour Governments and services were maintained. In the past four years, as a result of a Labour-Liberal pact, there has been ever-increasing disaster and chaos. The budgeting system that needs an increase of £101 million has been based on a pie-in-the-sky figure. On expenditure of £1,000 million, Kent is demanding an increase of 10 per cent. What Government in Europe or what county council or shire council in this country plans an increase of that size? I have looked at the statistics, but I cannot find any shire county that is planning an increase in expenditure at the level that Kent county council under Labour-Liberal control claims to need.

Kent council has introduced a political budget and is trying to put the blame on the Government. Its priority is not to look after the disabled, those who need adult education or those who need the fire services, but to have a political budget in election year. I hope that it reaps the reward for that, which is to be thrown out of office on 1 May.

Under a Conservative Government, the council has had an increase of £22 million. It is interesting that all the councils of the Opposition spokesmen who are present for the debate have had less of an increase than Kent. The Opposition have shot themselves in the foot by offering spokesmen from areas that have had lower increases than Kent. Kent has had allocated to it one of the largest increases in resources of any county in the United Kingdom, but still the Lib-Lab coalition on the council has got itself into a mess and bleats its complaints.

The council needs to get going with some decent budgeting procedures. I say as an accountant that it could have used zero-based budgeting. It could have returned to core essentials and asked itself, "Do we need to spend at the current level on some services or could we increase our efficiency and look at overheads?" It dismissed zero-based budgeting.

It could have opted for priority-based budgeting by looking at priority expenditure. It could have examined the way in which it looks after the elderly and cares for those who need education and for disabled people, but it dismissed that. It went for an Alice-in-Wonderland budgeting system—a politically based system—instead of looking at the priorities, concerns and needs of real people. No wonder Price Waterhouse and Co., the independent auditor, has said that the county council must increase its efficiency, do better, get something out of the £20 million a year that it spends on information technology, and cut central overheads.

A constituent came to see me who works within the Kent county council orbit. That constituent, who obviously does not want his name to be mentioned, complained that, a few years back, when the county council was under Conservative control, he had only two tiers of management to go through before he could report to the director. Now he has five. That is what four years of Lib-Lab control have done. They have converted two tiers of management into five.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): My hon. Friend has considerable experience in this sector. Is it usual to introduce a major capital investment in technology with the aim of increasing staff?

Mr. Shaw: As my hon. Friend points out, it is incredible that, after all the new technology investment,

Kent has failed to reduce its central overheads significantly. That is why I am delighted that we have had pledges from Sandy Bruce-Lockhart, the Conservative leader, that any cuts in libraries, adult education or the fire service will be reinstated and that efficiency savings will be found elsewhere in the budgetary system.

May I turn to something of great interest to me and to my constituents? Last Friday, I visited St. Margaret's-at-Cliffe fire station. I am delighted that today there are seven retained firemen here from my constituency, who are concerned about the fire station's future. They are not full time, but give their services in their spare time. They have other jobs, but, in their spare time, they look after my constituents and people in the village where I live. I know that many colleagues have the same situation in their constituencies. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) has asked me to say that he would like to be associated with these comments, as two retained fire stations in his constituency are also threatened with closure.

It is a disgrace that the county council could contemplate cutting a fire service when the cost of individual retained fire stations is so minor in relation to the total budget. We are talking about individual fire stations that perhaps cost £40,000 a year and a total Kent budget of £1,000 million a year. It is simply not necessary to go for cuts in that sector.

Mr. Brazier: Is there not something truly sad about the idea that these absurd cuts in the fire service should be proposed only a few weeks after the county council set up yet another expensive bureaucratic committee to consider public safety?

Mr. Shaw: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. There are far too many committees in Kent county council. There is far too much bureaucracy and far too much paperwork moving around, and there is not enough action or service delivery. That is what we are interested in as Conservatives: action, service delivery and increased efficiency. That is why there are threats of cuts in Kent's fire service. It is ludicrous.

Sir Roger Moate: With my hon. Friend's usual delicacy, he has refrained from commenting on the point made earlier about one county councillor—I have forgotten his name—who has made a large number of trips abroad. I cannot remember the precise number—[HON. MEMBERS: "Fourteen."] I cannot believe that one member could make 14 trips in such a short time, but is it not likely that even a small part of the expenditure on those trips—that, presumably, is just the tip of the iceberg—would keep all our fire stations open?

Mr. Shaw: My hon. Friend makes a point. As that councillor is my Labour opponent, I am slightly embarrassed to have to refer to his 14 trips. My hon. Friend may feel that, in due course, the electorate in Dover and Deal will be interested in those 14 trips abroad, including to Hungary and Philadelphia in the United States of America, and in their relevance to the needs of Dover and of fire stations in our region.

When the channel tunnel fire occurred recently, people at St. Margaret's-at-Cliffe fire station had to give extra cover. I understand that London and Sussex fire services were on alert to give support if necessary. We have major transport operations in Kent and we must maintain the ability to have a retained fire service as well as a full-time fire service. Many arguments support the retention of the St. Margaret's-at-Cliffe fire station.

Sir John Stanley: Is my hon. Friend aware that a letter that I have received from my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration shows that the Government's local government settlement provides for

"a £50 million or 4.2 per cent. increase in provision for the fire service"?

Against that background of an increase that is well in excess of inflation, is it not intolerable that the Liberal and Labour-controlled county council should be contemplating any reduction in fire service cover?

Mr. Shaw: My right hon. Friend makes the valid point that, if anyone needs adult education in Kent, it is the Liberal-Labour county councillors, because they cannot tell when a positive figure—an increase in expenditure—is an increase and not a reduction. At public meetings, they cannot tell the truth—that an increase in expenditure is extra money that is available. They insist that it is a reduction. That shows the fraudulent nature of their mathematics, accounting and budgeting.

The St. Margaret's-at-Cliffe fire service is called out some 100 times a year. In a busy year, it has been called out 170 times. That is what Kent county council under Liberal-Labour control wants to take away from us in St. Margaret's-at-Cliffe and Dover: a service that is regularly used and regularly needed by the community, and an emergency back-up service for the wider Kent community. The service is necessary. It shows the hypocrisy of setting up safety committees, as my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) has said, when they do nothing but talk and produce paper. What we are talking about is real action to save people's lives.

There is a clear message from the budgetary exercise that Kent county council is undertaking: the Labour and Liberal parties in Kent have done a repeat of the Labour-Liberal pact in the 1974 to 1979 period. They have brought Kent to the point of chaos, to the point where there are demonstrations at Maidstone and to a winter of discontent, just like there was under the Labour Government in 1978-79; but we have pledges from the Conservative group leader that, if the Conservatives are elected to control Kent county council on 1 May, those cuts will not take place. There is therefore a clear message: "Vote Conservative if you want services, a sensible council and sensible budgeting."

11.47 am

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): When I hear Conservative Members attacking Kent councillors for visiting countries, I am minded to say only that those Members should be careful because people in glasshouses should not throw stones. The people of Kent should know that the great majority of Members of Parliament for Kent, all of whom are Conservative, have on many occasions over the years been abroad at public expense, on travel paid for by the British taxpayer.

I rise on behalf of the many hundreds of thousands of people in Kent who are denied a Labour voice in the House of Commons. You will know, Mr. Deputy Speaker,

[Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours]

that all 16 Members of Parliament for Kent are Conservative. The voice of Kent Labour has not been heard in the House of Commons for 18 years. Conservative misrepresentations in Kent's affairs have repeatedly gone unchallenged. Their endless stream of untruths, party propaganda and distortion of facts is a travesty of justice. *[Interruption.]* I seek your protection, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In terms of its Members of Parliament, Kent is a one-party state—it has no Labour Members—in which there is no place for the truth.

It has become increasingly clear to my hon. Friends that there is a co-ordinated attempt by Kent Conservative Members of Parliament to orchestrate a campaign of disinformation in the media. Those same Members use the Chamber of the House of Commons to launch their—thus far unchallenged—attacks. Today, Parliament will hear the truth—the other side of the story: the counter-case. It is the story of a council valiantly striving to defend its ratepayers from cuts in public services. It is the story of a council desperately trying to avoid imposing hardship—

Mr. Gale: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have been in the House for 14 years and I have always been under the impression that it is not customary for Members to read out speeches—particularly speeches prepared for them by other people.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is correct about the custom. The copious use of notes, however, is unfortunately allowed.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I am using notes for reasons of clinical accuracy. It is important that the people of Kent know the truth—as opposed to the statistics bandied about the Chamber for the past few years. My accurate figures were produced for me, at my request, by Kent county council. I asked for the figures so that I could use them in this debate.

Sir Roger Moate: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Although the hon. Gentleman claims to be using notes for clinical accuracy, he has in effect just admitted that he is reading his closely typed speech. Surely that is contrary to the rules of order?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We shall see how we go. References to facts are entirely in order, but reading a speech would be wrong.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Hon. Members from most other counties, including many Conservative Members, have in recent years spoken for the people they represent, and have even joined in deputations to Ministers. Not one of Kent's 16 Conservative Members of Parliament, however, has stood up for local services or represented the county authority.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I am afraid that I cannot give way. There have been 16 Conservative interventions in this debate. I am the first to put the other side of the argument.

Most Conservative Members from Kent have taken every opportunity to make cheap political capital out of the problems that the county council faces—problems that result from policies for which they themselves have voted in the House of Commons.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I do not intend to give way. There have now been 17 Conservative interventions.

These Conservative Members have misrepresented the financial settlement year after year; and this year is no exception.

Mr. Rowe: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that this is a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Rowe: It is, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is of course entirely for you to judge whether, in the interests of clinical accuracy, the hon. Gentleman should read his speech; but it seems to me that reading a speech that makes assertions about things that, when the speech was written, could not have been known is stretching the rules rather far.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Chair makes no comment on the contents of speeches—although this morning I have already had to stress that it is the occupant of the Chair who must be addressed. Meanwhile, I shall make my judgment as the speech progresses.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Two years ago, the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) tried to claim on local radio that Kent had received a spending increase of £26 million, when the real figure was £6 million. He did so by misrepresenting the money for community care that had been ring-fenced to cover responsibilities transferred from central Government—

Mr. Jacques Arnold *rose—*

Mr. Campbell-Savours: This year on 23 January, at column 1077 of *Hansard*, the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) accused Kent county council of demanding a real-terms 10 per cent. increase just to stand still. He repeated his accusations during Prime Minister's Questions yesterday. In fact, the council has stated that it needed that sum in cash terms to meet its pay and price commitments and to finance extra commitments imposed on it by demography and new legislation.

Both those allegations reveal that neither hon. Member understands the interests—

Mr. Arnold: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman is making inaccurate claims about what I have said. Should he not give way to allow me to correct those claims?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) is technically in

order, but it is a custom of the House, when an hon. Member refers to another by name, that the former should give way to the latter at a suitable point. I am sure that that custom will be observed this morning.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: As I was saying, what both contributions reveal is that the intricacies of local government are not understood by the two hon. Members to whom I have referred. The more they protest, the more they demonstrate either their ignorance or perhaps their malevolence.

Let us examine the facts. Kent is effectively capped at 1 per cent. above standard spending assessment. That compares with the shire county average of 1.8 per cent., and with some counties that are capped at more than 5 per cent. Over the four years to 1997–98, Kent will have been allowed to increase its spending by only 8.7 per cent.—a figure that may surprise the House. That is far less than was needed to cover pay and price increases, let alone increased demand for services.

Between 1993–94 and 1997–98, Kent's capital financing costs—its debt charges—rose by £14 million, and its allocation of SSA for that element fell by £2 million, leaving a gap of £16 million. That is almost entirely attributable to capital projects, especially road projects embarked on by the former Conservative administration.

In 1997-98, the county council will face a superannuation payments bill of £3 million more than the bill three years ago. That will result from the decision of the former Conservative administration to cut its contribution, and from new Government regulations forcing higher contributions on the council.

Next year, the county council will have to spend £7.8 million more than SSA allocation to provide fire cover in line with Home Office standards. For the same period, its fire services SSA element will rise by £1.6 million. Despite savings of £500,000—the figure given earlier in the debate was wrong—involving the closure of some retained stations, the county council will need to increase spending by £2 million to cover pay and prices and service pressures. Those three items alone are costing the council a total of £37 million.

Representatives of the local authority have made representations on the three items to the Minister of State concerned. Perhaps today the Under-Secretary will give Kent some response to the representations which it has made and which I repeat here today. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Gravesham is trying to shout me down. For five years, we have heard the case put by Kent Tories. When, finally, a Labour Member finds a slot to raise these issues in the House, the Tories shout me down because they do not want the truth to come out.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I congratulate my hon. Friend on rattling the cage of Conservative Members from Kent. Facing defeat, rather like a hanging, concentrates the mind. They come here protesting their innocence, but they have presided over real cuts in services in Kent and throughout the south-east of England. I am the only Labour Member of Parliament outside Greater London representing a seat in the south-east: I represent 13 million people today.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: My hon. Friend puts his point most forcefully, as ever.

Mr. David Shaw *rose—*

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I am not prepared to give way. The hon. Gentleman's party has had more than its share of the debate.

The £100 million figure to which several hon. Members have referred, and which has been much trumpeted in the press in Kent, has been portrayed by Conservative Members as the "demand" of the county council—but it is no such thing at all. The leaders of Kent county council are realists. They would not expect such a sum to be made available, especially from the Government— *[Interruption.]* Do I need to repeat that for the benefit of Conservative Members, in case they have had trouble hearing what I said?

Mr. Shaw: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am very concerned about whether the relevant papers are available in the Vote Office showing that Kent has had the largest SSA increase of any shire county in the United Kingdom. It is important that those papers should be available in the Vote Office, so that Opposition Members can talk about the truth.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): I am quite sure that the papers are available.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Let us return to the famous £100 million, which the hon. Member for Mid-Kent was on about yesterday. For Kent county council, that sum is an honest and, so far, unchallenged estimate of what would be required to protect all existing services, to meet inescapable financial commitments, to meet pay and price increases and to provide for demographic changes and the cost of new responsibilities placed on local authorities by central Government. That is the explanation for which Conservative Members have been waiting.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): Does the hon. Gentleman realise that I have received figures from the co-chairperson of the social services committee in Kent, showing that extra statutory duties imposed on Kent—but not properly funded—by the Government amount to more than £4 million? That figure takes into account the extra costs incurred because of a 2.5 per cent. increase in the number of people aged over 75 and because of disabled access, asylum and criminal justice legislation, which have not been properly reflected in grant levels.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Those matters do not surprise me. What does surprise me is that, over the past few years, they have never been drawn to Parliament's attention by Conservative Members. At no stage have they raised those issues.

If there is one body that is unrealistic, it is the Government—who continually impose additional responsibilities on local authorities without providing

[Mr. Campbell-Savours]

funding, and then demand cuts. In the famous £100 million, Kent is simply flagging up, in plain language, the implications of Government cuts.

Briefly, Kent's £100 million estimate is composed of £40 million of financing pressures; a £25 million estimate of pay and price increases, which makes provision only for unavoidable price increases; £30 million for service pressures, which is led by demographic and legislative demand; and £5 million for redundancy costs forced on it by the financial settlement and by local government reorganisation. None of those costs is within the control of the county council. Most of the sum results from Government action and from decisions of the previous Conservative county council. To try to meet those pressures and remain within the £22 million capping limit increase, the county council is being forced to make extremely painful choices between services.

Initially, the council's policy and resources committee asked committees to consider savings of 10.7 per cent. in all budgets. To protect the most vulnerable, special educational needs were exempted, and increases made. Unfortunately, however, to balance the budget, that meant that extra cuts—more than 10.7 per cent.—were necessary in adult education and youth and community services.

Current figures are likely to be 1 per cent. for fire services and 9.5 per cent. for social services—*[Interruption.]* Those are matters of which Conservative Members should be aware. It may well be that, today, I bring them news from Kent. They have not been following developments in their own local authority.

Mr. Jacques Arnold *rose—*

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The likely figures are 9.5 per cent. for social services and 7.2 per cent. for the non-delegated education budget. Those figures should enable the council to avoid closure of its adult education service, its youth and community service and its residential homes. They would also avoid reducing fire cover below minimum standards, although the budget will still require the closure of five retained fire stations and the removal of four retained engines from other stations. However, even that has been made possible only by not fully protecting school budgets from the effects of higher numbers and increased costs. Schools will face a real-terms reduction of 4 per cent.

Kent's services still face horrendous cuts, and all the councillors know it. However, they know who to blame: they blame the Government. Conservative Members from Kent try to pretend that the cuts are the fault of the county council, yet none of the pressures that the council faces is of its own making. They are the result of Government decisions or, in some cases, the legacy of Conservative control.

Many of the decisions stem from legislation pushed through Parliament by Conservative Whips. Kent's Conservative Members have never rebelled. They have always supported piling on the pressure. Those poodles have lain on their backs and obediently allowed their constituents to take the punishment meted out by an insensitive Government.

Dame Peggy Fenner: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know that the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) would not wish to malign me. I am a Kent Member, and have been, with a very short break, since 1970. Would the hon. Gentleman care to repeat the point that Kent Members have never rebelled? Was he in the House when the Government of the day—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order. However, the hon. Lady has made her point.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: As you say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was not a point of order. It was also not an accepted intervention, or I would have produced material showing that, on many hundreds of occasions in recent years, the hon. Lady has obediently trooped into Conservative Lobbies to support legislation and financial measures that have damaged the interests of the people of Kent.

Mr. Thurnham: The hon. Gentleman and I are adding a Cumbrian element—from the other end of the country—to this debate, and are perhaps adding a degree of realism. Does he agree that it is unfortunate when the Government prevent a local authority from innovating? Are not community care direct payments a case in which local authorities have been prevented from extending benefits to those over 65? Has not the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) strongly advanced that case? I am sure that he would share the disappointment of Opposition Members that the Government have prevented such an excellent measure from being used by Kent council and others to provide benefits to over-65s.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I defer to the hon. Gentleman's knowledge in those matters, as he is an expert in many issues of community care. It may well be that some Conservative Members from Kent have on occasion raised those issues in the House; but the critical question is how they have voted when Parliament has allocated money for those types of expenditure. The truth is that the people of Kent are being taken for granted by those who are supposed to be representing their interests in Westminster.

Claims that Kent county council is inefficient and badly run—which we have heard before, from the hon. Member for Mid-Kent—are ludicrous. Price Waterhouse, the independent auditor whom the hon. Gentleman quoted, said exactly the opposite. It said in its report:

"The truth is the County Council has reduced its management and administration costs by"—

hold your breath—

"£23m . . . over 3 years and cut budgets of its central departments by 13.5 per cent. It is continuing such savings in 97/98 but these cannot cover the shortfall."

Local Conservatives say that no cuts are necessary, so why have they ducked Labour county councillors' challenge to submit an alternative budget? Perhaps the Minister will tell us why today.

Conservative Members of Parliament have attacked the county council for failing to increase education spending by the increase in the SSA. The House knows that the Government's claim to be providing extra money for education was a fraud. It was described in the *Local Government Chronicle* as a budget scam, because the resources were not made available.

In Kent, the education SSA increased by £20.4 million. If the whole SSA increase had been passported to education, the effect on other services would have been devastating. To meet its share of financing commitments, pay rises and unavoidable service pressures, the council would have had to make savings of 16 per cent. If social services had been exempted, cuts would have been 27 per cent., which would have meant the end of effective services in many areas.

Since taking over the administration of the council, the present controlling groups have increased resources for education, social services and other vital services by far more than the increases in the SSA. They have done so in spite of tight budgets and the appalling backlog of neglect that they inherited in, for example, school building repairs. Throughout this time, they have been subject to sniping attacks from Conservative Members who are more concerned with making cheap political capital than with defending the services on which their constituents depend.

While other local authorities have seen their Members of Parliament fighting for them, Kent has seen its Conservative Members of Parliament campaign against the county council and encourage the Government to inflict still harsher treatment on local services. It is interesting to note that these Members of Parliament never attacked the extravagance of the former Conservative administration in Kent—not a single Conservative Member uttered a word of protest when the former Conservative-controlled county council decided in 1991 to spend £7 million on the county hall. There was a wall of silence at Westminster. Perhaps we shall have an explanation of that when the Under-Secretary winds up the debate.

If Kent county council this year faces bigger cuts than some other authorities, it is for one reason alone—it refused to cut services and jobs last year as the Conservatives urged. The council used every resource at its disposal to protect public services for as long as possible, and it should be congratulated, not condemned. I certainly congratulate it.

The people of Kent are not deceived by the propaganda campaign of their Conservative Members of Parliament. In a recent telephone poll, readers of the *Kent Messenger* voted four to one on the statement that Kent's cuts were the fault of central Government. No amount of propaganda or misleading attacks on Labour and Liberal councillors for alleged extravagant spending can disguise the simple truth. Conservative Members of Parliaments are prepared to use Kent county council as a political football to be kicked around the Chamber in a squalid attempt to pick up votes. As a Member of Parliament, I have always rejected that approach—*[Interruption.]* Let me be tested by my words. I have always operated by the simple maxim that knocking one's local council is cheap and easy copy.

My constituency is in Cumbria. During my 17 years at Westminster, both my district and my county council have for periods been Conservative-controlled, but I have never attacked them at Westminster. For me, that is forbidden fruit, because they cannot answer back. Sadly, that is not the practice in Kent.

12.14 pm

Ms Hilary Armstrong (North–West Durham): I shall be brief. In many senses, this has been a rather sad debate. Every authority faces difficult choices. I know that none of the Conservatives here today was able to be present for Monday's debate, but everyone who spoke—including Ministers—acknowledged that this year's local government settlement is very tight. The Government acknowledge that the burden is being shifted on to local councils to the extent that they expect the average rise in council tax to be about 6 per cent. and that, in the next three years, some £4 billion is likely to be required from local government and the council tax.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will the hon. Lady confirm that Kent received an increase in its grant and its SSA? Would a theoretical Labour Government increase the grant to Kent and allow it to spend more—yes or no?

Ms Armstrong: It is a pity that the hon. Gentleman was not here for Monday's debate. Had he been here, he would have heard what we have to say on that. We recognise that this year's settlement is very difficult, but I pointed out on Monday that the level of public debt is completely out of control and that, as a consequence, the next Labour Government will not be able to promise more money to anyone. We did promise, and we shall continue to promise, a fairer distribution of the grant and a more open system for distributing the SSA.

Let us deal quickly with the SSA for education. Like many people, we are concerned to ensure that education is protected and that we give our children and young people the very best opportunities. What has been happening in Kent over the past six years? When the Conservatives were in charge of county hall in Kent in 1991–92, the council spent £53.2 million less than the SSA—that is £53.2 million less than the Government said was necessary for education. Last year, the present local authority spent £10 million more than the SSA allocation, or 0.9 per cent. above the SSA.

Rather than being spent on refurbishing county hall—Conservative Members were not bothered about that £7 million of expenditure—money has been used for front-line services, and it is because the authority tried to protect those services that there is a real problem this year. Obviously, Kent Conservative Members were not worried that the former Conservative administration in Kent was spending so many millions of pounds below the SSA, which is the Government's assessment of what is needed.

Mr. Thurnham: Although Kent's community care provision has been praised by both the county's health authorities, the Department of Health's figures show a 10 per cent. shortfall in community care funding for Kent. Should we not be debating those facts, rather than making political points as Conservative Members have done?

Ms Armstrong: I wish that we had had a proper debate this morning about the problems facing Kent and the way forward. The tragedy is that not one suggestion has come from the Conservative group at county hall, other than merging the posts of the chief officers. That has been the Conservatives' only suggestion for budget cuts for next

[Ms Armstrong]

year. They have not produced figures on how to pay for retaining services without putting up council tax. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. A debate seems to be going on from a sedentary position on both sides. That must cease. The hon. Lady must be allowed to make her case.

Ms Armstrong: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When I read the letter from the Conservative chairman of finance, I wondered whether we were back in the 1980s. It pledged no cuts in services—we have heard that today—and no increase in council tax. It is reminiscent of Lambeth and Liverpool in the early 1980s.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Who ran those?

Ms Armstrong: They were run by the Labour party, and the Labour party tackled the problems and sorted them out. Today we have seen Conservative Members colluding with the Tory Trot tendency in Kent.

Mr. David Shaw: Labour cannot run local government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must control himself.

Ms Armstrong: Ministers acknowledge that the settlement is difficult for all authorities. Difficult choices are being made. Those choices will have to affect central administration as well as front-line services, but such cuts will not be sufficient. The authority is already spending substantially above the standard spending assessment on the fire service. It is in difficulty because the Government do not acknowledge what hon. Members have said today about the needs of the fire service. The money needed to meet the commitments is not there. Incredibly difficult choices have to be made. It is our responsibility to work with all the councillors in Kent to ensure that they are able both to protect as much of the service provision as possible and to come within the spending limits.

Efficiency savings of £23 million a year have been made. The Government have admitted that the situation is difficult. It is difficult for Kent; it is difficult for all authorities. I wish that many more Members present today were prepared to get down to sorting out the problem instead of making desperate pleas to keep their marginal seats. As the hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) knows, I visited his area last week and had discussions with councillors about the problems that they face. They are trying to address those problems honestly. I wish that that were true of some of Conservative Members.

12.22 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): I must congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) and every Conservative Member from Kent.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: And me.

Sir Paul Beresford: Interestingly, one or two strays from Lancashire and Cumbria have also been present.

An authority has to be really bad to get such a united reaction from the local Members of Parliament. Kent had 100 years of relative calm and stability under the Conservatives. It was a good authority, judging the quality of service by its outputs rather than, as the hon. Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong) suggested, by the amount of other people's money spent on it. We should also recognise that this is a matter of private grief for the people of Kent. That is why hon. Members from Kent constituencies are here, pushing the point solidly.

I am astonished that the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) is here. He wished to speak on behalf of the Liberal Democrats, but could not because of the time. I remember some of his past statements on similar issues. Supporting the unsupportable behaviour of the Liberal Democrats in the Lib-Lab pact in Kent would contradict many of those statements.

The hon. Member for North-West Durham talked about finding a different method of distribution. One is tempted to suggest that it would be a distribution favouring friends rather than an objective approach. Independent experts accept that the standard spending assessment is an objective approach.

Ms Armstrong: What about Westminster?

Sir Paul Beresford: Including Westminster, although the hon. Lady does not seem to appreciate that.

It is worth noting that Kent's difficulties have been recognised. It has the highest standard spending assessment of all shire counties. Its SSA for 1997–98 is more than £1 billion. Admittedly, it also has one of the highest populations. Even so, its SSA per head is still the second highest of all shire counties. The overall SSA has increased by 2.2 per cent. on the 1996–97 figure. Within that, the education element has gone up by 3.5 per cent. and the fire service element by 5 per cent.—twice the rate of inflation.

The Lib-Lab pact councillors presented their case on a piece of paper last month to the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration, my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry). Their technique was fascinating. They should learn from some of the contributors to today's debate about how to approach budgeting. The normal procedure for setting a budget is to look a year ahead. They are looking at the last minute.

On their piece of paper, they rolled forward everything that they had spent in 1996–97 and then added a long list of all the expenditure that they would like for the coming year. They compared the result with their provisional cap limit. The difference, they explained, was a shortfall. They then said that they wanted to list certain items as service cuts to meet their wish list or shortfall. Nowhere in any of the documents was there any mention of how priorities might be reordered. Nowhere was there mention of efficiency savings in a budget of more than £1 billion. They could not find savings in that—they could only produce a wish list.

It is not for me to tell Kent county council how to find savings, although I am tempted to do so on occasions, but it is worth reminding hon. Members that the Audit Commission has given it ample scope for considerable savings. The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours)—Workington is in Cumbria,

400 miles from Kent—mentioned the district auditor's comments. Every district auditor's report is a curate's egg, and the hon. Gentleman has been selective. The auditor has pointed out opportunities for savings. For example, it is possible for authorities to recognise the millions of pounds being wasted on maintaining surplus places in schools. Kent's record on that is far from perfect. In 1994–95, the most recent year for which audited figures are available, more than one fifth of the secondary school places in Kent were unfilled.

That might sound depressingly familiar. Kent's council tax payers have a right to expect a little more imagination from their elected representatives on the council. I was not allowed to interrupt when my hon. Friends from Kent were criticised and I must defend them, because they are well known for placing considerable pressure on the Government on behalf of the people of Kent. They are successful because they put a good case. That is shown by the size of the SSA, the amount of funding that has been provided, and the efforts made on the single regeneration budget and on some of the roads. They continually make their case to the Government through letters, questions, general meetings and specific meetings. Time and again, they have put the case for Kent, but they recognise that times are difficult, money is tight and savings need to be made. Conservative councillors have made it quite clear that they intend to do that.

Members on both sides of the House will agree that a 10 per cent. increase in Kent's budget is not the only solution. It is high time that some people involved in Kent local government learned to face up to their responsibilities. There is a saying that under Labour it will all end in tears. That may happen if we allow Kent to remain under Labour control.

Poverty (Scotland)

12.29 pm

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): I begin by saying something about the title of the debate. I have chosen to debate Scottish poverty simply because I am a Scot and I represent a Scottish constituency. I am only too well aware that poverty has no respect for national origins; nor does one nationality inflict it on another.

Last year I attended the national poverty hearings in London, where I heard poor people from Liverpool, Belfast, Preston, Glasgow, Coventry, Dundee and many other places testifying that poverty is endemic across national and ethnic lines. It was made painfully clear that, for far too many millions of people, whatever their origins, poverty is a shared experience that has been inflicted on them by a combination of market forces operating on a global scale and Government policies of deregulation and privatisation which have taken from the poor and given to the rich. Someone once famously said that there is no such thing as the poverty gene. The poor are not born to be poor; they are made poor by the unjust actions of others.

Let me now address the poverty in my own country. The statistics of Scottish poverty are stark enough. The latest unemployment figures show that Scotland's official rate of unemployment is 10 per cent. above the United Kingdom average and more than 50 per cent. above the rate in the south-east of England. In 1996, official unemployment fell far more slowly in Scotland than in any other part of the United Kingdom.

The official unemployment figures are only the tip of the iceberg. The Government claim that there are 1.8 million unemployed people. In reality, 4 million people are out of work. That point was raised by one of my hon. Friends at Question Time yesterday. The Prime Minister and the Conservative party showed by their dismissive attitude that they could not care less; they showed why the Tories are rightly seen by most people as the party of mass unemployment.

Other relevant statistics reveal that more than 217,000 Scots earn less than £3 an hour—a top line well below £120 for a 40-hour week, when the average income in the rest of the country is £282 a week. Let us be absolutely clear. Those poverty wages have been imposed by the Government's drive for deregulation and what they cynically describe as a flexible labour market. At one end of the scale are the fat cats raking in huge astronomical earnings. The chairman of privatised BT earns £644,000 a year. At the other end of the scale, casualised and de-unionised workers are forced to survive on less than £2 an hour.

A recent article in the *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* showed that wage inequality in the United Kingdom is now greater than it was 100 years ago. It really is forward to the past under the Tory Government.

The latest Convention of Scottish Local Authority figures highlight our poor health record in Scotland, where there are 30 per cent. more deaths among working people than in England and Wales. In Scotland, more children are in lone-parent families, rented accommodation, families on income support and homeless families. We may have fewer very elderly people, but in general they are in poor health. They are more likely to live alone, to be on income support and to live in rented accommodation.

[Mr. John McAllion]

COSLA estimates that those facts of deprivation in Scotland require Scottish education and social work departments to spend between £160 million and £270 million more each year compared with their counterparts in England and Wales. Those facts of deprivation are ignored by Scottish Office Ministers, who repeatedly threaten to reduce council spending in Scotland to England and Welsh levels.

If this morning's debate descends into a barren exchange of contradictory statistics across the Floor of the House, it will have failed miserably. I want to try to put a human face on the statistics of Scottish poverty. If nothing else, at least the record will show that Parliament knew the nature of the suffering and chose to do nothing.

Let us take the example of David from Glasgow, who told his story to the national poverty hearings last year. He is 45 years old, with a grown-up family, and he lives in temporary accommodation with the Simon Community. He is officially classified as homeless.

David never had many breaks. His wife had a severe schizophrenic illness, and he had been left to raise three children on his own. Because he was on his own, he became isolated and turned to drink. Because he was in arrears, he lost his council house and eventually ended up in prison where he reformed; but when he came out, he could not get a council house because of his previous arrears. The homeless single persons unit placed him in the Simon Community, at a cost of £300 a week. One week's money would have cleared his previous arrears and allowed him to have a council house, but the rules did not allow for that. Nor did they allow him to apply for a course at the local college. If he did that, his place in the Simon Community could no longer be funded by the single persons unit, and he would be out on the street again.

In other words, David is in a poverty trap created by a social security system that ensnares the poor in its mean-minded, penny-pinching bureaucracy—which excludes the poor instead of accepting them into society.

I wonder whether the Minister really understands the deep hurt that is caused when Ministers and Tory Members denounce the poor as a disgrace and scum, accuse them of begging through choice and call for them to be hosed out of shop doorways and moved on. That is precisely what a Minister and a Tory Back Bencher said a few weeks ago.

David's story is not unique. Millions of people are trapped in poverty. One of my constituents had been on a training-for-work programme funded through benefit plus. He was getting £62 a week and was entitled to full housing benefit. He is single, lives alone and is 57 years old. He saw a course at the local college that would have given him a qualification that might have got him back to work. He applied and was accepted.

The course was for 22 weeks and was funded by a bursary of £64 a week. Because it was a bursary, he lost his entitlement to housing benefit. He could not afford his rent, and was forced to quit the course and sign on for income support. Like David, he was trapped by the Government's petty regulations.

The Government have plans for the likes of David, who is described as a single claimant under 60 years of age. They plan to deny him the right to a home of his own. He will be allowed only housing benefit for what is described as a single, non-self-contained room in what is euphemistically described as a house of multiple occupation. Like all under-25s, single claimants under 60 will now not be allowed the exclusive use of a bathroom, a toilet or kitchen. In the Government's view, those basic decencies are too good for the likes of David and too good for the poor.

Recently I spoke to a senior council officer with 30 years' experience working in different communities in Dundee. He said that he was receiving reports from his field officers of levels of poverty that he had never encountered before. They described children being sent to school with no breakfast, families being unable to carpet or furnish their homes, and genuine hardship on a scale that those of us who came of age in the 1960s never dreamed could happen again in our society.

What was the Government's response? They chose to attack the poor. The jobseeker's allowance takes away entitlement to benefit. It puts the onus of proof on claimants, who have to prove their entitlement to benefit. If they cannot do so within a three-month period, their benefit is withdrawn.

Moves are afoot to privatise the entire social security system. Lone parent benefit, housing benefit and council tax benefit are being cut. Council services are being cut to the bone. The poor look to councils for housing, but the housing budget in Scotland is being slashed again this year by a staggering 30 per cent. The poor look to councils to school their youngsters, but across Scotland council schools are closing, and council teachers are being made redundant. The poor turn to council social work departments for help, but they too have all been cut by a Government who have turned their back on the poor in Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

We all have to live with the consequences of the Government's abject failure to create a just and fair society. Crime and drug abuse are rising everywhere, crimes of violence are on the up, our prisons are filling up, suicides in prisons are on the up. The Government plan to build more privatised prisons across Scotland; this House passes ever more repressive laws and ever harsher sentences; the Government seek a law-and-order solution to the problems of injustice and inequality. There is no such solution, and it is a fraud on the people to claim that there is.

From time to time in Scotland, there are major conferences on poverty. Sometimes there are even debates in this place.

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): Has my hon. Friend had the opportunity to read the report by health visitors, which clearly shows that they have uncovered an increase in the incidence of rickets? As we know, rickets is a disease among children that is primarily caused by lack of vitamin B—through a lack of sunshine and especially a very poor diet that does not contain appropriate vitamins. When that was raised in the House, the former President of the Board of Trade admitted that he had read it but did not believe it. Such an attitude and response to a report by respectable and honest people is typical of Government Front Benchers.

Mr. McAllion: My hon. Friend makes a very effective point. The right hon. Gentleman who made that insulting

remark about a very good report happens to be the Deputy Prime Minister, and speaks on behalf of all Conservative Members. All of them should be ashamed of what he said. The facts of poverty are well known to those in power, but just like the Deputy Prime Minister, they simply choose to ignore them. When they are confronted with the facts of poverty they refuse to take them on board or believe them, and look the other way.

For the most part, poverty is hidden from the majority, who continue to enjoy rising living standards. Poverty is mainly contained in particular areas in parts of vast housing schemes, well away from the more prosperous suburbs; but it is undeniably there. The poor may be cut off, not unlike the black townships in apartheid South Africa, but they still have a voice and it must be heard, even in this place.

The problem is not that the country cannot afford to end poverty. In the final four decades of this century, world economic activity has quintupled. There has never been more material wealth than there is now. In relative terms, Scotland and Britain may have less of a share of that wealth, but they are both undeniably more wealthy than they have ever been.

In 1948, the country was immeasurably poorer than it is today, yet in 1948 the country found the political will to build a national health service and a welfare state that guaranteed the eradication of poverty, ignorance and illness among all peoples. Yet now, when we are far wealthier than ever before, we hear in the House the repeated cry that we cannot afford the social security system, the NHS or to treat the poor as equal citizens in an equal society. I for one simply do not believe that.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Does my hon. Friend recall that in 1948 hot school dinners of good nutritional value were available everywhere? Today, local authorities are having to consider removing proper school meals from their spending plans.

Mr. McAllion: My hon. Friend directs my attention and that of other hon. Members present to today's reality. I understand that, when the Secretary of State for Scotland was confronted by demonstrators outside the Scottish Grand Committee meeting in Selkirk on Monday, he said that there were no cuts in local government services. He was treated with the contempt that that sentence deserves by the demonstrators in Selkirk, and, indeed, by the vast majority of Scottish people. Those who depend on hot school dinners are the poor. Those with means have an alternative. The poor will suffer if hot school dinners are cut by councils across Scotland, which is what is happening.

The problem is not that there is not enough wealth—we have more than enough for everyone—but how we distribute it. For almost 20 years, the Government have been taking from the poor to give to the rich. It is time to reverse that process. *[Laughter.]* The hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) laughs, but he should look at the latest analysis of households below average income, which says that, in 1979, the top 10 per cent. of earners took 20 per cent. of this country's wealth, but they now take 26 per cent. What has happened to the bottom 10 per cent. is the exact opposite. They have less of a share of the wealth than they did in 1979.

It is time that we reversed the Government's process of taking from the poor to give to the rich, through progressive and fair taxes linked to expanded programmes of public expenditure and investment. No one can achieve such a breakthrough until we get rid of the Tory Government. The first step will be taken in the general election when they are removed. With a new Government, further steps will follow to help the poor. Only then will their day come.

12.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Kynoch): I congratulate the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) on securing this debate. I have listened very carefully to all that he has said, and will attempt to deal with some of the points in the time remaining.

The Government's policies have always been directed towards promoting overall prosperity and economic growth, which have produced benefits for all of the people. In a rapidly changing and increasingly competitive world economy, living standards in Scotland in terms of real gross domestic product a head rose by 28 per cent. between 1985 and 1995, and are higher than in all parts of northern England and Wales. The benefits of that have been spread across all sections of our population.

Our policies of promoting sustained growth have meant that the United Kingdom recovery since 1992 has been the strongest of any of our major European competitors. Our underlying inflation performance is the best for almost half a century. Unemployment in Scotland has fallen by more than 70,000 since its previous peak in 1992, and is below the European average.

We have secured record levels of inward investment. The companies that we have been able to attract are creating jobs, resulting in increased prosperity for Scotland and its people. Research has shown that the vast majority of people are better off as a result of the Government's policies. Average income has risen by more than a third—37 per cent.—between 1979 and 1993–94, and all family types have benefited, not just top earners.

Listening to the hon. Member for Dundee, East recite his catalogue of doom and gloom, one realises the Labour party's difficulties in Scotland. He and his colleagues cannot recognise the Government's remarkable success in bringing wealth to the nation.

We are nevertheless determined to ensure that specific groups who need it are supported through the social security benefits system, for which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has responsibility. The main aim of the social security system is to focus resources on specific vulnerable groups such as low-income families, poorer pensioners and sick and disabled people on low incomes.

Mrs. Fyfe: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Kynoch: No, I shall not give way, because I want to try to get through as much as I can in this very short debate.

Following the implementation of key Department of Social Security reforms to the benefits system in 1988, extra help has been made available to low-income families, which is now worth approximately £1.5 billion a year. The value of improvements to income-related benefits for pensioners since 1989 is now £1.2 billion a year.

[Mr. Kynoch]

The Government are committed to creating a better social security system that protects the most vulnerable, is adapted to modern needs and does not outstrip the nation's ability to pay. It is clear that changes to benefits can play a crucial role in helping people into work, which is the most effective way of raising their living standards.

Concentrating on attacking the causes of dependency and creating ladders of opportunity and incentives helps to increase individuals' chances to prosper. People are being helped to take up employment by ensuring that they are better off in work, and are not discouraged from increasing their earnings.

Those initiatives and incentives include the introduction and extension of family credit, which now averages £56 a week on top of family incomes in addition to child benefit, the introduction of disability working allowance, the fact that up to £60 a week in child care charges is ignored when calculating in-work benefits, and the implementation of the jobseeker's allowance.

However, it is important to bear in mind the fact that the benefit system should not be regarded as the mechanism for eliminating poverty. The Government have a range of policies and programmes with the aim of ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to benefit from economic prosperity. In addition to the help given to unemployed people, significant assistance is also given to those who have a job but require additional help.

I referred to the extensions to family credit and the other schemes aimed at ensuring that people find that they are better off with a job. Through its pilot earnings top-up scheme, which started last October, the Department of Social Security is now testing whether in-work benefit assistance is effective in getting the single and those without dependent children back to work. One of the eight pilot schemes is in Scotland, covering Perth, Dumbarton and Stirling, and it has the potential to increase the income of low-paid workers there by more than £50 a week. That is a practical measure, which will be especially beneficial for young people under 25.

As our economic measures continue to bear fruit, and unemployment in Scotland continues to fall, we remain alert to the needs of those who are still unemployed. In addition to our economic measures, we have put in place a wide range of programmes and services to combat unemployment and assist people back to work. They include programmes such as training for work, the main training programme for unemployed adults who have been out of work for longer than six months, Employment Service measures such as 1-2-1, worklink, and jobplan for the minority who remain unemployed for 12 months or longer, and restart courses and jobfinder grants for those still unemployed after two years.

The Government have also launched Project Work, an innovative programme offering job search help and practical work experience to people unemployed for two years or more. In response to encouraging results from two current pilots in Hull and in Medway and Maidstone, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment announced an extension. The four Scottish pilots, to be located in Lanarkshire, Edinburgh, Dunfermline and Dundee—the hon. Gentleman's own area—will help 9,000 long-term unemployed people to find jobs.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): No, they will not.

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman provides a classic illustration of the Labour party in Scotland, especially his wing of it, which is intent on selling Scotland down the river, and on refusing to recognise the significant improvements that the Government's policies have achieved in Scotland and the help given to those unfortunate enough not to be in employment. All he can do is carp. I suggest—I may have time to enlarge on this later—that his policies would do nothing to help the situation. In fact, they would have the reverse effect.

As I have said, we have a range of policies that have the effect of reducing poverty. Our housing policies have done much to improve living standards for all of Scotland's people. Since 1979, we have issued more than £8 billion in gross capital allocations to local housing authorities. Since it was established, Scottish Homes has invested more than £2.5 billion in housing. Those resources have led to real progress in addressing issues such as homelessness and housing that is below tolerable standard.

Another of the important successes of the Government's housing policies has been the dramatic shift in tenure. The proportion of housing accounted for by the public sector has fallen from more than 50 per cent. in 1979 to less than one third now. Levels of owner-occupation have risen from 35 per cent. in 1979 to almost 60 per cent. now. In the city of Dundee, between 1979 and 1995 the proportion of local authority stock was reduced from 53 to 32 per cent.

Private sector investment in housing has been crucial, especially when there are ever-increasing pressures on the finite public resources available. Scottish Homes has already attracted private investment of more than £900 million, and there is scope for the private sector to play an even greater role. Scottish Homes continues to have substantial resources at its disposal, and will invest more than £500 million in Scottish housing this year and next, which in turn will generate over £300 million of private sector funding. As a result, 10,000 people in Scotland will be better housed.

In the local authority housing sector, we have maintained the net provision for local authority capital expenditure at planned levels of £180 million each year for the next three years. That means more than £0.5 billion-worth of investment in council housing in the next three years, on top of the £2 billion that councils have been able to invest since 1992.

The total net allocations for 1997-98 amount to £171.9 million, slightly higher than those issued to authorities in 1996–97. In addition, next year councils will be expected to generate usable receipts of between £50 million and £60 million to augment their investment.

We firmly believe that considerable scope exists for authorities to increase investment levels by involving the private sector to a greater degree than at present. Authorities should be considering the potential for transferring stock to other landlords. Such transfers benefit tenants, by enabling investment to be made in their

homes earlier than would have been possible through conventional means, and gives them an assurance about future rent levels, along with improved services.

In some parts of Scotland, people face a combination of low incomes, poor housing and a degrading environment. Tackling either the economic or the social causes of deprivation in isolation cannot bring a sustainable renewal of such areas. We need to focus instead on developing a comprehensive approach, encompassing social, economic and physical regeneration, if we are to achieve a lasting solution for the most needy areas in our country.

In 1988, we published our ground-breaking urban regeneration policy statement, "New Life for Urban Scotland", which acknowledged the importance of taking a comprehensive, strategic approach, involving all partners with an interest in regenerating our deprived urban communities.

At the same time, we established four pilot Scottish Office-led urban partnerships at Castlemilk in Glasgow, Ferguslie Park in Paisley, Wester Hailes in Edinburgh and Whitfield in Dundee. Each of those partnerships has shown the way forward in urban regeneration, winning awards and admiration not only in Scotland but beyond. The hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) joined me when I recently visited the Whitfield partnership in Dundee, and the project under way there was most impressive.

On 11 November last year, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration announced the designation of 12 priority partnership areas and support for 11 regeneration programmes, with resources amounting to £60 million over the first three years. Included in the list of successful PPAs and regeneration programmes was Dundee, which will receive urban programme funding of £3.3 million for its PPA and £727,000 for the regeneration programme over the same period. Much has been done, and is still being done, by the Government to help develop a prosperous and successful economy that is benefiting Scotland and all of our people.

The hon. Member for Dundee, East and his party believe firmly in introducing a national minimum wage and in signing up to the social chapter. Labour believes in the application of a tartan tax in Scotland, and a teenage tax. It believes in policies that will hit all Scotland, but particularly the poor. Rather than benefiting those on low incomes, the introduction of a national minimum wage and the social chapter would have quite the opposite effect.

In a market economy, wages reflect the productive contribution of employees, and a minimum wage would prevent some people from gaining productive employment. The Government believe in allowing the market to generate jobs, and a national minimum wage would not help families on low incomes—rather, it would cause many people to lose their jobs. The figures for the UK show that, if a national minimum wage was set at around £4 and if only 50 per cent. of the differentials were restored thereafter, 1 million jobs would go.

The attitude of the Labour party has been typical, as has that of the hon. Member for Dundee, East. He, at least, is an honest member of the Labour party, who believes in saying what he thinks. He called for increased funding for local government, and I felt from his speech that perhaps he was seeking to justify that to his own party as much as to anyone else.

In conclusion, I believe that the Government's policies have been good for the people of Scotland, whatever their economic circumstances. We have created sustained economic growth, increased average incomes—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. We now move to the debate on the second Severn crossing.

Second Severn Crossing (Approach Roads)

1 pm

Sir John Cope (Northavon): The second Severn crossing—in spite of having an uninspired name—is a wonderful engineering achievement that has rightly won prizes. It is also valuable to those of us to the east of the river, as well as to south Wales and west Gloucestershire. However, the gains have been at the expense of residents, particularly in the parish of Pilning and Severn Beach in my constituency. The villages have been cut in three by the new approach roads, with a large motorway junction in the middle.

We have known for some years that that would happen. The routes of the roads are determined by the siting of the bridge, which itself was dictated by engineering considerations and by the position of the rocks in this most difficult river. When the private Bill went through the House, it was recognised that there would be great damage to life in those quiet rural villages. This damage was recognised by colleagues who served on the Committee, and by the Government and their agencies.

An undertaking was given that, in making decisions, the spirit as well as the letter of the law would be followed in dealing with the residents. I am here to tell my hon. Friend the Minister for Railways and Roads that it is time to honour that undertaking. The motorway is built and has been opened. The road users are benefiting, and the impact on residents is now apparent.

I asked for this debate because too many detailed matters are still outstanding, which affect residents of the area. There was a tremendous push to get the road open, but since it opened last summer, I have had the impression that the Highways Agency has rather pushed the remaining work to the back of the shelf and told its people to concede as little as possible, as slowly as possible.

There are a variety of detailed matters that I could mention, but I want to illustrate my point with three. They are separate issues, but what they have in common is that they were all left over from the end of the building process. The first issue is noise mitigation. We all know that we cannot have a motorway without noise, but where—as in this case—the road inevitably passes close to the houses because of considerations such as the siting of the bridge, we should do the maximum to mitigate that noise.

To give one example—it is the best, but there are others—the residents of New Passage are insufficiently protected from the noise of the new motorway and the M4-M49 junction, which is near them. New Passage is a hamlet with a number of houses, mainly dating from the days of the railway ferry before the Great Western railway tunnel was built under the river 120 years ago. They are downwind of the prevailing winds off the river and some houses are less than 100 yd from the motorway, which at that point is raised level with the eaves of the houses.

Some protection was supposed to have been provided by an earth bund, which was to be constructed opposite the eastbound entry and exit slip roads of the interchange. I discussed the proposals with the Highways Agency after the motorway opened in July, and I was eventually told in November that the bund is to be continuous instead of having a gap in the middle and is to be 2 m higher than the original proposal. I welcome those improvements.

However, I must point out that I was told in November that the bund was supposed to be completed by the spring or summer of this year. It will take some months to build, including a three-month pause in the middle of building to allow for settlement. So far, nothing has been done, so it will be late spring—if not late summer—when we can expect even that, by which time the motorway will have been open for more than a year.

In any case, the bund will do nothing at all to shield the houses at the eastern end of New Passage road, which are near the exit from the motorway and the interchange, and where there is nothing between them and the motorway and the interchange. An acoustic fence along the motorway has been refused on value-for-money grounds. Many of the houses are solid Victorian buildings, but the noise inside them—even with double glazing—is continuous. The residents used to live in a peaceful rural backwater, but they are now supposed to live with their windows shut. One needs to shout to hold a conversation in the garden when the wind is blowing. That is a big change in the residents' life style.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to take a personal interest in the matter, and not just in New Passage. He must ensure that the Highways Agency, which is responsible to him, acts with sympathy towards local citizens. They did not oppose the road, nor did they dig tunnels where it was to be built—as we have seen in other recent cases. They relied upon the promises given to the Committee by the Government and the agency, and they are entitled to fair treatment.

There is also the wider question of why low-noise porous asphalt is not used where motorways are close to residents. Information from the Refined Bitumen Association suggests that modern porous asphalt—at an extra cost of about 2 per cent. for a new road—will reduce noise by about 50 per cent. I am told that some of it has been laid on the M4 near Cardiff and has been successfully used on the continent for a number of years. I am concerned that it was not used near Pilning and Severn Beach, as it would have been a great help. I am told locally that a top dressing of that type, Safepave, has been laid on the A38 between the M5 and Filton, and—although I cannot be sure whether it is responsible—noise seems to be at a lower level there than before.

I realise that the Treasury—one of my old Departments—will be looking over the Minister's shoulder as he replies, ever present, like Long John Silver's parrot, except, of course, the parrot said, "Pieces of eight, pieces of eight," whereas the Treasury—not being a parrot—says, "Pieces of eight, pieces of seven, pieces of six," and so on. Perhaps the shadow Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), is the parrot because he gives an official "Hear, hear" to everything that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer says. But that is another matter.

The next important date is the first anniversary of the opening of the bridge next June. It is important because that is when compensation claims can be submitted. The fact that every successful act of noise mitigation will reduce those claims should be some encouragement to the Treasury. Indeed, at one point, New Passage residents collectively offered to forgo their rights to compensation if the noise was reduced. Whether they were wise to do so is a matter for them, but it certainly shows that they would prefer less noise to more compensation.

The second case is different. It is that of an individual—my constituent, Mr. Philip Jones. He owns salmon fishing rights on the Severn, which he has fished under Government licence for many years by the traditional method of lave net fishing—highly skilled and potentially dangerous work. It was his livelihood and that of his father and grandfather before him and it is an ancient method of fishing for salmon, much used on the Severn in years gone by.

Two things are clear. Building the bridge, with its many piers, has inevitably altered permanently the currents and, therefore, the sandbanks on the river, although I accept that it is extremely difficult to know exactly how they have altered. It is also clear that, in the same period, Mr. Jones's fishery at Oldbury has become impossible to work because of movements in the sandbanks. His problem is to prove that the one was a consequence of the other, although to the layman the coincidence of timing makes it look highly likely, as far as I can see.

Mr. Jones has spent more than three years arguing the case and has been forced to commission several expert reports because of the refusal of the authorities to decide the matter. It has already cost him and, latterly, the Legal Aid Board a great deal. If the case goes to court after all this time, it will cost even more.

As there are practically no lave net fishermen left, very few people are likely to be able to claim the case as a precedent. Why not pay Mr. Jones a reasonable amount now, rather than paying it to lawyers and consultants and in court fees?

The third matter concerns the attempt of South Gloucestershire council, supported by others, to protect the public rights of way that have been affected by the building of the approach roads. Like me, the council thinks that the Highways Agency is trying to do the minimum, so the public are losing amenity and being encouraged to use their cars. For example, the agency has resisted for months a cycleway between Redwick road and Northwick road, which is an essential link for the national cycleway. It has also failed to provide alternative bridleways at a time when everyone else is trying to encourage horse riders to use off-the-road routes. An example is that it will not provide suitable parapets and fencing on the M4 bridge near Holm farm, and expects the council to provide an alternative bridleway.

The British Horse Society, whose golden jubilee some of us had the honour to celebrate this morning, is rightly concerned about that, and I pay tribute to the society's work in that area and generally. The Countryside Commission is also concerned about the matter. I hope that the Minister will be able to confirm that it is the Government's policy to encourage the off-road riding of bicycles and horses and that the Highways Agency should provide alternatives when road construction closes or affects footpaths, bridleways or cycleways. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will back the provision of cycleways. As we all know, he is a keen cyclist. I, too, think that they are important. The excellent Sustrans is based in Bristol. It has done so much and is doing excellent work with the backing of the Millennium Commission, particularly on the national cycleway. I am sure that the Minister will want to support Sustrans.

Those are three different aspects of the same thing—the consequences of the building of the approach roads. I welcome the bridge, but residents in my constituency and in that of the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes), who has joined the debate and represents those on the other side of the river—the other half of the bridge and the approach roads on that side are his concern—are paying the price of the building of that valuable facility.

I have sketched in a few cases. There is a lot more detail and there are other cases. My constituency probably has more motorways than any other—20 miles of the M4, 17 miles of the M5, plus the M48, M49, a bit of the M32 and half of both Severn bridges. When new motorways are built or old ones altered, the Government, through the Highways Agency, must do their best to mitigate the harm for those affected. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will help to achieve that in this instance.

1.15 pm

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East) *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Has the hon. Gentleman the leave of the right hon. Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope) or of the Minister to speak?

Sir John Cope *indicated assent.*

Mr. Hughes: I wanted to endorse the sentiments expressed by the right hon. Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope) about noise levels. I represent an area on the Welsh side of the crossing that was formerly very quiet and secluded. The way of life has changed quite a lot since the opening of the new bridge. Apparently, the prevailing wind is from the west and residents in the Rogiet and Caldicot areas get the worst of all worlds, so to speak.

The main environmental problem that arises from the opening of the new bridge is caused by the fact that tolls are collected only on one side, so people tend to drive down the A40 through Monmouth and on to the A449, do whatever business they have to do and travel back across the bridge toll free. That seems detrimental on environmental grounds, besides being most unfair. I hope that the Minister will be able to consider those two matters.

1.16 pm

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope) on his diligence and persistence in pursuing the cause of his constituents and bringing these matters before the House today.

As my right hon. Friend acknowledged, the new Severn crossing is a magnificent structure, but he rightly expressed concern about the impact that the opening of the second Severn crossing and the Avon approach roads have had on his constituents. The hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) also referred to the impact on his constituents in Wales. I am not sure whether I am permitted to reply on behalf of the Welsh Office, but if I do not have the opportunity to do so during this brief debate, I shall ensure that he receives a written reply.

The roads were constructed in pursuance of the Severn Bridges Act 1992. During the planning and design stages, great care was taken, in decision making, to maintain the sensitivity of the local environment. The environmental

[Mr. John Watts]

statement that was published in 1990 identified and limited construction access routes. It also required separate drainage networks and outfalls, as well as environmental protection and landscape planting.

Extensive consultations were held with local authorities, landowners and representatives of others with key interests, including environmental bodies, prior to and during the planning and construction stages of the scheme to ensure that local views were taken into account. Regular liaison meetings continue to be held to discuss any outstanding matters.

The choice of motorway alignment was made carefully to balance its impact on local communities. As a result, environmental bunds have been constructed at several places adjacent to properties along the M4 and M49, to provide visual and noise mitigation. Where the M49 joins the M5, environmental noise fencing has been erected. As the construction contract has progressed, the bunds have been increased in height where possible to improve visual screening and further to reduce traffic noise.

My right hon. Friend will be pleased to know that we have been able to accommodate the request for screening from the majority of residents of New Passage by the provision of a new earth bund to the north of Pilning interchange, up to 5.5 yd high, which will replace the temporary topsoil bund left over from the construction works for the second Severn crossing. The replacement bund is an additional measure. Preparatory work for its construction is under way, and it should be completed by this summer. My right hon. Friend referred to the agreed timetable, and I believe that the bund will be completed on time.

Landscape planting of the area is programmed for later this year and will help to screen the motorway from properties. Unfortunately, as my right hon. Friend said, we have not been able to accommodate his constituents in New Passage with an extension to the bund, because the motorway rises as it approaches the second Severn bridge, and any extension to the bund would be below the level of the motorway and therefore would not provide any further protection for the residents. There is also a lack of available land to produce a bund that would be wide enough to support a height above the level of the motorway and provide protection.

Following representations from my right hon. Friend and from residents in the Redwick road area, we propose to erect a fence to fill the gap in screening over the River Pill. A planting programme to screen local views and integrate the roads into the surrounding landscape was started this winter, and eventually about 250,000 to 300,000 trees will be planted both off and on site along the motorways.

Among the many indigenous species to be planted will be oak, ash, field maple, hawthorn and blackthorn. Evergreen species and species tolerant of pollution will be used in strategic locations to provide visual screening for properties along the route. Owners of 138 properties identified as eligible under the Noise Insulation Regulations 1975 have received offers of noise insulation, and about 70 have already accepted. A public notice will be issued early this month giving advice on the appeals procedure for insulation against traffic noise to anyone who has not received an offer but considers himself to be entitled to one.

Following representations from my right hon. Friend, and complaints from residents, including two petitions, a study to examine the benefits of noise fencing in the vicinity of Pilning interchange was undertaken. It showed that fencing would not provide a noticeable improvement in noise levels, and would be visually intrusive to properties in New Passage and the Redwick road area, so the estimated cost of about £300,000 could not be justified. Properties in the eastern part of New Passage are shielded by an earth bund provided as part of the environmental mitigation, varying in height from 1.3 yd to 3 yd high above the motorway adjacent to properties.

My right hon. Friend referred to porous asphalt. He will recall that the approach roads construction contract began in March 1993; porous asphalt, which can reduce traffic noise by an average of 3 to 5 dB(A), was not approved for use on motorways and trunk roads until 1994. It was therefore not possible to specify its use in the contract, and to incorporate it would have required extensive modifications to the water drainage system, leading to delays and disruption to the completion of the contract.

In addition, porous asphalt is considerably more expensive than conventional surfacing materials, as well as being less durable, so it is doubtful whether value-for-money considerations would have permitted its use. Although it can be extremely valuable in the appropriate circumstances, it cannot be used everywhere and will not always provide good value.

I give my right hon. Friend the assurance, however, that when we resurface the road, as must inevitably be done, we shall consider using whatever quieter appropriate surfacing materials are available, which can be used without completely rebuilding the road. Porous asphalt was laid on the M4 west of Cardiff in 1996 to reduce surface water spray and ameliorate a poor wet weather accident record.

Some new proprietary products for renewing existing road surfaces can help to reduce surface water spray and traffic noise, but many of them are not yet approved for general use on trunk roads and motorways, and could not have been employed in place of the conventional materials used in the contract. All available materials will be considered when the road needs to be resurfaced at some time in the future.

As well as trying to offset the effects of the scheme by both physical and financial means, we have examined the safety issues. At the Church lane footbridge, timber fencing will be provided to the path on the eastern approach embankment. On the western side, both the steps and the alternative ramp approach have pedestrian guard railings and there is considered to be sufficient ambient lighting for use during the hours of darkness.

South Gloucestershire council has expressed concerns about a pedestrian crossing on the A403 at Church road. My right hon. Friend will be pleased to hear that a revised location has been identified for the crossing, north of the Church road junction, and that discussions will shortly be held with the council. The site chosen should allay the concerns about poor visibility of approaching vehicles for pedestrians trying to cross the A403. Clearly, we want to provide the safest facilities that we can for pedestrians.

Pilning and Severn Beach parish council has sought changes to directional signs on existing roads, for fear that otherwise heavy goods vehicles will continue to use unsuitable local roads. The signs are the responsibility of

South Gloucestershire council and Bristol city council, but we have already agreed to reimburse the reasonable costs of necessary consequential signing undertaken by those authorities, and we await their proposals.

A request has been received from South Gloucestershire council to provide a cycle track at the south side of the M4 between Redwick road and Northwick road. Although it is not part of our remit, as it would fall outside the motorway boundary, we have made provision within the works on the A403 overbridge, and by modifications to earthworks, for a future cycleway to be provided by South Gloucestershire council and local transportation groups. As my right hon. Friend said, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State would be very much in favour of such a development of cycling facilities.

We have recently discussed the issue with South Gloucestershire council, and have agreed to allow the proposed route to cross over part of the adjacent land that we acquired for the schemes. During construction of the approach roads, one bridleway was diverted over the new M4, and an equestrian bridge parapet was provided. Replacement routes have been provided for all bridleways stopped up as a result of the scheme.

In accordance with national policy, we have not provided those higher equestrian parapets on the other overbridges, which are frequented by horse riders but are not part of the bridleway network. We have, however, provided mounting blocks to assist riders. Discussions are taking place with South Gloucestershire council on its proposed alterations to a bridleway route at Awkley hill, to move it further away from the motorway, and on an addition to the bridleway route between Holm lane and Greenditch street, to provide a continuous route for horse riders in the area.

My right hon. Friend spoke about the effects of the second Severn crossing on salmon fishing in an area known as Oldbury lake, about six miles upstream from the new bridge. The Government carried out several studies prior to the construction of the second Severn crossing to determine any effects on siltation in the Severn estuary, including hydraulic model studies and bathymetric surveys, which have continued after construction.

The earlier studies predicted that the bridge would have only a local effect on flow, and that was confirmed by recent surveys. It is also considered that any effects caused by the bridge would be insignificant when compared with natural changes occurring in the estuary.

Oldbury lake is not covered by any of the studies, but it is not considered possible for the bridge to have had an effect there without having a discernible effect on the waters nearer the bridge. Oldbury lake is very close to Oldbury nuclear power station, which outfalls into the estuary, and that may be of some significance.

I am happy to say that completion of the outstanding works is progressing well, and it is expected that they will be substantially completed by Easter. Progress has been somewhat delayed by additional works resulting from the safety audit process and by extra works requested by local councils. Remedial works will continue from time to time until the end of the contract maintenance period in January 1998.

Responsibility for the side roads was formally transferred to South Gloucestershire council on 24 October 1996 for the M4 and on 11 November 1996 for the M49. There are, however, some outstanding matters to be resolved. Inevitably, a scheme on that scale creates disruptions, although we do our best to keep them to a minimum. I hope that the major problems for my right hon. Friend's constituents are at an end. I ask him to thank them for their patience and forbearance during construction—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up.

Fire Services (Essex)

1.30 pm

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): There is a crisis in the fire service in Essex. Before this debate, a local journalist asked me who I was going to blame. He misunderstood the motive for the debate. It is not to apportion blame but to identify that there is an acute problem with fire cover in Essex, and to try to point the way forward. If I make measured criticism, it is only to demonstrate that the county council's consultation process on the fire service review is deficient.

The public's expectation of what should be considered in assessing the adequacy of fire cover is not the same as that of the Home Office. Government resources are generally inadequate for England and Wales. The distribution formula needs to be revised. I believe that the Home Office is considering how it assesses fire cover and risk category. I hope that that process will be completed with greater expedition.

The existing criteria by which the Home Office judge the efficiency and adequacy of fire cover take account of property but not of lives, which are of paramount importance to all hon. Members. They assume that call-outs for fire appliances occur at convenient times. In practice, call-outs often happen simultaneously. In Essex last summer, on several occasions all fire appliances were out on call at the same time, leaving no cover for further emergencies. Fire incidents are, by nature, not routine.

The Home Office's criteria disadvantage Essex, and especially those of us in the south of Essex. Essex has a high number of road traffic accidents. It has many A roads, on which, unhappily, many accidents occur. We have a high inspection rate, which is critical in saving lives but which is not reflected in the Home Office criteria. The Lakeside shopping centre alone requires 360 inspections a year. That would be doubled if we included the whole West Thurrock retail park.

In addition to major traffic infrastructure, we have petrochemical industries all along the river. My constituency includes the QE II Dartford-Thurrock crossing. There is a major airport at Stansted, and soon the channel tunnel route will enter Essex in my constituency. The river requires extra fire cover because of riverside industries and the docks. The river also means that fire engines cannot come across the river to Southend from Kent. The borders of counties such as Sussex and Surrey allow reciprocity between counties.

I regret that Essex county council did not appeal against its standard spending assessment this year. That was a mistake. It did ask to meet the Home Office Minister, Baroness Blatch, but that request was turned down. I hope that that decision will be reviewed. I was told that the council had approached the right hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon) to seek a meeting with Essex Members but had had no response. I put that to the right hon. Gentleman yesterday, but he said that that was not correct. That is between him and the county.

In the autumn, I was approached by the county's chief executive for a meeting to discuss the crisis in the fire service. I offered him some 20 occasions for such a meeting. I followed up the offer of those dates with telephone calls and correspondence, but he was unable to arrange a meeting. Getting the fire service review documents that I have with me from the chief fire officer's representative a few weeks ago was like extracting teeth from a whale. The county council's consultation and powers of persuasion have been deficient.

In my constituency, the public consultation meeting on the fire service review was held at 5 pm. The county said that that was the borough council's choice. In response, I said that, while it should meet the borough council, the public consultation should be in addition to, not merged with, proper consultation with the borough council.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mackinlay: No.

The Fire Brigades Union has taken the initiative in protecting and promoting the fire service in Essex. We should acknowledge that it is a representative body of dedicated, skilled public servants who must deal every day with the harrowing trauma of road traffic accidents and domestic fires.

The revised SSA that the Government have awarded Essex provides sufficient cover only to meet fire service wages and pensions. That applies also to other counties, much of whose budgets go on wages and pensions. The county council's triennial review is happening at the same time as the budgetary process. I accept that the county council faces difficult choices. We were told yesterday that it was likely that there would be a further £1.5 million reduction in the fire service budget, in addition to the matters under consideration in the review. That fills me with alarm.

The review explores the possibility of closing fire stations at Rochford, Leigh—with its population of 80,000—and Canvey Island. I recognise that the hon. Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) is in his place. Corringham could lose one appliance.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Corringham fire station is in my constituency and I take a special interest. It covers the petrochemical areas of Shell Haven and Mobil on Coryton peninsula, two of the largest processing areas in Britain, which service many big oil tankers every day.

Mr. Mackinlay: The hon. Lady is correct. The nearest whole-time fire station that will have to meet the deficiencies if the closures and service reductions are enacted will be Basildon, which deals already with 3,000 call-outs a year.

I am concerned about the Purfleet Garrison estate area of my constituency. As long as 20 years ago, and certainly in the 1986 review, it was identified as an area of great concern. The Essex fire service cannot meet the attendance time recommended by the Home Office for Purfleet, being a B risk category area. The attendance time for B risk is one appliance in five minutes and two appliances in eight minutes. That time cannot be met for that critical part of my constituency. The problem cannot be abated by fire appliances from Greater London. The old reciprocity principle has long gone; local authorities decided to charge for fire services provided across county boundaries. I regret that. That means less fire cover for Purfleet and Aveley in my constituency.

The Southend conurbation, which has 20 per cent. of the county's population, has seven fire stations, three whole-time and four retained. Under the review, two stations would be closed. That would leave five stations to deal with a quarter of the county's calls. Some 44 stations will remain to deal with the rest of the county—a perverse distribution of fire cover. I do not, however, dismiss the needs of other areas of the county and I know that rural districts have special problems. I appreciate the attendance of the right hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Newton) in the Chamber for today's debate. In an ideal world, there should be full-time stations at Braintree, Stansted and Witham. We should be expanding our services, not contemplating their reduction.

I have already mentioned my constituency and the special categories and risks that exist there and elsewhere along the river front. Another cause for great concern in our county is the significant growth in the so-called modern sandwich-panel buildings that are prevalent in the food storage industry and among factories, offices and warehouses. They present unforeseen opportunities for fire spread, with its attendant loss of life.

The review documents—to which, as I said, it was difficult to gain access—show areas of residential property in my constituency that are category D. One such area in my constituency is Stifford Clays and I know there are other examples in other constituencies. In category D areas, a pump has to arrive in 20 minutes. I am worried about the situation, not just in Essex, but nationally. We put property before people. Unhappily, the overwhelming majority of deaths caused by fire occur in residential properties, not factories and offices. I hope that the Home Secretary will acknowledge the fact that standards need to be re-examined.

What needs to be done? I have acknowledged—I reiterate—that Essex county council has enormous resource problems. I could have reduced the debate to a party political slanging match—the temptation is there, as we are now in an election period—but it would not be productive or useful for the people of Essex; nor would it advance the matter that I wish to bring to the attention of the House: the immediate crisis in fire cover in Essex.

I recognise that there is a problem with resources and that the county council has to weigh the fire services against other services such as social services and education. However, the council needs to reflect. The review—the consultation process—has been deficient; the council has been conducting it at the same time as it has been considering its budget. We have been told that there is likely to be a significant reduction in moneys for fire services as a result of the budget. As a consequence, there should be a moratorium in the review; the council must stop and consider the matter more critically.

The Home Office should recognise that Essex is an unusual county of great diversity, with a growing population. In the period up to 2001, my borough alone will have increased its population by 10,000 in 10 years. It is part of the Thames gateway—a welcome Government initiative, supported by the Opposition, designed to bring new industries, employment and residential properties to that part of south-east England. The river itself presents enormous difficulties in terms of fire cover. I hope that the Home Office will be prepared to reconsider those matters.

If my pleadings this morning do not bring a halt to the threatened cuts and if either the budget cuts or the review result in the county council making an application to the Home Secretary under section 19 to permit a reduction in personnel, appliances or the closure of stations, I ask the Minister to hold a public inquiry. He is entitled to do so under section 19(8), and if a public inquiry is held, many of the matters that I have mentioned can be amplified and those issues that I have been unable to raise owing to lack of time can be explored in full.

That would allow the county council to have a fair day in court; it would also allow everyone interested in this important public service, as well as the representative organisations, particularly the Fire Brigades Union, to state their case. It would enable the Home Office to understand the special nature of the county of Essex, which is not reflected in its standard spending assessments or in the resources available for its important public services.

1.44 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), who made a most responsible speech, for allowing me two minutes to speak in his debate. I shall offer him the same facility next week when I have an Adjournment debate.

The Government should appreciate that, while local Members of Parliament are always shouting about local problems, in this case there is a widespread belief among hon. Members of all parties in south Essex that the closures proposed in the document presented to Essex county council are unacceptable on safety grounds. They are based on the principle of vehicles moving at 30 miles an hour. As a local resident in Southend, I know that, when travelling from Southend to Rochford—where it is proposed to close a fire station—it is impossible to move at 30 miles an hour in the busy period. In fact, it is difficult to travel at two miles an hour. All our stations face more calls and have more, not fewer, buildings to cover. We have special problems in the Southend area, with a number of houses in multiple occupation, a hospital and an airport.

We must also accept that Essex faces major problems. The report identified the need for extra facilities at Stansted national airport. The council is already overstretched as it already spends £5 million more per year than it should on its fire service. Despite that, the efficiency review showed it to be extremely efficient.

As the hon. Member for Thurrock said, it is vital not to apportion blame. It would be possible to blame each party in different ways, but the crucial point is to find a solution. I hope that Essex county council will formally declare that it is withdrawing its proposals so that Members of Parliament can, on its behalf, seek meetings with Ministers to discuss a number of issues. I hope that the Minister will accept that, if Essex were to withdraw its proposals and make it clear that it will not proceed, we could have discussions on a number of matters.

Mrs. Gorman: Is not the amount of money in question barely £1.5 million? As that compares with Essex council's current reserves of £21 million, should it not be well within its capacity to find that money? Will my hon. Friend address that point?

Sir Teddy Taylor: Most certainly. Those are issues that we could discuss. On Monday, the Minister of State

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

made it clear that, as long as the county could prove that it had a good case for overspending its capping limits, it would be considered.

National airports are more than a responsibility for a local council. I hope that that issue will be considered.

Another question is whether, despite the generous settlements that the Government have given counties over the country as a whole, there is a need for additional provision to be made for fire services.

I hope that the Government will accept that Members of Parliament in south Essex are genuinely concerned about safety. They hope that a solution can be found in commonsense negotiations and consultations. They hope that the Government will accept that hon. Members from all parties have a genuine desire to find a solution to this serious and urgent problem.

1.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Tom Sackville): I congratulate the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) on securing the Adjournment debate, and I welcome other hon. Members to a debate of great concern to Essex Members. I particularly welcome the Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons, my right hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Newton).

We have good reason to be proud of the fire service in this country. Surveys have consistently shown that the service is held in great esteem by both the general public and individuals who need its assistance. It was commended in 1995 by the Audit Commission in a major value-for-money study on its very high levels of skill and assistance.

In a report last April, the commission noted that, in respect of the performance of fire brigades in the year 1994-95,

"the fire service maintained its outstanding performance in meeting national standards for attending fire calls on 95 per cent. of occasions".

In that respect, Essex is one of the best performing brigades. In the year 1994–95, it performed better than average in meeting required response times to fire calls—its response rate was 96 per cent. The Audit Commission will soon produce audited figures for 1995–96, and it will be interesting to see whether Essex has managed to maintain that high standard.

Statutory responsibility for the provision of an efficient fire service rests with individual fire authorities. Those authorities necessarily review their fire cover arrangements periodically to keep them up to date. The Essex fire brigade recently had an extensive review of fire cover, the results of which were recently circulated for public comment. As several hon. Members have already said, the report proposes a major redistribution of resources, including the closure of two stations, a change in the status of others, and an improvement in the fire cover in other parts of the county. I fully appreciate that those changes will cause concern to some hon. Members.

Under section 19 of the Fire Services Act 1947, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary's approval is required if a fire authority wants to reduce the number of its fire stations, fire appliances and firefighting posts. He has a specific and limited role in considering applications under section 19. He grants approval when certain conditions are satisfied.

First, the proposals must have been sufficiently widely publicised, in sufficient detail, and with adequate time to enable any interested party to make representations. Secondly, the representations must have been considered by the fire authority. Thirdly, after taking advice from Her Majesty's inspectorate of fire services, the Secretary of State must be satisfied that the national recommended standards of fire cover will be maintained.

In the event of a section 19 application being made, my right hon. and learned Friend will also take into account any representations made direct to him, including those from hon. Members, firefighters and the communities affected. To date, we have not received a section 19 application from Essex county council following its fire cover review. I assure the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) and my right hon. and hon. Friends that should the county council make such an application, my right hon. and learned Friend will, in reaching his decision, take account of the representations that he receives, including those made in the debate.

Dr. Spink: Will my hon. Friend revisit the debate that I secured on 18 December, when I asked that the Home Office deal with those problems? He will see from reading the report of that debate that Canvey Island is a special case. Although I am sure that all hon. Members would claim that for their patch, I am sure that they would agree that that is true for Canvey Island.

Despite the fact that the public consultation undertaken by Essex county council was totally against the cuts, and despite requests from me and other hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), for the council to reconsider this matter using a more appropriate set of assumptions, including average speed of vehicles, it has extended the consultation period by two months, which will put this decision beyond the 1 May elections. Does not the Minister find that curious? Does it not show that Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors are running scared on this issue?

Mr. Sackville: I hear what my hon. Friend says, but this should not be a matter for party political debate. We are discussing whether, on advice from the inspectorate, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary believes that fire cover is being maintained. I hope that the county council will hear what my hon. Friend said, and will take his remarks seriously. There should not be a delay, but there should be cool and detailed consideration of where best to use the resources to ensure that every part of the county is properly covered.

I should say something about the national recommended standards of fire cover, about which the hon. Member for Thurrock has doubts. The Fire Services Act 1947 does not define the test of an effective and efficient fire service that a fire authority must provide. However, it is long-standing practice to interpret that by reference to the national standards, which dictate the initial response to a fire in terms of weight and speed of attack. They rest on four main standards of service, according to the risk category in which an area has been placed. That system of risk is based on the characteristics of the buildings and property in an area, and assumes for each category that a predetermined number of firefighting appliances should attend within a certain time.

The standards are not just nationally recommended: they are nationally agreed in the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council. They were extensively reviewed in 1985 by the joint committee on standards of fire cover for the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council. The standards enable all concerned to know where they stand as regards the minimum level of service that they should deliver. We believe that those standards have served the country well.

Mr. Mackinlay: The standards have served us well, but they do not take account of modern shopping malls, such as Lakeside. Things have moved on, and it is time for those standards to be reviewed.

Mr. Sackville: I shall deal with the hon. Gentleman's point later.

We believe that the standards have served us well, but that is not to say that we regard them as entirely unchangeable. The Audit Commission's report recommended that there should be another fundamental review of the levels of fire cover, but recognised that no fundamental change could be considered without the most careful research. A review of fire cover standards is being taken forward by the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council, but these issues are complex and much work will be required. In the meantime, any section 19 application will be judged according to existing standards.

Many people are concerned about the level of resources available for the fire service. We still expect the fire service to make efficiency savings, as in every other public service: it is vital that the taxpayer receives best value for money. However, the Government have shown their commitment to the fire service by confirming that we shall increase the fire service element of the standard spending assessment in England for the coming financial year by £50 million, which is more than 4 per cent. I believe that that is a satisfactory settlement. I also point out that Essex will receive an uplift of 4.7 per cent. in its SSA.

I appreciate that Essex spends over the SSA, which is its right. In case anyone is under any illusions, I point out that the cost of the fire service in Essex represents about 4 per cent. of its total base budget. The fire budget in the current year is £39.35 million, against an overall budget of £976.7 million. It is within the county council's gift to review its priorities and to make further funds available if it has doubts about whether the fire cover is being maintained.

I assure the House that everything that has been said today about the particular problems of Essex—whether they relate to Canvey Island, the extent of river industrial frontage, the number of A roads or cover for an airport with international flights—will be heard by the county council, the chief fire officer and the inspectorate. I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman's comments will be taken fully into account in any future decisions.

It being two minutes to Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

Glasgow (Funding)

1. **Mr. Davidson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he intends to meet Glasgow city council to discuss the allocation of public funds to the city. [12880]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Kynoch): I have offered to meet a delegation of hon. Members from Glasgow and representatives of the council next week.

Mr. Davidson: Are the Minister and his colleagues aware of the widespread view in Glasgow that the Government are deliberately discriminating against the city, not only in terms of the money given to local authorities but in terms of money for the health board, the development agency, Scottish Homes and other organisations? Will he agree next week to give Glasgow the resources that it needs?

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman is very brave to come here and talk about Glasgow at all, in the light of the article in today's Glasgow *Evening Times* about the civil war that seems to be going on in the Labour party there.

As I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows, central Government funds are distributed according to a formula drawn up by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Scottish Office and the distribution committee. I understand that COSLA is perfectly satisfied with the distribution procedure—although I gather that the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) has proposed an independent review of it. Given that COSLA is largely the Labour party, is this yet another split in the Labour party in Scotland?

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my hon. Friend agree that, since 1979, per capita spending by all Government agencies and Departments in Glasgow has far exceeded the amount spent in North Tayside? When we hear complaints from those in Glasgow—especially after the rows and ructions that have been going on there, and the spending of money on limousines rather than vehicles intended to transport people—we ask whether it is not time that we told them to shut up.

Mr. Kynoch: I understand what my hon. Friend is saying. He is referring to a report in yesterday's *Evening Times*, which mentioned the £810,000 that had been spent on some 28 limousines, one of which was a Rolls-Royce for the Lord Provost of Glasgow. The people of Glasgow have a perfect right to question the priorities given to expenditure in their city—which, as my hon. Friend pointed out, is significantly greater than expenditure in many other parts of Scotland, and very much greater than expenditure per head south of the border.

Mrs. Fyfe: Will the Minister not admit that the Government's record on spending public money is a disgrace? No council in Britain comes anywhere near it. How does the Minister explain the apportionment of Glasgow's share of urban programme funding, which is grossly unfair to those in the city?

Mr. Kynoch: Yet again, we have heard a reference to distribution. I have already covered the distribution of local government funds; as for urban funding, perhaps the hon. Lady should visit some other parts of Scotland, where people think the exact opposite—that Glasgow has received more than its fair share over the years.

Mr. Stewart: Has my hon. Friend read the whole of today's *Evening Times* article? In particular, has he seen the headline "Give us a trip and we'll vote for you", which refers to Labour councillors in Glasgow? Given that appalling state of affairs—given that Glasgow receives 80 per cent. more Government grant per capita than the English average, and the administration is descending into chaos—is there not a case for suspending that administration and putting in commissioners?

Mr. Kynoch: I shall not comment on allegations that are reported in the Glasgow *Evening Times*. Like my hon. Friend, I read that article, and I suggest that, if there are such allegations, they could be referred to Lord Nolan, who I am sure would be particularly interested. Local elected representatives have a responsibility to their electorate, and the people of Glasgow should expect no less of their councillors than anyone else.

Mr. George Robertson: Could we hear a little less humbug from Ministers, the arch-priests of waste who lost £1 billion of taxpayers' money on the poll tax? Less preaching would be much appreciated in Scotland.

When the Minister meets Glasgow city council next week, why does not he tell it that he will abandon this wasteful nursery voucher scheme and give it and other local authorities the money that is being spent on the scheme? He should also cancel the incredible advertising campaign, which is pure party propaganda and is grossly improper before a general election. It is funding the Tory party's campaign on vouchers. He should use that money for the provision of proper nursery education, which the people of Scotland want and the children of Scotland need.

Mr. Kynoch: I noticed that the Opposition Chief Whip had his eyes closed during that contribution. I am not surprised, because the hon. Gentleman has a bit of a cheek. Unfortunately, he believes in removing choice from the people of Scotland. If he talked to people in one of the pilot areas, such as Eastwood, which is close to Glasgow—the city that we are discussing—he would discover what a successful scheme it has been and that it has had a high take-up. It is right and proper that people in the rest of Scotland should be able to enjoy such a scheme so that they can give their four-year-old children nursery education.

Of course, the hon. Gentleman is in a remarkable fix because he is tied by the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) and is clearly not able to offer an alternative. Nursery vouchers are good for Scotland, and that has been proved already.

Health Spending

2. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the level of health spending per head in Scotland relative to that elsewhere in the United Kingdom. [12881]

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): Next year, we are planning to spend £883 per head in Scotland—£153 more than in England.

Mr. Congdon: If there were a Scottish Parliament, how could I justify the significant extra amount that is spent on health in Scotland to my constituents in Croydon when I would have no vote on Scottish health matters or funding?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: First, higher spending on health is justified at present because, for a variety of reasons, health spending need is greater. People who live in Scotland have a higher incidence of heart disease and cancer, and there is a greater need for dental treatment. However, my hon. Friend makes a valid point. Members of Parliament are traditionally reluctant to vote funds if they have no say over how they should be spent. A further tax-raising parliament would inevitably raise questions about the size of the Scottish block and, frankly, it is a gamble that we Conservatives are not prepared to take.

Mr. Donohoe: Is it possible that the additional expenditure on health in Scotland is to line the pockets of the private sector? In my constituency, most geriatric beds are being transferred to the private sector, where excess profits are being made. Is that not another example to show that the national health service is not safe in Tory hands?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No. Whether a person remains in hospital is a matter for clinical decision, and that is where it should remain. It is not a matter for political decision. The recent Tayside inspector's report made it absolutely clear that for comparable care there could have been huge savings—well in excess of £2 million or £3 million—if the private sector had been used more.

Sir Hector Monro: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give some idea of capital expenditure on the health service in Scotland during the past five years? Will he reaffirm our commitment to spend more on the health service year on year? Does he not find it astounding that the Labour party cannot give the same assurance?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have given a commitment to increase spending for the health service year on year in real terms—a commitment that the Labour party has failed to match. In Scotland, net expenditure in 1997–98 is planned to be £4.375 billion, an increase of £148 million—or 3.5 per cent.—over the 1996–97 expected outturn. If we had adopted the Opposition's line on local government finance, less would have gone to the NHS.

Borders Health Board

3. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the level of additional resources to be made available to Borders health board for the year 1997–98 relative to the average level in Scotland. [12883]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Because we have made health a priority, Borders health board received an extra £3.3 million, which is a 3.7 per cent. increase and above the national average increase of 3.5 per cent. Had we given those funds to local government, again health interests in the Borders would have received less.

Mr. Kirkwood: I am grateful to the Minister for that answer, but, leaving capital aside and considering recurrent and non-recurrent expenditure, does he accept that the settlement for the Borders health board region next year is the lowest of any health board region in Scotland? Is he aware that, on Monday, the Secretary of State for Scotland came to Selkirk and tried to argue that local people should thole a massive shortfall in local authority funding on the ground that he was giving increased priority to health in Scotland?

According to my figures, when we consider recurrent and non-recurrent expenditure, the increase is 2.55 per cent. That is the lowest increase in mainland Scotland. Will the Minister consider the matter, review the settlement and give a personal guarantee that, if there is any suggestion that patient care could be prejudiced in the next financial year, he will make good any shortfall and do away with this ministerial mean-mindedness with regard to public service provision in south-east Scotland?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Borders health board received an allocation above the national average. Hospital and community health services in Borders will receive some £69 million recurrent expenditure and £1 million non-recurrent expenditure next year. The £1 million is less than 2 per cent. of the hospital and community health services allocation for 1997–98, but it is important that the non-recurrent element can be used for restructuring and investments to boost services in future. We are committed to continuing all allocations to health boards by a fair population-based formula. I repeat the commitment that I have given the House: we are determined to increase spending for the NHS in real terms year by year—a commitment that has not been matched by Her Majesty's Opposition.

Mr. Gallie: Will my right hon. and learned Friend assure the House that Borders is not the only region where increases have taken place? In south Scotland—in Ayrshire—has not expenditure on health care gone through the roof? It is well above the 50 per cent. real terms increase per head over recent times—

Madam Speaker: Order. I must caution the hon. Gentleman that we were in the Borders; I am sure that the Minister will reply appropriately about the Borders.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Just as a substantial allocation has been made for Borders, so the allocation

throughout Scotland has been made on the basis of fairness. We will ensure that all parts of Scotland are properly catered for.

Madam Speaker: Back to the Borders with Sir David Steel.

Sir David Steel: Will the Minister take note of the fact that, when my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) visited the Borders general hospital during the Christmas recess, he found that acute beds were being blocked by elderly people who should be cared for in the community or in nursing homes? That problem is caused by the lack of financial resources both to the health board and to the local authority. It cannot be in patients' interests. Will the Minister undertake to examine the problem?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The total increase in social work grant-aided expenditure for Borders is 8.3 per cent., but if the right hon. Gentleman's recommendations for enormous increases to local government expenditure were implemented, there would be substantially less for health. We have given top priority to the NHS. That is our commitment. It will remain our commitment, and it will generally be supported by the electorate.

Electricity Interconnector

4. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his discussions with Scottish Power about the electricity interconnector with Northern Ireland. [12884]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend is considering representations received and, once he has done so, will announce his decision.

Mr. Home Robertson: Does the Minister realise that the Secretary of State's interference in this affair could add £28 million to the project's cost and cause impossible technical problems? In short, he could scupper—he could sabotage—the whole interconnector project. Given the great importance to the economies of Scotland and Northern Ireland of establishing an interconnector between the electricity systems on each side of the Irish sea, will he stop playing local politics with this important issue and uphold the outcome of the public inquiries on each side of the Irish sea?

Mr. Kynoch: I know that the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has to consider all representations made to him on the issue. This afternoon, the hon. Gentleman has once again disclosed the significant split between Labour Members, in that the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) was shaking his head the whole time the hon. Gentleman was asking his question. My right hon. Friend will seriously consider all representations; when he has done, that he will make his announcement.

Mr. Beggs: Can the Minister confirm that Scottish Power took account of all representations—including those made by the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes)—and that the re-routing has been done to appease environmentalists and to satisfy the justifiable need to protect fishing grounds? Will he accept that, if the project is not approved and the public inquiry's finding is not upheld, the Secretary of State will bear responsibility for sabotaging the link between Scotland and Northern Ireland, and for imposing a huge burden on electricity consumers in Northern Ireland? Will he therefore further consult the Department of Economic Development in Northern Ireland before making a final decision?

Mr. Kynoch: As I have said, my right hon. Friend listens to all representations. I know that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues have a great interest in the matter. Indeed, the Secretary of State has received a letter about it from the hon. Gentleman, and has already agreed to meet him and a small delegation of his colleagues at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Eric Clarke: Is the Minister aware that the interconnector will burn the equivalent of 600,000 tonnes of coal? Is he further aware that the coal used by Cockenzie power station comes from Monktonhall; and that Scottish Office Ministers were involved in encouraging Waverley Mining to invest in that mine? The company has spent £15 million on new machinery, so jobs in my constituency and in East Lothian will clearly be under threat if the project does not go ahead.

Mr. Kynoch: I am well aware of that. I should point out that my right hon. Friend has said that he is minded to approve the interconnector, subject to four sections of it being undergrounded. It is on that aspect that he has sought further advice from the interested parties; but the matters to which the hon. Gentleman refers are commercial. They are therefore for the companies concerned, not for my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Trimble: Perhaps the Minister will remind his right hon. Friend that the crucial question is whether the interconnector will go ahead; if the undergrounding that the Secretary of State is considering is required, it is probable that the interconnector will not go ahead. It thus comes down to considering whether the project is to go ahead. Will he remind the Secretary of State that he must, in his deliberations, rise above purely local considerations and think about the national interest? He is one of Her Majesty's Secretaries of State: he must consider the national interest.

The interconnector is vital to the economy of Northern Ireland, which has to bear electricity costs 15 per cent. higher than anywhere else in the United Kingdom. The interconnector might help to reduce those costs. There are therefore larger considerations to be borne in mind.

Mr. Kynoch: As I told the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs), we are well aware of the significant interest in Northern Ireland in the project, but I know that my right hon. Friend is considering all representations. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not expect him to reach a conclusion before giving serious consideration to all aspects. He is doing that; he will do that; and when he is ready he will make an announcement.

Health and Community Care (Highlands)

5. **Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his funding projections for health and community care in the highlands for (a) 1996–97 and (b) 1997–98. [12885]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Highland health board's 1997-98 initial revenue allocation is £138 million, which reflects a 5.6 per cent. increase in the board's basic allocation over 1996-97. The local authority grant-aided expenditure allowances to Highland council for its community care responsibilities are £24.5 million in the current year, rising to £26.6 million in 1997–98.

Mr. Kennedy: I thank the Minister for those figures. Will he acknowledge that, in the highlands, as elsewhere in Scotland, a mixed economy of provision, particularly in care of the elderly, will remain essential? Against a difficult financial backdrop, particularly in the local authority's social work department, a major consultation exercise is now under way, and public provision of care of the elderly faces a very uncertain future. There is uncertainty at such facilities as Urray house, in Muir of Ord, as there is at other facilities in the constituencies of my hon. Friends the Members for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) and for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston).

Does the Minister realise that local authorities are being put in an impossible position trying to maintain the level of public provision for care of the elderly, because they have simply not been given adequate resources by the Scottish Office?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The settlement includes provision to increase the community care allowance by £2.1 million in the highlands, which is an 8.6 per cent. increase. I am of course aware that Highland council is currently consulting local interests as part of a comprehensive review of future arrangements for the care of elderly people in the highlands. I must repeat that, if the hon. Gentleman had his way and we were to give much more funding to local government, funding through the health service would be considerably less.

Mr. Maclennan: Against the background of Highland council contemplating closure of residential care for the elderly in at least four places and a reduction of care in others, will the Minister very carefully consider the feasibility study that the Highland health board has proposed for Sutherland? Such a study might carry the implication of closing the excellent Migdale hospital, which is providing care for the elderly and psycho-geriatric cases, and post-operative and respite care. That health service provision is absolutely necessary if there is to be close co-operation between authorities in providing care for the elderly in Sutherland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Requests for hospital closures must be cleared by us, and we would consider any such request very carefully before giving approval. However, I shall look into the case and the feasibility study mentioned by the hon. Gentleman.

Public Expenditure Settlement

6. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received about the public expenditure settlement for his Department for the financial year 1997–98; and if he will make a statement. [12886]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): The public expenditure settlement is a good deal for Scotland. We have given priority to education, law and order, health and jobs.

Mr. Luff: Does my right hon. Friend understand that it is relatively easy for me to justify that good deal for Scotland to my constituents in Worcestershire so long as the Parliament of the United Kingdom retains control over that expenditure? Does he understand that it would be a great deal more difficult for me to pursue that justification with the creation of a Scottish Parliament that controlled expenditure with their own tax-raising powers, particularly if Scottish Members were still able to come here to vote on English expenditure?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with my hon. Friend, because he is quite right. Local government expenditure in Scotland, for example, is almost £2 billion over and above the per head proportion in England. On health, the extra is £1 billion. From Scotland's point of view, having a Secretary of State in Cabinet and Members of Parliament from Scottish constituencies—who have the same status and role as hon. Members from other constituencies—undoubtedly helps us to secure a good deal for Scotland, which Labour would squander for the sake of party political advantage.

Mr. Galloway: That depends on whether the Secretary of State is Scotland's man in the Cabinet or the Cabinet's man in Scotland. Does he have any understanding of how that "good deal for Scotland" looks on the streets of Glasgow to the 30,000 people who demonstrated there a week last Saturday? It looks like another dismal round of school closures, wind and rain coming through houses that cannot be repaired, day care centres being shut and a further spiral downward in the standard of public services in Glasgow, which is already beset by poverty and mass unemployment.

The "good deal for Scotland" that the right hon. Gentleman trumpets means more despair, more homelessness and more joblessness in the city of Glasgow. When he meets representatives of the city council next week, will he take account of the fact that everyone in Scotland—bar him and the motley crew that sit beside him on the Treasury Bench—know that Glasgow is a special case with special problems? Will he do something to help what was the second city of the Empire?

Mr. Forsyth: If I am Scotland's man in the Cabinet, the hon. Gentleman is Labour's man in Libya. Perhaps if he spent a little more time in Glasgow and a little less time elsewhere, he would know what was happening.

As for overall local government finance, I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has been reading the speeches made by the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), who has made it

perfectly clear that a Labour Government would not increase local government expenditure in Scotland. My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) raised the issue of how Labour would put at risk the funding that we have because it would leave us impotent to argue our case at Westminster where Scotland's budget would be determined. That is the matter that the hon. Gentleman should address.

Sir Hector Monro: Were my right hon. Friend to allow local authorities to spend more money without there being an increase in income tax, surely he would have to scrap the business rate and increase other taxation or levy a tartan tax. Does he agree that the Labour party's proposals would inevitably lead to an increase in taxation in Scotland?

Mr. Forsyth: I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend. The Labour party's agenda is perfectly clear: it is to allow councils to put up the business rate. On the basis of the limited concession announced by the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), that would have meant the business rate in Glasgow going up by 20 per cent. last year, which would have destroyed jobs and businesses there.

My right hon. Friend is also right to point to the so-called independent review of local government finance which is concerned with inventing new taxes. Indeed, in Edinburgh the Labour leader suggested a bed, or tourist, tax. Labour would therefore introduce a trade tax, a tartan tax and a tourist tax, all of which would destroy jobs and Scotland's competitiveness.

Mr. Wallace: The Secretary of State has committed himself to £860,000 of expenditure to advertise nursery vouchers. Given the number of parents at whom it will be directed in Scotland, as compared to England, how does he explain—especially in the run-up to an election—why it costs so much more pro rata to run the campaign in Scotland? What answer will he give to the parents who see the £1,100 voucher waved before their eyes but who will find no outlet at which to cash it?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman calls himself a Liberal; for a Liberal to stand up in the Chamber and denounce a scheme that will allow parents to choose the provision for their children says a great deal about what has happened to the Liberal party in Scotland. As for the success of the scheme, why does not the hon. Gentleman take up the invitation issued by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), who asked him to come and see the success of the pilot scheme? Ninety-seven per cent. of parents have taken up the vouchers, and more places are being provided by the private sector, but where is the biggest increase in the number of nursery places being provided as a result of the voucher system? In local government, which is able to take advantage of the extra resources that we are making available for children.

On the cost of advertising, I am not responsible for the rates charged by the media in Scotland; I am responsible for ensuring that parents know what the Government are offering, and I hope that everyone in Scotland will know that the Liberal party wishes to take it away.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: It is all very well to attack Glasgow, but it spends money on providing services such as home help. Home helps are the unsung heroes in our communities, and cuts will mean that the elderly and disabled will be denied the services they need, which, in turn, will mean more pressure on carers. Will the Secretary of State face the fact that Glasgow is indeed a special case? It provides work not only for the people who live in the city, but for those in areas such as Eastwood where the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) comes from. Is it not a fact that the Secretary of State's cuts will mean unemployment throughout the west of Scotland?

Mr. Forsyth: There have been no cuts in Glasgow. Glasgow has had an increase in its spending. The hon. Gentleman talks about cutting back on home helps. Why does he not read the Glasgow *Evening Times*—not a newspaper that I regard as particularly favourable to the Government—and its examples of waste in Glasgow? It cites the fleets of limousines and the £500,000 that was to be spent on celebrating the centenary of the Scottish Trades Union Congress, pouring red dye into the Clyde. Those are not the priorities of people who put services first. The hon. Gentleman should have a word with his colleagues who are responsible for Glasgow. They are now fighting among themselves like ferrets in a sack instead of looking after the interests of the people they were elected to serve.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will my right hon. Friend suggest to the Chancellor of the Exchequer that a good wheeze to raise more taxes would be to say that we shall not put up income tax for anybody in the United Kingdom Parliament, but take an extra 3p on income tax in a Scottish Parliament? Would that not be one way for the Labour party to bamboozle the people of Scotland, to get votes up there without telling people that they are about to get a 3p increase on their income tax?

Mr. Forsyth: I am not sure whether my hon. Friend is aware that some people in England will have to pay the tartan tax—people on the payrolls of Scottish companies. That is another reason why the tartan tax would be damaging to Scotland's interests.

Mr. Salmond: I commiserate with the Secretary of State on the demise of his argument that Scotland is a subsidised nation. Has not the admission by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 13 January that Scotland has generated an absolute surplus of £27 billion since 1979 blown a black hole in the Secretary of State's argument, particularly given the Scottish Office's assumption that there will be another £12.5 billion over the next five years? Is not the reality that the subsidy junkies in the United Kingdom sit on the green Benches behind the Secretary of State—people who are so anxious to hang on to Scotland that they turn up here on a monthly basis and ask foolish planted questions?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman lives in a dream world of his own. I set out the position clearly on the extraordinary paste-up job he did on the answers given by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary. I clearly pointed out that Scotland would have a substantial £6.1 billion deficit. The hon. Gentleman goes around Scotland promising everything to everyone, but has no means by which to deliver his promises. With his slogan,

"Independence in Europe", the hon. Gentleman, more than any other hon. Member, would surrender most of Scotland's sovereignty to Brussels. That is the reality. The people of Scotland will not vote for people such as him, who want to give their country away.

Mr. Norman Hogg: When the Secretary of State has calmed down and recovered his equilibrium, will he tell the House whether he is satisfied with the decision of his Minister of State to spend £150 million driving a motorway through the urban area of my constituency? Is he aware that the decision has been met with widespread disapproval in Cumbernauld and Kilsyth? In those circumstances, and having regard to the fact that not a single elected member of North Lanarkshire council or the previous authorities—Strathclyde regional council and Cumbernauld and Kilsyth district council—favoured that option, will he call a public inquiry?

Mr. Forsyth: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will fight strongly for his constituents. I understand that such a major project will cause concern and difficulties wherever it is sited. There were two possible lines of route, as the hon. Gentleman knows. I imagine that the relief in one area will be matched by disappointment in another. We had to take a decision in the national interest of Scotland. Of course I shall be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss any particular concerns of his.

Legislation

7. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many pages of legislation have been passed in each of the last three years; and how many pages have been repealed in the same period. [12887]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Raymond S. Robertson): There have been six pieces of Government primary Scottish legislation and 977 instruments passed in the past three years; no central record of the number of repeals is held.

Mr. Steen: Although the Government's deregulation initiative is going very well, is my hon. Friend aware that, since 1970, 220,000 pages of additional law have been added to the statute book? As a Scottish Minister, will he take the lead and, in addition to the qualitative test of debating measures on the Floor of the House, introduce a quantitative test whereby, when any new Scottish law is introduced, the identical amount of legislation is repealed, so that a balance is achieved and no additional laws are added to the statute book without the repeal of others at the same time?

Mr. Robertson: It is right that my hon. Friend maintains pressure on all Departments, including the Scottish Office. As we have heard, he has great style. However, as he is aware, the Government have passed 44 deregulation orders resulting in savings of more than £100 million per annum. Last year alone, 228 statutory instruments were passed; 105 produced savings for business by repealing some 500 existing regulations.

Mr. McAllion: Does the Minister recall that there was no greater supporter of the legislation to impose the poll tax on Scotland and the rest of Britain than the current Secretary of State for Scotland? That legislation was repealed within five years and cost the taxpayer £14 billion. Does the Minister also recall that the Secretary of State for Scotland wasted months of legislative time in Scottish Standing Committees forcing through measures in respect of opted-out schools in Scotland—legislation that has been ignored? Does he recall that the Government imposed local government reorganisation on Scotland, creating the crisis in Scottish councils today? The measures were unwanted, expensive, unnecessary and wasteful. If I had a pound for every wasteful piece of legislation passed through the House, I would not have to buy a ticket for the national lottery tonight.

Mr. Robertson: I hope that the hon. Gentleman takes the same venom and passion to Scottish local authorities and encourages them, in the same way he has berated me, to collect the outstanding £750 million in uncollected poll tax and council tax.

Mr. Cash: Does my hon. Friend accept that many of the increasing number of pages and volumes of legislation being generated throughout the United Kingdom and particularly in Scotland come from the European Commission and the European Union and, furthermore, that the policies pursued by the Scottish nationalists and the Scottish Labour party giving in to federalism in Europe will increase that volume of legislation and place a terrible burden on the Scottish people?

Mr. Robertson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Opposition parties seek, each in its own way, to sell Scotland short and to sell Scotland out to the bureaucrats in Brussels. My hon. Friend will be pleased that we have succeeded in getting the Commission to look at ways of cutting the burdens placed on business by the single market legislation.

Mr. Watson: Are not the past 18 years important—not the past three years of legislation—during which the Government have attacked the unemployed, the homeless, local authorities and trade unions in Scotland? Is it not a matter of having a general election within weeks rather than months, so that a Labour Government can begin to repeal some of that legislation and introduce a Scotland Bill so that, for the first time in hundreds of years, the people of Scotland can have a say in their destiny? Finally, is it not the case that the one thing that the Government have passed, on which everyone will agree, is their sell-by date?

Mr. Robertson: The Scotland that the hon. Gentleman describes would not be recognised by anyone who lives or works in Scotland. In reality, Scotland is prospering and booming, and the quality of life there is second to none. It is not worth a Scotland Bill from the Labour party.

Mr. George Robertson: I hope that the Minister will accept that there is one piece of legislation that both sides of the House want to get through Parliament before the general election—the Firearms (Amendment) Bill, which will tighten up the law on handguns. Will he join me in condemning the action of unelected hereditary peers who seek to dilute, weaken and sabotage the Bill, which has

the backing of the overwhelming majority of hon. Members? As the Opposition will offer the Government our full support in their confrontation with the upper House, can the Minister reassure us that this valuable and valued measure will be on the statute book before the general election and that the 200,000 handguns in Britain will be taken out of circulation?

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: As the hon. Gentleman will know, Labour peers voted both for and against in the Divisions. He should therefore watch before he casts accusations across the Dispatch Box. He knows that we have presented a Bill in both Houses of Parliament. We have pledged to deliver on that Bill, and we shall do so.

Local Government Finance

8. **Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to discuss local government finance. [12888]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I met COSLA on 17 January and I am looking forward to meeting it again on 4 July.

Mr. Welsh: If only that could also be independence day for Scotland.

As local authorities face their greatest ever financial crisis, the Government claim that Scotland receives a per head of population subsidy for local services. Has the Secretary of State read the COSLA report that demolishes that Tory subsidy myth? Will he take the opportunity to refute line by line the COSLA report or cease the Tory anti-Scottish propaganda that he is pumping out?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman is confused. The Pieda report to which he refers is about jobs. He ought to know that we have commissioned an independent study by Coopers and Lybrand and Pieda which will set out where the extra money is going in local government. I think that he will be surprised when he sees the result.

Mr. Maxton: Is the Secretary of State aware that we are told not only by elected councillors in Glasgow but by every official from the chief executive to the director of finance, right down across the whole board of the council's chief officials, that Glasgow is facing the greatest crisis in its existence? Why does he keep pretending that there is no crisis? Is he accusing them of telling lies? Whom should the people of Scotland and Glasgow believe—him or the officials?

Mr. Forsyth: If the hon. Gentleman does not believe me, he should believe the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), who I believe is the shadow Chancellor. He made it absolutely clear that a Labour Government would not give a cent more to the public expenditure plans that we have provided. If the hon. Gentleman feels that Glasgow is not getting its share of the pot, he should have a word with the Labour chairman of COSLA and leader of Edinburgh council, Mr. Keith Geddes, who has indicated that the distribution formula is fair and correct. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman should have a word with the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), who appeared to say along with the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) that he thought that the formula for Glasgow was wrong, but is now saying that it is not.

Mr. George Robertson *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman appeared to be saying that from a sedentary position. The Labour party should get its act together; then it might be in a position to give a coherent view on what it would like to happen.

The Government have set forward their proposals. We have been fair by Glasgow, including last year, when I gave it an extra £15 million to find time to make the necessary adjustments—time which has been squandered by the Labour administration.

Mrs. Ray Michie: The Secretary of State will be aware of the £8.5 million cuts which are facing Argyll and Bute council, because I wrote to him to ask him for a meeting on the matter, which he unfortunately declined. Is it not unrealistic to expect COSLA and the distribution committee to agree to take money from other councils so that Argyll and Bute can qualify for the special islands needs allowance? Does not the ultimate responsibility for funding and helping Argyll and Bute lie with him? We really must stop going around and around in circles and buck passing. Will the Secretary of State take that on board today?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Lady is normally very courteous. She has written asking for a meeting and my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Local Government has agreed to see her next Wednesday. She really does have to tell the whole story and not half the story. It is certainly true that Argyll and Bute would like to increase its expenditure substantially, although it has had extra cash. As she knows, I have some sympathy with her about the special islands needs allowance settlement. The position of COSLA is that Argyll is not justified in having it. Given the number of islands in Argyll, I agree with her that, on the face of it, that seems rather extraordinary. I am very happy for that to be considered in the distribution committee and agreed by COSLA.

We simply cannot have COSLA, which is dominated by the Labour party, saying that it speaks for the whole of local government and agreeing an arrangement with the Government, followed by the various constituent parts of local government coming along—*[Interruption.]*—and saying that they have not been treated properly and do not agree it. Then people such as the hon. Gentlemen speaking from a sedentary position blame the Government, who are genuinely trying to get a good deal for local government—a deal on which the shadow Chancellor has made it clear he could not improve.

Mr. Chisholm: Why do the Government not tell the truth about local government, instead of giving us fiction and fiddles about grant levels and spending limits, and scaremongering rubbish about Labour's plans for the business rate? Why, for example, do they, unlike anybody who has studied the subject, keep pretending that £60 million will be saved next year, compared with this year, through local government reorganisation, and then keep adding that imaginary money to grant levels to come up with an imaginary increase for next year? Does the Secretary of State not understand that this is the worst

local government settlement for more than 20 years—the final monument to 18 years of Tory economic failure? Does he not realise that nobody trusts or believes him, and that it is time for him to go?

Mr. Forsyth: If this year's settlement is the worst in years—which it certainly is not—why can the hon. Gentleman not pledge an extra cent on top of it? If it is so bad, what has happened to the Labour party? What exactly would a Labour Government be for? If the hon. Gentleman says that ours is a poor settlement for Labour councils, why can he not add a single penny? The truth is that his masters in Islington know that it is a good deal for local government in Scotland.

Education Institutions (Agency Staff)

9. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had with education institutions concerning the employment by them of agency staff. [12889]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: None. The employment of agency staff in colleges is for individual college boards of management to determine.

Mr. Hughes: Does that answer not show the Minister's cavalier disregard for his responsibilities to education? Is he not aware that the decision by Aberdeen college and others to force their part-time staff out of service into agency employment is causing great concern about pay, conditions and standards in education, with the fear that that may be a precursor to turning all full-time staff over to agency employment?

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman seems to forget that many further education colleges, including Aberdeen college, in which he and I share an interest as constituency Members, are restructuring staffing levels so that they can deliver a more efficient and effective service to students. He does Aberdeen college a great disservice by choosing to ignore the fact that, as part of the restructuring, 42 new posts have been made permanent.

Mrs. Liddell: Why has the Minister not ordered an immediate public inquiry into the college board members who operate the very agencies that undercut the pay, conditions and job security of college lecturers? Is he aware that the matter is likely to be raised with Lord Nolan? Why did he wash his hands of it when I raised it with him in correspondence?

Mr. Robertson: If the hon. Lady wishes to raise the matter with Lord Nolan, she is entitled so to do; but, in all kindness, I must tell her that it was obvious on Monday that the pressure is getting to her. She should take some time off, away from the House, and visit Scottish colleges and schools to find out what the real situation is. Then she should come back to the House and stop running down the great achievements of Scottish education.

Unemployment

10. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the level of unemployment in Scotland. [12890]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Unemployment in Scotland has fallen to 7.4 per cent. and has fallen by 10,000 in the past two months.

Mr. Marshall: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer, and for the fact that unemployment in Scotland has fallen by 71,200 since December 1992. [HON. MEMBERS: "Fiddled figures."] Does he agree that the rate of unemployment, at 7.4 per cent., is lower than that in Germany, France, Italy and Spain—*[Interruption.]*—all of which follow the economic policies put forward by the Opposition? Does my right hon. Friend also agree that the only hope for continued reductions in unemployment is the re-election of a Conservative Government?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with my hon. Friend. I do not know whether he noticed, but he was being barracked throughout his question by Opposition Members who, on this occasion, seem to have seated themselves as far away from the Opposition Front Bench as they can. I do not know whether that is symbolic. Opposition Members were shouting, "Fiddled figures." When unemployment in Scotland was increasing, Opposition Members were happy to quote the figures time after time, and they accepted them; but, now that we have a success story with falling unemployment, they do not want to acknowledge it. That is the kind of commitment that Labour has to Scotland—a commitment to decline, which we in government have reversed.

Mr. David Marshall: Is the Secretary of State not ashamed by the unacceptably high levels of unemployment and poverty in Glasgow? By how much would the 11 Glasgow constituencies have benefited in total if they had received the same preferential treatment pro rata as the constituencies of his fellow Tory Members, especially his own constituency of Stirling?

Mr. Forsyth: If we are talking about public expenditure and the constituencies were funded on the same basis as those of my hon. Friends, there would be a reduction. The hon. Gentleman surely recognises the transformation that has been brought about in Glasgow as a result of a partnership between the Government and local authorities, and I pay tribute to all concerned. I agree that there are areas in Glasgow—and elsewhere in Scotland—where unemployment is far too high. There are a number of proposals to achieve a reduction in unemployment and to encourage investment in Glasgow. I will happily work with anyone from any party who wishes to achieve that purpose.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is ironic that the parties that claim to want to reduce unemployment want at the same time to impose a new tax on the Scots? Labour also talks about running headlong into Europe, but when it shares out the oil as a common

resource after it has committed itself to do so, it might well share Spain's unemployment rate of 23 per cent. Does he not find that ironic also?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with my hon. Friend. The only jobs that a Labour Government would create in Scotland would be jobs for the boys in their Parliament on Calton hill. [HON. MEMBERS: "And the girls."] That is right, because Labour would impose a gender balance quota on that Parliament. We still have to hear from the shadow Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), where the money will come from to pay for that Parliament—more than £70 million in the first year. If there is to be no increase in the overall Budget, the money will presumably come out of the health service or local government.

Mr. Ernie Ross: Has any of the Scottish Office team visited any of the project work pilots in Hull or Maidstone to see exactly what the scheme to be foisted on Scotland consists of? If any Minister has done so, could he tell us exactly what benefit Scotland will receive from the scheme?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman should know that there has been some marvellous development work in Glasgow, for example, where we have had schemes in which the long-term unemployed have been encouraged to carry out work that is useful to the community, and have received payment for doing so. These projects have been built on and developed.

The hon. Gentleman will recall that—during a period of absence from the Scottish Office—I was an Employment Minister, and I have seen for myself some of these projects. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman—or certainly new Labour—will welcome the Government's commitment to ensuring that people who have been on unemployment benefit for many years are given the opportunity to work and to make a contribution to the community, and that he will therefore welcome and support the pilots.

Mr. Gallie: Is my right hon. Friend aware that unemployment in my constituency has fallen by 35 per cent. in the past five years? Will he take on board the words of the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg)—whom we all respect—and look at the money that is to be spent on the A80? Considering the opposition that is coming from north Lanarkshire, would not that money be better spent on the A70 in Ayrshire? Such a move would increase the employment prospects in my constituency and those of other Ayrshire Members.

Mr. Forsyth: Perhaps I could add to the discomfort of the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth by paying a tribute to him as well. He is an excellent Member of the House. Both he and my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) know that, where lines of route have been proposed for the roads, if there are a sufficient number of objections, a public local inquiry has to be held to resolve them.

I welcome, and acknowledge, my hon. Friend's continuing lobbying for the interests of his constituents. No sooner than we have delivered on one of his proposals than he appears with another, which is why I am sure his constituents will return him as their Member of Parliament, not just at the next general election but for many years to come, particularly if they contrast his behaviour with the way in which the other Members who represent Ayrshire constituencies behave in this Chamber on these occasions.

Mr. Dalyell: What does the Secretary of State say to worried officials of the Scottish Office who read in the newspapers that they are likely to be faced with redundancy?

Mr. Forsyth: They should do as I do, which is not believe everything they read in the newspapers.

Mr. Stewart: Is my right hon. Friend aware that unemployment in my constituency of Eastwood has been falling very sharply and is a great deal lower than it was five years ago, because of the excellence of the Government's policies in Scotland, including the important policy of controlling the level of business rates, especially for small business men? What would happen if a Scottish Parliament threw that policy out of the window, business rates went into the stratosphere and the Scottish Parliament also imposed a tartan tax, about which Opposition Members are enthusiastic? If they were elected, they would not pay that tax, because they work in England.

Mr. Forsyth: My hon. Friend may have stumbled on something. Perhaps it is the fact that Members of Parliament would not have to pay the tartan tax that makes some of them so keen on voting for it, or at least having an opportunity to do so. I agree that the effects of putting us back to the bad old days, when Labour councils discriminated against Scottish business through the business rate, would be disastrous for jobs and for those people who are struggling to run small shops and corner shops and who are already facing difficulties because of competition because of changes in shopping patterns.

When Labour in local government says that it wishes to broaden the tax base so that it is not so dependent on central Government, that means introducing new taxes—it is a bed tax and a tax on business. As a Scottish Parliament, if it were established, would be [illegible] per cent. funded by revenues determined here, why would the same arguments not apply to such a parliament? Of course they would, and it would mean raising the tartan tax well beyond the 15 per cent. extra that is planned and promised by Labour at present.

Mr. McFall: Why is there no commitment to reducing youth unemployment? The Secretary of State is aware that each of the 50,000 unemployed under-25s costs the taxpayer almost £8,000 a year. Would it not be better for Scotland's economic and employment future to have policies like the Labour party's, to get a quarter of a million young people in the entire country off the dole? After the Government's 18 years of neglect, is not the true message that Tory policies have left 50,000 young people with no jobs, no hope and no future? That can be remedied only by the election of a Labour Government.

Mr. Forsyth: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has noticed, but youth unemployment has been falling. He asks why we have no proposals, but we have a proposal—we have got skills vouchers, worth

between £3,000 and £8,500, which are offered to every 16-year-old so that they can choose the training that they wish. The Labour party cannot stand vouchers and the idea that youngsters should be able to buy the training that they require.

What is happening in the countries that have adopted the social chapter and the minimum wage—policies of the Labour party? Those are the countries where youth unemployment is going through the stratosphere. That is the generation that has been betrayed by socialism, and that is what the hon. Gentleman would do to Scotland.

Care in the Community

11. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to increase the value for money of care in the community funds; and if he will make a statement. [12891]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Proposals are being considered to ensure that information on the net costs to local authorities of purchasing services from the private and voluntary sectors, as well as from their in-house providers, is made available to elected representatives and to the public.

Mr. Walker: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for that reply. Is he aware that the chairman of the social work committee of Perth and Kinross council has told the private sector owners that, although the inquiry into Tayside provisions showed that massive savings could be made of between £3 million and £6 million in Tayside and between £33 million and £66 million in Scotland as a whole, nothing will be done about it and Government directives will have no impact?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: That assertion is incorrect. In the next few weeks, the Scottish Office will publish directions on information that local authorities cannot disregard, and the inspector's report made it quite clear that the three authorities could save between £3 million and £6 million, which would mean between £33 million and £66 million nationally.

In the public interest, electors should have the right to expect their councils to ensure that they get value for money for all their services, including in-house provision, and the facts should be made public. We shall ensure that that happens.

Mr. Connarty: Is the Minister aware that Central Scotland Healthcare NHS trust, which is responsible for care in the community in Forth Valley, is proposing to do away with its care managers and to sack 28 charge nurse sisters and replace them with 18 nurse managers, who will be responsible for double the number of patients? Sisters will no longer be responsible for contact with patients in the hospitals in the Secretary of State's constituency and other constituencies in central Scotland, including mine. Will the Minister take a stand and keep the sisters in the wards? Matrons have been done away with, and now the same is to happen to sisters. Will he prevent that?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The problem is not caused by funding for community care. The increase in funding for community care is £66.5 million, taking it to about £720 million for Scotland as a whole. I shall look into the individual circumstances about which the hon. Gentleman asked, and be in touch with him in due course.

Press Release (Madam Speaker's Statement)

3.31 pm

Madam Speaker: Yesterday, the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) raised a point of order with me and was good enough to let me have the documentation so that I might examine it. I have to say to him that I can see nothing wrong in the Labour party press release to which he referred. It is perfectly open to any hon. Member to raise a subject with the Comptroller and Auditor General, either directly or by means of a conversation with the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, and to tell the media that he has done so.

On the point of substance, which is publicising the nursery voucher scheme in Scotland, I noted from the material that the hon. Gentleman sent me that the Secretary of the Cabinet has made it clear that this is legitimate at present but that once a general election has been called new advertising campaigns will in general be postponed and running campaigns will be closed. That would no doubt include the one that the hon. Gentleman referred to.

BILLS PRESENTED

Mental Health (Joint Commissioning Consortia)

Mr. Peter Thurnham, supported by Mr. Simon Hughes, Mr. Archy Kirkwood and Mr. Charles Kennedy, presented a Bill to enable health and local authorities to form consortia to commission health and social care for mentally ill people and to jointly disburse the funds voted them by Parliament to provide mental health services: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Wednesday 5 March, and to be printed [Bill 97].

Town Centres (Insurance and Restoration)

Mr. Dafydd Wigley, supported by Mr. Cynog Dafis, Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones and Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, presented a Bill to provide a requirement on the owners of properties in urban areas to maintain adequate insurance cover to enable them to restore to its previous condition a building damaged by fire or other accident; to require money paid by insurance companies arising from such a claim to be used primarily for that purpose unless granted a specific derogation by the local planning authority; to authorise local authorities to make claims against the assets of the owners of such properties in the event of their failure to restore damaged buildings; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 28 February, and to be printed [Bill 98].

Constitutional Change

3.33 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide for the holding of a referendum on any constitutional change approved by Parliament.

The Bill seeks to address the public concern that could be expressed if some of the constitutional proposals that are currently being discussed in the United Kingdom and the European Union were to be implemented. I make it clear at the outset that it is neither a device to maintain the status quo nor a device to frustrate Parliament.

I sincerely believe that the United Kingdom's constitution and Parliament have served the people of these islands well. Scotland and the Scottish people have been especially well served. Sometimes the arrangement is called sovereignty—the right to make one's own democratic decisions.

The constitution's great strength is that it is not cast in stone. Since 1707, it has changed to meet the needs of the times. In other words, it has evolved, and the people have accepted its evolution. Only during the past 20 or so years might some changes have occurred by default rather than consent. That is important, because consent is at the heart of the United Kingdom constitution and vital to the way in which we are governed. If Parliament deliberately or inadvertently ignores that, it does so at its peril.

The single-Member constituency is a cornerstone of the constitution. Once elected, a Member represents all the people of the constituency. Another cornerstone is the Member's right to ask questions and have them answered. That, coupled with parliamentary privilege, means that Members can, through questions, debates and motions, address problems brought to them by their constituents. All that is free to the constituent. Any change that affects those cornerstones should have the consent of the people. My Bill seeks to ensure that that will happen.

Members of Parliament have the leasehold of the constitution during their time in Parliament. They can make changes that can be reversed the following month or year if Parliament so decides. However, we cannot bind future Parliaments. That is why I say that Members have the leasehold of the constitution—or sovereignty—during their period in Parliament. The freehold of the constitution belongs to the people. I remind the House that, in the United Kingdom, we govern by consent. If Parliament wishes to make permanent constitutional change, it must have the consent of the people. Only the people can give away our grandchildren's inheritance—the constitution of the United Kingdom and Parliament.

Put simply, constitutional change embraces any transfer of power from this Parliament to other bodies in Europe, Scotland Wales, Northern Ireland or the regions of England; any change in the single-Member constituency and the way in which elections to the House are organised and structured; any change in how individuals can become peers of the realm and sit in the other place; and any reduction in the ability of this House to vote Supply, or to influence interest rates, inflation, or levels of borrowing or unemployment.

Many people propose referendums because they regard them as a means of obtaining consent before Parliament decides. The main problem with such proposals is the difficulty of framing the questions to be put to the people.

There is also the problem of the complexity of such changes and the difficulty that that creates for public debate. My Bill would ensure that any change proposed was fully debated by Parliament, and that only after Parliament had decided, and a Bill had completed its passage through both Houses, would the matter be put to the people. That means a straight yes or no: do the electors accept or reject Parliament's proposed change?

During the passage of a constitutional Bill, the proposers—probably the Government of the day—will have to tell the millions who voted for them what Members of Parliament will or will not be able to do if the proposal becomes law. They will, quite properly, have to explain the impact of their proposals on the ability of the House to influence matters of great importance to the people. Sovereignty—or the constitution—is not a theoretical abstract matter but a living thing that impacts on everyone living in the United Kingdom. It influences tax and spending decisions, and unemployment. All that will be argued in Parliament during the passage of any Bill for constitutional change, be it for devolved assemblies in Cardiff, Edinburgh or Belfast, for European Union federal matters, or for the single currency.

My Bill is not novel. It was tested and tried during the referendum on entry to the European Economic Community. It was used again during the referendum on the Scotland Act 1978; the precedents exist.

My Bill ensures that full, frank and open debate on constitutional change is held in Parliament against the background of the knowledge that the proposals, when agreed, will be put to the people in a referendum, thus ensuring that consent will occur before sovereignty or the constitution is changed. Change by default will cease, and the risks of constitutional unrest following unwanted change will have been banished.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Bill Walker, Mr. Allan Stewart, Mr. Iain Duncan Smith, Mr. Bill Cash, Sir Teddy Taylor, Mr. Andrew Hargreaves, Mr. Richard Shepherd, Mr. Jacques Arnold, Mr. Barry Field, Sir George Gardiner and Mr. David Shaw.

CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Mr. Bill Walker accordingly presented a Bill to provide for the holding of a referendum on any constitutional change approved by Parliament.: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 14 February and to be printed [Bill 96.]

Opposition Day

[4TH ALLOTTED DAY]

National Health Service

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.40 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I beg to move,

That this House believes that, of the many improvements the NHS needs, immediate priorities should include the reinstatement of free dental and eye checks, a freeze on all finance-driven bed, hospital and service closures which represent a reduction of service to patients pending the first report of an open and independent assessment of national health demand and provision, a move to three year contracts between health authorities and boards and health providers and the immediate scrapping of local NHS pay bargaining.

Parliament is, of course, entitled to debate the state of the national health service at any time. But—and above all just before a general election—it strikes us that politicians should also be obliged to say how they would improve it. Public experience and perception is that, however good the NHS may be most of the time, sadly we cannot guarantee that it will be there to do what we need whenever we need it. We cannot at present in the United Kingdom rely on the NHS to do what it was set up to do. That leads my colleagues and me to the conclusion that, sadly, the NHS is not safe in the Government's hands. We also believe that the NHS would not be safe in a Labour Government's hands.

On the basis of agreed commitments given by the Conservative party, the Labour party and ourselves, we believe that the best guarantee for the NHS after the next general election would be for its management to be in our hands. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) grunts—if he looked at the spending commitments and was honest about admitting the facts, I am sure that he would agree with us. I cannot believe that the hon. Gentleman is happy with his party's current policy.

My colleagues and I also believe that all the Irish parties represented in this Parliament and the Welsh and Scottish Nationalist parties would, like us, be willing and able to vote for a more significant commitment to the NHS than either the Tory or the Labour party.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): I respect the fact that the hon. Gentleman is trying to identify some party differences over this subject. But does he not accept that two thirds of the health service has been built by a Conservative Government at one time or another and that two thirds of the hospitals and all the capital projects in this country were built by Conservative Governments? Is not the health service a Conservative success?

Mr. Hughes: The NHS is bigger than all of us. In previous speeches I have paid tribute to the Tory successes and progress in the NHS. I am happy to do so again—I have no problem with that. The NHS is what it is today owing to the efforts of three parties. A member of one of those parties devised and proposed it during the

[Mr. Hughes]

war: our party, the Liberal party. A Labour Government enacted it in the post-war Parliament; they did so with our support, opposed by the Tories. The Tory party has often given it extra resources. I shall not argue with the hon. Gentleman about that, because I accept his point. The issue is the current state of the NHS, and where we go from here.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): It is true that the Liberal Democrats voted against the income tax cut.

Mr. Hughes: Two years running.

Mr. Skinner: Two years running, as the hon. Gentleman says. We should get the record straight. The Liberal Democrats voted against the last income tax cut, which would have produced £1.8 billion extra to spend on the national health service and education. I did the same. However, the hon. Gentleman will recall that there were three further votes that night on measures to spend money. The Liberal Democrats voted against the reduction in income tax, thereby saving money for the health service and education—or so they said—and then proceeded to get rid of that money by voting against the airport tax and the increase in petrol tax.

I told the Liberal Democrats that I was being consistent, because I voted against the income tax cut. I wanted to provide £1.8 billion, but they and the other rag, tag and bobtails went into the Lobby to spend the money that they had tried to save for the health service. I have never seen so much hypocrisy in one night as I saw on that occasion.

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman is good at blustering.

Mr. Skinner: It is true.

Mr. Hughes: No, it is not true. Like all good stories, the hon. Gentleman's story is partly true and partly untrue. The truth is that we voted against the income tax reductions two years running. The figure he used was correct: it was about £1.8 billion. So that he does not accuse me of misrepresenting him, I have to say that we proposed that that money should go on education.

Mr. Skinner: Why did he vote against the airport tax?

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman should listen.

We have also costed—I will willingly give him the figures—the other Budget proposals that we voted for. As I shall set out later, our proposals for the health service—

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): The hon. Gentleman has not answered my hon. Friend's question.

Mr. Hughes: I am answering his question.

Our proposals for the health service will mean extra expenditure that has not already been spent or given away on anything else. The hon. Member for Bolsover is embarrassed, because he voted with us on the income tax reduction. The reality is that our party, unlike the Labour party, is willing to make significant further investment in education and health, which is why we are proud of our record, and will be happy to defend it today.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South) *rose—*

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: I give way to the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth).

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will give way after the hon. Member for Belfast, South has intervened.

Mr. Hughes: I may give way once more, but then I want to make progress.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I appreciate the hon. Member giving way. I understand his response to the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw), but does he accept that he was only partially right? The bulk of the hospitals in Northern Ireland were built under a devolved Administration, and have been run down ever since.

Mr. Hughes: Not only do I accept the hon. Gentleman's point, but I share his view that the budget for the national health service in Northern Ireland would be better allocated and run by people there following a democratic debate in Northern Ireland rather than in the House. One of the frustrations of Parliament is that we have hardly any time to debate public welfare issues for Northern Ireland—far less time than for Scotland and Wales. The people of Northern Ireland rightfully agree.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: May I press the hon. Gentleman on the issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover? He says that the Liberal Democrats voted in three Divisions to spend £700 million, and in another Division voted to save £1.8 billion. There is a shortfall of £1.1 billion. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that that £1.1 billion would cover all the expenditure commitments that the Liberal Democrats have made in debates on education and the health service? Can I tie him down on those figures? Does he understand them?

Mr. Hughes: I understand them, and I am happy to answer the question.

No, we are not tied to that figure. We have made a commitment to put an extra £2 billion into the education service. I shall outline our commitment to the health service in a moment. If the hon. Gentleman has not already seen them, I will happily send him our costed manifestos for the last election and for the coming one, so that he can see exactly where we would raise the money and where we would spend it.

The debate is timely because the position is similar in each of the four countries of the United Kingdom. The NHS is under pressure; those in the NHS, and the people who use it, feel insecure; and the NHS needs further investment. However, as I tried to point out in reply to the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw), there is a much more important question than whether the NHS is safe in

a particular party's hands at a particular point in history. That question is, are the public safe in the hands of the NHS today?

That should be the test of whether we are supporting the service efficiently. Can we give a guarantee to the hon. Gentleman's family, my family and the families and friends of hon. Members and their constituents that, when we need it, the NHS will be able to deliver the care that it is there to deliver, without sending people home when they should be operated on, or sending them around the country when they should be admitted to their local hospitals?

We all know that it is not normally through the failing of any individual—although, of course, individuals fail in the NHS, as in any walk of life—that the service is not up to the job. The fact is that, when competent, well-trained, experienced NHS staff become demoralised, overstretched and under-resourced, they are not good for anyone's health. If the NHS is to be a service fit for patients to rely on, adequate staff and facilities need to be there so that patients can rely on them as well.

The task of all politicians in the United Kingdom—and of the Government of the United Kingdom, whoever they are—is not to ensure that we can "sort of" respond to the NHS crisis of the moment and plaster over the long-term structural cracks, but to insure the NHS for now, and to start securing it for the future.

If we are to be honest with the public, we must admit that there will be no one-election wonder. There is and can be no miracle cure. Demand is rising, costs are escalating, and a national debate is needed about how much health care we can fund and how best we can fund it. That debate will, of course, take place in politics, but it must also take place outside and beyond politics. It is not a moment too late to start it now. *[Interruption.]*

The Minister may mutter, but, in a recent letter to me, the Secretary of State said that he

"would welcome greater cross-party consensus on the major issues in the NHS."

I agree that more consensus is necessary, as do the public, the commentators and the professionals. On behalf of my party, I give a pledge to work with anyone and everyone to obtain the maximum possible agreement that will secure the future of the NHS. The NHS is much more important than any divisions along party lines.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Is it not unlikely that, by absenting himself from the debate, the Secretary of State will promote consensus?

Mr. Hughes: I find the Secretary of State's absence surprising. I am glad that the Minister of State and the Under-Secretary of State are present, but, if the Secretary of State thinks the NHS as important as he claims, he should be here. This may well be the last debate on the NHS before the general election, which is another reason why the person in charge—in a system that I must say is very undemocratic: no other elected person can be in charge even locally—ought to be present.

Politicians will need to be bold. It is widely recognised that the Tory and Labour parties are not yet rising to the challenge. I am not the only one who says that: it was said the other day on a Radio 4 programme in the "Analysis" series, presented by Andrew Dilnot, entitled "Free for All". Let me briefly quote from what he and Chris Ham, professor of health policy at Birmingham, said in the programme. Andrew Dilnot said:

"Clearly and unambiguously committed"—

the Secretary of State, apparently, is so committed—

"to high quality, universal, tax-funded healthcare . . . With both major parties so firm in their backing of the NHS, surely we can just relax in the security of knowing that it will be all right.

No, we cannot. In fact there is now a real risk that over the next five years the NHS will cease to be a universal, comprehensive, free service, without any real debate, because neither party"—

neither of the main parties, that is—

"is prepared to promise anything like the rate of growth in spending seen throughout the life of the NHS."

Professor Chris Ham said:

"This year is the toughest year for the Health Service in the last decade. There's always been a funding problem in healthcare because demand exceeds supply of resources, but in the current year that's a particularly acute problem. We're finding that hospitals all around the country, health authorities and GPs, are finding it very hard to make ends meet. In that sense the wheel has come full circle because a decade ago Mrs. Thatcher, when she was the Prime Minister, was forced to set up a review of the Health Service because of the funding problems. That review has led to increased efficiency and greater responsiveness but it's not really tackled the long-term underfunding of the NHS and it's that problem that the NHS continues to grapple with."

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: Not for the moment: I want to proceed.

Therefore, there is no dispute that there is a long-term problem or that we owe an enormous, probably unspeakable, amount to the work of the people who are in the NHS locally in our constituencies, regionally and nationally. There is no doubt that many of them work under perpetual pressure and often regular crisis in the frontline, saving and extending lives and alleviating pain every day.

The predicted winter difficulties have, in large measure, come to pass. Hon. Members do not have to take my word for it. They just have to read reports in the past couple of days from the Greater London Assn of Community Health Councils and the British Medical Association, or a briefing from the Royal College of Nursing for today's debate. I did not know that it was going to be on, but last night I watched a report on "Newsnight" by Alexis Rowell on the health service in Whipps Cross hospital in north London. The report confirmed the crisis and acute difficulties of coping with people, some of whom testified to spending two days waiting in the casualty department before admission to a ward, and to not being able to get a moment's sleep—understandably, because it is a busy place and that is not where they should have been cared for.

Above all, hon. Members do not have to take the word of politicians or journalists if they talk to people in the health service. This morning, my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) and I met a nursing student and three nurses: Jerry, an accident and emergency nurse from Homerton hospital in Hackney; Tracey, an HIV and AIDS staff nurse from just across the river in St. Thomas's hospital; and Richard, a senior staff nurse working with older people who are acutely ill. They all confirmed that there is a need for more staff, for better

[Mr. Hughes]

training and for urgent provision of methods to ensure that we keep staff—who, at the moment, often choose to leave. They also confirmed that we have the facilities for patients, who are just not receiving them.

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: Yes, but this is the last intervention.

Mr. Banks: I just wonder whether I could ask the hon. Gentleman, in view of that visit, where the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) is at present?

Mr. Hughes: I do not know the answer to that question, but I assume that my right hon. Friend will be here shortly and certainly he has spent a lot of time in recent days on health service matters.

On the motion and the Government amendment, the big questions are these. Is the NHS doing enough, which in Government-speak is a question about volumes? Is the NHS doing it well, which in Government-speak is a question about quality of care; and has the NHS been given adequate resources, which in Government-speak is a question of NHS spend? My party's view is that, sadly, we are not doing enough, and we are not always doing it well enough; and those two conclusions are not surprising because we are not spending enough.

We have real concerns about the volumes. Where we used to count patients, we now count episodes of treatment. People whom we used not to count as admissions—for example, newborn babies—are now additional parts of the statistics. There is now widespread, probably universal, public and professional scepticism about the Government figures on increased volumes. In terms of separate individuals being treated by the NHS, those figures no longer accurately add up. We believe that the NHS statistics must be collected, verified and reported by a body independent of Government and of party politics. We propose a practical way of doing that. We are worried about the fact that no one independent of the authorities vouches, when people are discharged from treatment, for the fact that that treatment has been properly administered. We believe that the quality of work done in the NHS by the NHS should be checked, verified and reported by a body independent of the Government of the day and of the authorities, and independent of party politics in general. We propose a practical way of doing that.

We also have real concerns about costs. Again, no one independent of the authorities vouches for whether the NHS is given enough resources to do even the minimum amount of work that we expect it to carry out. An assessment of what the NHS needs should be done by a body independent of Government and party politics. Here too we propose a practical way of achieving that. The NHS needs an independent assessment of supply and demand, of the quality of its care and of what we should spend on it.

How we pay for the NHS is a separate question. I suspect that the debate over the next few years will develop our idea of hypothecating taxes instead of simply assuming that the NHS can always win its share from general tax and revenue held by the Treasury.

For us, therefore, three issues must be dealt with: investment, planning and accountability. For us, investment means—above all—investment in staff: doctors, midwives, nurses and allied professions. We are committed to spending an amount equivalent to the cost of 10,000 nurses or 5,000 doctors to get the NHS back to a state in which it can do the job.

Waiting lists must be reduced; they are currently rising. The public should not have to wait, as they often do, for 18 months for routine operations. That requires investment; we have identified the money that can go into reducing those waiting lists. We believe that, over a three-year programme, waiting times could be reduced to six months.

Mr. Gallie *rose—*

Mr. Hughes: I have already said no. This is a half-day debate, and I want to give colleagues a chance to speak.

We must also make sure—careful language is called for here—that NHS expenditure keeps pace with inflation. The Government say that they are committed to year-on-year real-terms growth—referring to general inflation—but everyone knows that the NHS costs a bit more, and that, unless expenditure on the NHS keeps pace with NHS inflation, a real reduction in funding will occur.

There has been some debate this week about public sector pay. Last year, the nurses were awarded a flat rate—sometimes topped up locally—increase of 2 per cent., which was below the rate of inflation. This year, according to Red Book projected expenditure on health and community services, and if the award recommended by the review committee, when it is announced tomorrow after the Cabinet meets, is about 3.3 per cent., that amount can, we believe, be afforded.

An analysis of the real-terms growth in the budget for health and community services shows that the 3.3 per cent. increase anticipated by the Government for next year leaves money to spare to allow the Government to agree the recommended increase. We believe that the Government should tomorrow, without demur and without phasing, agree to implement the recommended award; and we would expect the Labour party to agree with us that the money should be paid straight away.

If morale is to be restored to the health service, it is essential to honour an independent recommendation on pay for the 1.3 million people at the bottom end of the public sector. We should stop being distracted by the pay of a very few at the top end—although they seemed to be the preoccupation of the shadow Chancellor this morning. Moreover, we must bring back national pay negotiations. Most of the health service has not even settled yet for last year, which is clearly nonsense. It wastes a great deal of professional time; it wastes millions of pounds. We think that the NHS should have a single pay review body, so that the chief executive and the porter, as well as the doctor, the dentist, the midwife and the nurse, all have their pay assessed at the same time.

Our motion also contains the simple proposal that we reinstate free dental and eye checks—an idea which has the support of Members on both sides of the House, as confirmed by their support for early-day motion 471, which was tabled by the hon. Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam).

According to the Minister's answer of 27 January 1997, it would cost £120 million a year to reinstate eye tests, and £60 million a year to reinstate free dental checks—a total of £180 million a year. The Royal National Institute for the Blind confirms that people are becoming ill and are suffering incurable eye disease because of the loss of those free checks. We believe that the House and the public would be united in backing as a high priority the restoration of those preventative health measures by finding the relatively small amount of money required.

Thirdly—although the Secretary of State has hinted that he and the Government are moving towards this view—we believe that it is not possible to conduct planning in the health service if contracts between health authorities, health boards and health trusts are renegotiated annually. It is nonsense to do so. It is like painting the Forth bridge—no sooner has one finished than one must begin again. Some people in the service do nothing other than negotiate contracts. A generally held view is that the health service should be funded and that contracts should be entered into for a minimum of three years, and possibly longer, and that contracts should be altered according to the year-on-year outturn. We must stop the stop-start, on-off, nobody-knows planning of the health service. It is a mystery how one can plan on that basis, nationally or locally, the nation's largest service—a mystery not only to us but to those in the service.

The final matter most concerns the public. They just do not believe that the health service can stand any further service reductions, whether in beds or in other services, that are not replaced by equivalent services. The public simply do not believe that there are sufficient resources. I do not want to get into a debate with the Secretary of State about how many beds or hospitals there are, because Ministers say that they never know, as figures are not collected centrally—but I want us to have those figures, so that we can have a debate.

If the Government are not believed, and if politicians' dialogue does not advance the argument, we believe that there should be an immediate halt to any finance-driven closures—or such a halt could occur on 1 April, for six months. Yes, it would cost something, but during that time there should be an independent audit of health service resources, capacity and demand.

Yesterday, I spoke to the chief executive of the King's Fund, and learned that he and his organisation would be willing to conduct such an audit. Tomorrow the fund will celebrate its centenary, and it is an extremely reputable organisation, but so be it if there is a better organisation in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland to conduct an audit. The point is that such an audit should be conducted independently. We should stop the ridiculous nonsense in which we spend half our time disagreeing about the facts. Let us agree on the facts, and we can then consider our disagreements on funding.

There will always be differences in policy and priorities between political parties, but we must get away from the dialogue of the deaf, because patients and patients' interests are not being served. My colleagues and I can initiate a debate on the long-term future of the NHS and go through a litany of problems, but, today, we have limited ourselves to making four practical suggestions, which hon. Members on both sides of the House support and which the public and the professions overwhelming support. In an accountable NHS, realising those proposals would start us on the road to securing in the years ahead the place of the national health service in all four countries. I hope that we can make some progress, and I hope that the House will approve our motion.

4.7 pm

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"is committed to the National Health Service as a public service, promoting health and offering increasing volumes of high-quality health care on the basis of need regardless of the ability to pay; and welcomes the Government's continuing commitment to real terms increases in NHS spending year by year.".

I listened with interest, and mounting incredulity, to the speech of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). If we required any further evidence that Liberal Democrats perhaps live on another planet, he has absolutely provided it. We shall now have a health service that is simultaneously "inside", "outside" and "beyond" politics—whatever that may mean.

The hon. Gentleman's wish list of wishful thinking does not sit very comfortably with his ambitions—which I read in my copy of *Nursing Times and Nursing Mirror*. In the event of a hung Parliament, he will apparently have a difficult choice to make, as he wants to be either a Health Minister or mayor of London. It is always good for him to be ambitious, and it is clear that he and his party are once again preparing for government, as they did—under instructions from the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel)—in the general elections of 1979, 1983, 1987 and 1992. However, if the hon. Gentleman is wondering about his job prospects in a hung Parliament after the next election, he is wasting his time.

I thought it odd—I think that the House will find it odd, too—that the hon. Gentleman and his party have chosen three immediate priorities. The first is a national commission—a sort of fairness commission on statistics. Commissions to gather figures always fascinate the Liberal Democrat party. We are always told that these proposed commissions will be independent. They are surrounded with worthy words, which the Liberal Democrat party hopes will play well with the public, although they will perhaps not do very much at all—*[Interruption.]* As I hear an Opposition Member say from a sedentary position, a commission such as that being proposed will certainly not do what the Audit Commission does, which is to provide a real insight into how the health service works.

As a second immediate priority, the hon. Gentleman wants to reduce the money spent on patient care by reinstating free eyesight tests and dental checks. I shall deal with that matter in some detail later, but the rather interesting cross-talk on the Labour Benches made it clear that that was what the hon. Gentleman was proposing.

The hon. Gentleman's third priority was to end local pay awards in the NHS. He was long on saying how important it is to accept the review body's recommendations, but I must point out that one of its consistent recommendations has been the introduction of local pay in the NHS. The hon. Gentleman and his party quote selectively when it suits them and depart from a consistent line of argument when it gets too difficult.

I thought that the hon. Gentleman might have had a few other immediate priorities for the health service—probably boring old ideas such as treating more patients,

[Mr. Gerald Malone]

improving the quality of care and the effectiveness of treatment and underpinning the research programme that keeps the NHS at the cutting edge when compared with any health service in the world.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned waiting times. He said that he wants to reduce them, but he failed to acknowledge that, for the first time in the history of the NHS, this Government have focused on waiting times. We have made great progress in identifying the length of time that people wait and then in reducing it according to patients charter standards.

I also thought that the hon. Gentleman would make it an immediate priority to underpin the reform of primary care, which is currently in another place and which will come to the House in the not too distant future. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will say what he thinks about that. Such ideas may be boring to the Liberal Democrat party, but they are the essence of our health service and they are top of the agenda for patients and the professionals who work in the service.

Mr. Simon Hughes: None of those things is boring or unimportant. The Minister knows that I share his view in that respect. Does he accept that, according to the evidence that he is receiving, waiting times are increasing again?

Mr. Malone: Since we began to examine waiting times and since we bore down on them with the patients charter standard and the setting of benchmarks, remarkable progress has been made. The vast majority of patients are now treated within three months of an operation being diagnosed as necessary. The hon. Gentleman may shake his head, but he fails to recognise that, during the winter months, when there is pressure on the health service, elective surgery will take second place to emergency care. That is perfectly obvious—it is how the NHS has always operated. The important point is whether we are continuing to build on the standards that we have brought into the health service. I confirm that that will be the priority of this Government and of the next Conservative Government.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Will the Minister answer the question asked by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes)? Will he confirm that waiting lists in every constituency are getting longer?

Mr. Malone: I told the hon. Gentleman that when the service is under great pressure, of course elective surgery will take second place for a while. Progress on reducing waiting times and securing better standards, if we can, has to be maintained. The hon. Lady is making a non-existent point.

The speech of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey was rather thin gruel compared with the announcements of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in the document, "A Service with Ambitions", which set out clearly not just the immediate priorities, but the long-term priorities for the health service. I shall set out those priorities again to the House.

Mr. Matthew Banks: Before my hon. Friend moves from the subject of waiting lists, will he confirm that the additional £25 million that the Department has put into areas of pressure has been directed to the causes that the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) is concerned about—blocking and mental health services?

Mr. Malone: That is absolutely right. The history of reducing waiting times—as my hon. Friend understands, but the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey clearly does not—shows that, to maintain progress, it is important to invest in that progress. The Government have consistently done that by setting targets and standards and by the actions that we took to cope with the emergency pressures that we foresaw during the winter.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Malone: No. I want to move on to my next point. I have given way a lot so far.

In "A Service with Ambitions", recently published by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, we set out our ambitious alternative for the immediate and long-term future of the national health service. It is an ambition for a quality integrated service that is responsive to patients. Those working in the NHS share that ambition. It can be brought about by having a well-informed public and a seamless service working across boundaries, so that patients understand that they are being treated by an integrated service. It should become more a knowledge-based, decision-making service and should have a highly trained and skilled work force. It should be a responsive service, sensitive to differing needs.

"A Service with Ambitions" sets out the Government's policy of underpinning our national health service, based on the principles on which it was founded, into the foreseeable future. The Government are also committed to real-terms increases in funding, because we believe that the NHS is affordable in its current form and needs continuing investment.

The document gives a detailed commitment to the development of the NHS as a public service. It outlines an exciting vision of an integrated service, sensitive to the needs and wishes of patients. It is very useful to the NHS and has been widely welcomed, setting out strategic objectives to help set future direction nationally and locally. It commits the Government to the future of the service, much criticised by Opposition Members at every opportunity. We will build a service of quality for the future.

The debate introduced by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey is based on a false premise—the idea that we can somehow remove health from politics. Raising the issue and then claiming to want to remove it from politics is a frequent Liberal Democrat party tactic. The Liberal Democrats go up and down the country, from constituency to constituency—all my hon. Friends are aware of this—making health a political issue in a way that is a disgrace to any party that says that it supports the national health service, and the hon. Gentleman knows it.

The Liberal Democrats have made an industry of saying piously that everything controversial should be removed from politics and then doing exactly the opposite. They want to remove the economy and education from politics. They actually want to remove

Government from politics, as it is part of their policy pretty well to abolish Westminster and to set up regional assemblies across the country. Now we hear that they want to abolish health as a political issue.

I find it extraordinary that the hon. Gentleman should make the absurd suggestion about central Government clearly not being very important at local level, but for some bizarre reason he and his party are not in favour of local pay.

Mr. Simon Hughes: We could spend the entire debate discussing which issues ought to be non-political. No one has ever argued that the health service should not be political. What is the Minister's objection to removing the accumulation and presentation of statistics on the health service from under the hand of Government, so that they would be believed—as they are not at the moment?

Mr. Malone: It is a disgraceful allegation for the hon. Gentleman to cast aspersions on civil servants who prepare statistics.

Mr. Hughes: Who are they?

Mr. Malone: The hon. Gentleman asks who they are. I hope that everyone who works in the public interest preparing those statistics—and that public interest goes well beyond the Government—will have heard the hon. Gentleman's derision. I shall explain in some detail how we have introduced open government in the health service, and the statistics support the evidence that we bring of its success.

I would take the nonsense that the hon. Gentleman talks about removing the health service from politics slightly better if he used the existing statistics fairly. The description that best befits the Liberal Democrats is that they use statistics in the same way as a drunk uses a lamp-post—for support, not illumination. It is frankly absurd for the hon. Gentleman suddenly to say that if there were a national body, his party would suddenly accept the statistics that it provided, when it does not accept any of the statistics from the organisations that currently provide them to the Government—often at arm's length.

The Liberal Democrat party delighted in counting the people who came off dentists' registers. When I pointed out that the Liberal Democrats did not count people who went back on the registers—as they are rolling registers—they failed to respond. In the face of the evidence, they produced a league table of people ditching dentists.

The Liberal Democrats also twist the statistics that relate to their own spending commitments. We heard a rather good example of that at the beginning of the debate. At the Liberal Democrat party conference last September, the hon. Gentleman claimed to have found a national insurance tax loophole that would provide, as always, a painless £350 million. However, in the Liberal Democrats' self-styled *Richmond Park Mail*, one of the exciting documents that flutters through letter boxes in a number of constituencies, the Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidate scaled that down by £100 million. What is the hon. Gentleman's commitment?

Last month, the leader of the Liberal Democrat party promised £500 million for the national health service. He said that £175 million would come from additional increases in the price of cigarettes, but that left a £325 million hole—another unexplained statistic from the Liberal Democrats.

Effectively, the Liberal Democrats have said that they would make every family worse off by an average of £12.50 a month, by adding a penny on income tax. Their health promise would double that. As a result, every family would pay an extra £300 every year with no increase in the care provided. Today the hon. Gentleman is committing his party to spending yet another £180 million or £190 million, although he has no funding plans to back that up. His position is absolutely unsupportable.

Mr. Simon Hughes: That is the most extraordinary allegation, given that we obtained the figures—and we have costed them all—from answers that we were wise enough to get from the Government only last week. In the past 10 days, we have obtained Government figures in respect of eye tests, dental checks and closing the national insurance loophole. They are all costed and our commitment remains the same—£550 million a year in addition to keeping up with real NHS inflation.

Mr. Malone: In every election since I have been a boy in politics, the hon. Gentleman and his party have said that they have a wonderfully costed, tested manifesto commitment that will fly and bear all scrutiny. The truth is that none of them ever does, because they are based on false premises throughout. The hon. Gentleman can wave his piece of paper and send it across the Chamber. I shall have a look at it and be delighted to write to him in due course, picking it apart, as we have always been able to do with every Liberal Democrat commitment that has ever been made inside or outside the House. The House is not impressed, and the Government are certainly not impressed.

Mr. Gallie: A point that comes to mind from serving on Select Committees and listening to debates in the Chamber is that I repeatedly hear Opposition Members demand statistics. Is it not so that, the more statistics we gather, the more bureaucracy is required to gather them and the greater the cost imposed on the health service or any other service, yet Opposition Members complain about administrative costs? Is there not a degree of—I should not use the word "hypocrisy". I shall try to think of another—but I cannot.

Mr. Malone: I am sure that my hon. Friend's thesaurus will reach him before the debate goes on much longer. He is right. In my two-plus years in office, I have not noticed that the Department of Health is entirely a statistics-free zone. In fairness to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey, he was saying something else: the statistics were unreliable. They are unreliable simply because he chooses not to accept them.

I come now to Government accountability and shall address the Government's record of increasing it. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey may not recollect that—I concede to him—Gladstone formed the Public Accounts Committee and created the post of Comptroller and Auditor General in 1861. Gladstone the hon. Gentleman is not. The national commission that he is proposing would in no way be as powerful or as enduring as both those important offices.

[Mr. Malone]

In considering the Government's service, and especially the NHS, we should also remember the National Audit Office, the Audit Commission and, in terms of accountability to the House, the Select Committee on Health. I should point out that the Government established the Audit Commission in 1982. It is far more important to have a commission that looks with some practised insight into what the statistics mean and at the performance of the service rather than one that simply collects statistics that can be published eventually in some unread book that does not serve the service.

The fact that raw statistics, useless in themselves, should not be collected because that is a burden on the health service, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) rightly pointed out, underlines the Government's approach. We are encouraged by the Opposition parties always to try to get rid of forms wherever possible, so it is right that we should not burden the service with collecting unnecessary statistics.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey would do better to follow the example of the Audit Commission. In 1990, we extended its role to the NHS and it was given powers in 1992 to require performance indicators from local authorities. Insight offered by organisations such as the Audit Commission not only into the gathering of statistics but into the way in which the service works is far more important than anything that the hon. Gentleman has suggested.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): My hon. Friend and I have had many discussions on the status of rural dispensaries and priorities in the NHS in ensuring that, consistent with good Conservative principles of competition, pharmacies on one hand and rural dispensaries in doctors' surgeries on the other do not have an undue advantage over one another. In his role as Minister for Health, my hon. Friend has been immensely successful in applying himself to the question. Will he ensure that we stick to Conservative principles so that my constituents in Madeley and Gnosall can have an assurance, either today or as soon as possible thereafter, that the matter will be resolved, difficult as many people find it?

Mr. Malone: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I have turned round and noticed that he has not been with us throughout the debate, but arrived breathless in the Chamber to make his point. Although his question is not closely related to what I am talking about now, I had not intended to deal with it in the substance of my remarks, so I shall answer it right away.

The answer, of course, is that there must be a compromise between professions that have found it rather difficult to agree on those issues over time. I believe that there is an opportunity to resolve several of the immediate issues that my hon. Friend raised, which will be taken forward by both professions in the coming weeks. I hope that we shall be able to make some progress and build a better atmosphere between the two professions. I acknowledge my hon. Friend's interest in that subject.

Back to boring statistics. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey made much of the idea that, if we set up a great organisation, we could remove the question of statistics from politics. For support in my response, I turn to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who is also something of a statistics guru. I think that he, too, sometimes shares the hon. Gentleman's interesting belief that one could remove such matters from politics. However, in the same breath he went on to say something else—and in terms of the real world, which is populated not by people such as the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey but by others, the hon. Member for Blackburn made a good point. He said:

"But often, as someone in the heart of that process I can attest that statistics are used more as hand-grenades to be lobbed at one's opponents, than as a means of illumination. There will always be an element of that in adversarial politics."

Therefore, even if we were to go beyond where we are now and provide sufficient information that could be properly audited and accounted for to Parliament, by means of the great new office that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey wants to set up in the land, anyone who suggested that things would be much different would not be living in the real world. That is probably a truism that both the public at large and anybody who has been in politics will recognise.

I shall now talk about an issue that I promised to address—the integrity of Government statistics. It is wrong of the hon. Gentleman simply to scoff at an extremely important activity. Government statisticians, like all civil servants, have an obligation to serve Ministers, but as part of that obligation, they must ensure the integrity of any departmental statistics and provide impartial advice.

Statisticians do not work alone in some far corner of a Department, and they do not work entirely to Ministers. They observe the official statistics code of practice, published by the Government statistics service, which is based on good practice and designed to promote high standards of accountability and to maintain public confidence in all official statistics and analysis.

The code contains several points that I should draw to the hon. Gentleman's attention because, perhaps inadvertently, he has made an attack on those who provide the information. It requires them to be impartial and objective. They must release information in accordance with the "Code of Practice on Access to Government Information"—open government, as sponsored by this Administration, especially the Prime Minister. They must pre-announce publication dates of statistics, and must take responsibility for the content of statistical press releases. Ministerial press releases containing policy comment must be issued separately; the two cannot be issued together.

It does the hon. Gentleman and his party no credit to try to attack the integrity of the mechanism of government that is underpinned in such a fundamental and clear way, whose standards have been built upon by the Government throughout their period in office.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Is it the fault of the statisticians or of the Government that, when a parliamentary colleague asks how many hospitals have been closed since 1979, the answer comes back from the Minister that those figures are not held centrally?

Mr. Malone: The hon. Gentleman totally fails to understand the point. We collect statistics across the

national health service because they may be relevant to its operation. Often, parliamentary questions are asked that are relevant to the operation of the NHS, while other questions are not. The suggestion that we should collect a whole range of statistics of which we could make absolutely no practical use is foolish, and would add to the burdens on the NHS that we are effectively trying to reduce.

The example raised by the hon. Gentleman was a good one, because I should like to hear his definition of what constitutes a hospital, for which statistics might be gathered. Would a hospital be a super-surgery, with a small number of in-patient beds serviced by a general practitioner? If we added such surgeries to the statistics, the hon. Gentleman would say that we were fiddling the figures by adding things that were not hospitals at all. Should we include community hospitals, or hospitals that have a certain range of services? Would a hospital with a minor accident treatment facility be counted in the same way as a hospital with a major accident and emergency unit? If the hon. Gentleman wants to collect statistics which he may find interesting but which are of no practical use to the health service, he will be frequently disappointed when they are not available centrally.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): I wish to ask a follow-up question on the rather intriguing theory now being advanced by the Minister. Clearly, there will be differences in the definition of different facilities within the health service, and I quite accept that. But is the hon. Gentleman trying to tell the House of Commons that, as the Minister for Health, he does not have at his disposal relevant information as to the rate of closure of hospital facilities throughout England and Wales? Surely that information is central to the conduct of his duties.

Mr. Malone: The hon. Gentleman completely fails to understand what is important to the NHS. It is fundamental that decisions should be taken at a local or health authority level on the future of services. That is what is meant by devolved NHS. I understand that it is the ambition of the Liberal Democrats to hand control of the NHS to local councils, and that makes a double absurdity of the suggestion that we should accumulate non-operational statistics of that kind.

Mrs. Mahon: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Malone: No, I have given way a lot. I intend to move to another point, which is openness in the NHS.

Mrs. Mahon: I wish to ask about openness.

Mr. Malone: Let me develop my point, and I might give way to the hon. Lady in due course. Recently, we have made the NHS a far more open organisation, and it is now more accountable to both Parliament and the public. The code of practice on openness was published in April 1995 and came into effect on 1 June, when the NHS executive published detailed guidance on its implementation. The code supports the Government's commitment in the White Paper "Open Government" of 1993, to increase public access to information about the NHS.

That complements the code on access to information, which applies to the Department of Health, including the NHS executive, and helps the public to know what information is available and where they can get it. All NHS organisations are required to have a named individual responsible for the operation of the code, which sets out the basic principles underlying public access to information about the NHS. I totally reject the implication of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey that the NHS is not open and accountable. It is, and in a way that it never was before.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Why was the Minister prepared to tell me the location of the dental practices of the highest-paid orthodontists who practise in Norfolk and Essex, but when I asked him the same question concerning dentists doing primarily non-orthodontic work, who receive £350,000 from the NHS, he told me that the disclosure of that information would be in breach of the code of practice on open government?

Mr. Malone: I can answer that simply. In some cases, it would be possible to identify the individual dentist. That would be in breach of any proper code. If the hon. Gentleman wants a system by which one can gain an insight into people's private affairs without any let or hindrance, it is up to him to explain that to his constituents or to the country as a whole. Of course, any sensible code of operation should protect people's privacy.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey mentioned sight tests and dental examinations. In 1994–95, spending on sight tests alone was in excess of £90 million. We assess that £120 million would have to be taken from expenditure on other forms of health care if free sight tests were to be restored. The hon. Gentleman never even touched on whether, if that were done, the quality of health would improve.

There is an on-going debate in the national health service among professionals and politicians about the priorities and direction of targeted resources and where they can be effective. The hon. Gentleman might be interested to know that the number of sight tests has increased since the fee was introduced. Other things are happening as well. For example, domiciliary visits, which are paid for by health authorities and provide sight tests for the housebound—often the elderly, to whom the hon. Gentleman referred—have increased by 105 per cent. in the five years to 1995–96, from 109,000 to 222,500.

I point that out simply to illustrate the fact that, rather than introduce some universal benefit, which the hon. Gentleman might think would play well to the audience, he would be far better advised to ensure that expenditure was targeted, as we are doing in the NHS, for example with domiciliary visits and the targeting of those at risk, such as the relatives of people suffering from glaucoma. That should be his priority instead.

The suggestion on dental examinations would be a fruitless exercise. The hon. Gentleman failed to point out that the number of individual treatments carried out within NHS dentistry has risen from 17 million in 1978 to 24.8 million in 1995–96, which shows that there are even more opportunities for the general examinations that must surely precede such treatments. More facilities are available for examinations now. Again, it is a matter of properly targeting the resource—of targeting those who are at risk. That is why we reformed the child capitation system and why we are ensuring that, in funding NHS dentistry in the future, we shall use purchaser-provider

[Mr. Malone]

agreements driven by health authorities, which have an insight into the local health needs of their population. Thus we shall target the resource effectively at those who need it, rather than spreading it across the population, as the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Mr. Charles Kennedy *rose—*

Mr. Malone: I shall give way for the last time.

Mr. Kennedy: I am grateful to the Minister, as he has been generous about interventions. On dental charges, surely the Minister, like every other hon. Member, will have anecdotal evidence—through his family, for example—and any dentist could tell him the same story. Dentists can give comprehensive and proper preventive and restorative attention to only two categories of patient—those who are fully funded by the benefits system because of their income status and those who can afford to pay. A great swathe of middle-class families do not qualify for support and are having to take short cuts, or are not undergoing the full treatment that the dental surgeon prescribes.

Mr. Malone: The hon. Gentleman should have a care. People can always promise to do more. Within NHS dentistry, anything that is clinically required is available for patients. Of course, there is a system of charges that raises a substantial amount that can be spent elsewhere in the NHS or targeted at at-risk groups in dentistry. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey completely failed to recognise that properly targeting need in the NHS is far more important than simply spreading the resource thinly across a population: that cannot bring results.

There are immediate priorities for the health service. The Government have pledged funding on a secure basis for the years to come and the Prime Minister pledged to increase spending on the health service in real terms, year on year on year. That is the foundation stone on which the service will rest in the years to come.

We are developing a primary care-led NHS, which is vital for patients and for the profession, especially those in the primary health care team who can now develop their professional roles, and we are continuing to make more effective use of taxpayers' money, so that more and more patients can be treated. That is the Government's record and that is what we intend to continue. We shall continue to build the quality of the whole NHS team—doctors, nurses and other medical professionals—which has greater horizons than ever before.

Our long-term priorities are to build a service in which the public can have confidence, which expands the professional skills of all who work in it, and which invests in work that keeps us at the clinical cutting edge of medical research and development: a service that can take pride in its achievements over the past 50 years, and has ambitions for the next 50 years. That is what the Government have delivered and will sustain after the general election.

4.46 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I am aware of the positive role of the national health service. I remember that, some years ago, when we were considering long-term financing, we had before us a person who had been in private medicine in the United States and in England. He was asked which was the most effective health management organisation, and his response was, "Yours—the NHS." I accept that, but there is room for improvement in everything.

When the Minister spoke about waiting lists, my mind went back to a little family discussion a good number of years ago, when I had asked my wife whether she would be able to join me on a certain occasion, and she had said no. I turned to my eldest girl and said, "What about you, Rosemary?", to which she replied, "Yes",

whereupon my younger daughter immediately said, "Ha! Using a big word when a small one would be sufficient!" The younger daughter had worked out that if Rosemary had said no—a smaller word than yes—I would have invited her instead. The Minister gave us a long, wandering explanation of the waiting list problem, when the simple reality is that waiting lists are growing. It would have been much easier to say that on the record.

It is not sufficient for Ministers to be on the defensive in the House, even when some hon. Members may be on the offensive, asking questions and putting things on the record. A senior civil servant put on the record the role, at times, of civil servants, when he said in a famous court case that they were economical with the truth. Figures can be used in different ways.

Mr. Gallie: Given the hon. Gentleman's comments on waiting lists, is he aware of the service offered by hospitals in Ayrshire to patients from Northern Ireland for orthopaedic surgery, aimed at reducing waiting lists in Northern Ireland, and does he feel that that strengthens the bond between Scotland and Northern Ireland?

Rev. Martin Smyth: I have no difficulty with that, because it is part of the system. If people who need treatment can receive it in other places, that is fine. The tragedy is that some purchasing bodies are not prepared to go elsewhere, even if, as in the case of Ayrshire and some London providers, the service is offered as a loss leader, to try to fill spare places. If patients who need treatment can be treated anywhere in the NHS, I would support it. Certainly there is a bond, and it will be strengthened when Musgrave Park hospital starts competing and tendering abroad. It, too, has the facility to do that but, unfortunately, it has tried to treat people in Northern Ireland as first priority when the boards in Northern Ireland have not been able to purchase places there.

I am concerned by the phrase

"on the basis of need regardless of the ability to pay"

in the Government's amendment. I accept that, but the harsh reality is that that does not always happen in the national health service. We will be told that we offer only anecdotal evidence, but if only one person in a hospital, having been examined by a cardiac specialist, is told, "You need a cardiac operation. I will have to put you on the waiting list. If you can afford £10,000 or £12,000, we can do it in three weeks," something is wrong. Those surgeons are employed in the national health service rather than in private practice: it would different if the patient had gone to a private practice for treatment. If that happens to one person, it is one person too many.

I generally support the motion. It is the way of all Governments, of whatever ilk, that they bring in people from outside to try to resolve problems—to kick them into touch, to use a rugby analogy. They might call it a royal commission but someone else has to take the responsibility. Why did the Minister try to shoot down a mere Opposition spokesperson who suggested using a body, such as the King's Fund, which the Government have used often? As a Member of Parliament, I have found its services very helpful. My constituency has at least two medical facilities that have benefited from assessment by it. I support its use.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The Minister's response to our suggestion was to ask why we should not use the Audit Commission. Many hon. Members would rather have the Audit Commission perform independent assessment of statistics than the Government. If they have some problem with using the King's Fund for this job and the Minister were offering that, it would be an acceptable middle way that the hon. Gentleman might encourage the Government to adopt.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I have no difficulty with the Audit Commission doing the work, but I am concerned about the pressure of work on it. Often, when Select Committees are asked to consider its reports, civil servants or officers come before us to answer our queries and we discover that they are doing their best to kick into touch. They say that were not involved in the misdemeanours of previous years and assure us that they will do better in future. In the end, the same mistakes are perpetrated. However, I have no difficulty with the examination being carried by the Audit Commission.

I am not sure that the Minister fully understood what he was saying in talking about free dental and eye checks. He said that they would mean that there would be less money for patient care. I have a suspicion that the people we are talking about are patients who need care. Some people have found that they can benefit from routine check-ups because other diseases are immediately discovered and helped on their way. We are arguing for something that experts have been asking for.

Only recently I went in to have my eyes tested—admittedly, a year after I should have done, not because of the expense, but merely because I put off until tomorrow what I should have done yesterday—and asked about the figures. I was interested in the Minister's answer. There was a decisive drop in the number of people coming for eye tests when the change took place; the numbers have now begun to rise again.

I am not so sure that they are rising again simply because more people need the tests. It may reflect the fact that some sections of our society are better off financially and are ready to have check-ups earlier. However, elderly people who have to balance their budgets think twice before having a routine eye test. They wait until something affects their eyesight before going for a test. We might save pounds in the long run if we treated patients earlier.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Can the hon. Gentleman confirm that there is now evidence—I think that we have all seen it—from the Royal National Institute for the Blind which confirms that there has been a deterioration in the sight of some of those who are now not being tested? It is not a theory, but practice. The proposal that I and others have made is not that we should take money from the rest of the health service budget to reinstate free eye and dental checks, but that we should raise money elsewhere—we propose putting extra tax on cigarettes. We propose not taking from the health service, but adding to its resources.

Rev. Martin Smyth: The motion deals specifically with that matter. I accept that the Government of the day may have to find some money from another sphere.

I know that we do not want to make political points; there are those who fear that, the nearer we come to an election, the more likely it is that political points will be made. All I shall say by way of guidance to the Government is that the recommended increase for nurses of about 3.3 per cent. might be their best vote winner and it may embarrass others if the Government opt for it. Only yesterday, those close to the core of the matter claimed to me that the money is available for such an increase. That may relate to the argument that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) was advancing.

People throughout the nation still believe that those in the front line of medical care at every level, community or otherwise, are those in the nursing profession. Unfortunately, even now, some people have not received last year's increase because the discussions are still continuing. There is something wrong with that. I cannot understand how those who manage different health provisions can argue that they have been wrong-footed and that, if the Government give the increase, they will be short of money because they have already allocated their funds in a different way.

When we discuss financing the health service, we must watch out for what I constantly call medical politics, where each group—whether managers, community groups or elsewhere—argue specifically for themselves. They may bring in patients as an added bonus, but there is undoubtedly a need in the nation. I am discovering that Northern Ireland is being robbed of some of the advantages that it had when it governed itself.

Lest anyone should misunderstand, I shall put the record straight. There is no Minister responsible for Northern Ireland present on the Front Bench. I know that the House will sympathise with the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss), who lost his wife yesterday. I felt a great sense of sympathy when I was told about his bereavement at the conference of the Royal College of Student Nurses in Belfast. That is why the Minister is not on the Government Bench today.

People in Northern Ireland believe—as do people in other parts of the nation—that there is a great need for more resources to be concentrated on health care.

4.59 pm

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me so early in this important debate on the national health service. Before coming to the substance of my remarks, I shall take a moment to join the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) in his expression of sorrow. We were all sorry to hear of the family bereavement of the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss).

[Mr. Matthew Banks]

The hon. Gentleman also drew attention to the attendance at the debate. I am pleased to see my hon. Friend the Minister for Health on the Front Bench, and also the Minister of State, Scottish Office, who is representing the Scottish component of this important debate, if I may put it that way. As I commence my remarks, I am sorry to see that not a single Labour Back Bencher is present. I get the feeling that the Labour party is trying to make the debate collapse early, in the hope that insufficient Conservative Members will be present to out-vote the Liberal Democrats. No doubt the hon. Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) will be here later, because, as a member of old Labour, he is hardly likely to pay any attention to the antics of the new Labour Whips Office.

I was pleased to hear that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) wanted to introduce a non-partisan element into the debate, especially on the development of health provision. His attempt to do that was spoilt when the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) popped up and demanded to know where the Secretary of State for Health was. I do not think that any convention has been broken by the absence of the two senior Front-Bench spokesmen on health. Most of the colleagues of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey are not participating in the debate and are not here to support him.

I can say one positive thing about the attendance of Liberal Democrats at their own debate. At least they have come a long way since my predecessor, Councillor Fearn, was the Liberal Democrat party's health service spokesman in the House. Liberal Democrats had to pitch in with helpful interventions to try to keep him on track, until the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) rightly replaced him with the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) when things became a little too hot for him. Councillor Fearn is the Liberal Democrat candidate in my constituency at the next general election. It is his 66th birthday tomorrow, and I genuinely wish him a long retirement from Westminster politics, because I doubt that we shall see him back here.

Mr. Simon Hughes: One never knows.

Mr. Banks: The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland drew attention to the fact that the Secretary of State is not present. In his opening remarks, the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey said that this morning he had visited health service premises in his constituency with his right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil.

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman is almost right. My right hon. Friend and I had a visit from nurses: the meeting took place in this building, and not in NHS premises.

Mr. Banks: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for clarifying that point. It is even more disappointing that his right hon. Friend has not bothered to turn up for a debate initiated by his party. Either this is an important subject for the Liberal Democrats or it is not.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): The debate may be of interest to the three Liberal Democrat Members who are present, but it is clearly of no interest to the rest of them.

Mr. Banks: With the greatest respect to the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones), he stayed for about 20 minutes and did not even hear the end of the opening speech by his hon. Friend the Member for Southwark and Bermondsey.

It was suggested that I will have difficulties at the next election, but I suspect that there will be a number of Conservative gains from the Liberal Democrats.

I shall return to the substance of the debate, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I do not want to incur your wrath or get a little too overheated about the impending general election.

Although I did not catch the fact that the meeting with nurses took place in the House, I listened attentively to the substance of the remarks of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey. He is clearly not a budding Treasury Minister. He should take care when advocating the hypothecation of taxes, because we could end up with a problem if we had to find money to spend on provisions that were not particularly popular.

Although the motion does not refer to nurses' pay and whether it should be negotiated locally, I have read the hon. Gentleman's previous speeches in which he has referred to that, not least in the debate on 20 November. *[Interruption.]* He is waving the Order Paper at me. I am grateful to him for pointing that out.

I think that the hon. Gentleman is wrong. His point about the independence of pay negotiating bodies is important, but he cannot have it both ways. We either have an independent body whose recommendations we accept, or we do not. The independent body that looks after nurses' pay has recommended that it should not fall below a ceiling of a 2 per cent. rise. However, there is no reason why nurses cannot be paid more than 2 per cent. either across the board in a geographical area or in specific cases on a local basis, depending on the trust.

It is important to have local flexibility in pay negotiations. In an area that is looked after a particular NHS trust, greater flexibility may allow management to reward nurses with an increase of rather more than the 2 per cent. suggested by the independent body. We should not be too rigid. What matters is the local provision of care within the national health service.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman about contracts. I have some sympathy with the view that too much time is spent negotiating contracts. I am not suggesting that every contract that an NHS trust puts out to tender should be a rigid three-year one. We should seek ways to extend, in appropriate circumstances, the one-year contracts that take up so much time to renew each year. That is bound to free management time, so that the management can ensure that the provision of health care is improved in each trust hospital.

I regret that insufficient reference was made to the additional £25 million. That is a constructive criticism by the Minister of State. Insufficient credit has been given to

the £25 million additional resources from what I call an emergency contingency fund to deal with some of the winter problems, which have resulted in a marginal rise in waiting lists. I appreciate the action taken by the Department of Health.

I am fairly familiar with the £25 million split. That money will help to deal with bed blocking problems, which have certainly affected my local hospital in Southport. It will ensure that the local health authority has the resources to put more money into care in the community in local authority and private nursing homes, and it will free hospital beds so that people can be treated more quickly.

I pay particular tribute to my hon. Friends in the Department, who have ensured that additional contingency funds have been used to deal with problems in community mental health services.

I believe that a non-partisan approach to some health issues is possible. In this debate, Conservative Members may come closer to achieving that with the Liberal Democrats than with Labour. After all, as the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey pointed out, the Labour party has not in any way met the commitment made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Government to year-on-year-on-year increases over and above inflation. That commitment was first made in 1992, and has been met. Have we heard such a commitment from Labour? We have not: the silence has been deafening. I look forward to hearing from the hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) later in the debate.

I strongly agree with some of the other comments made by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey. I particularly agree with what he said in the NHS debate of 20 November:

"Like the Secretary of State, I welcome a debate on the NHS. I welcome an opportunity to pay tribute to the service, to praise those who work in it and to say how good I believe it is. It serves hon. Members and our constituents extraordinarily well. Of course, things go wrong and sometimes there are sad mistakes and tragedies."—[*Official Report*, 20 November 1996; Vol. 285, c. 1021.]

I hope that those mistakes and tragedies will be kept to the absolute minimum, and eradicated where possible, but we should all recognise that, because so many more patients are being treated in the NHS than were treated in the 1970s—as a result of the Government's policies—the odd mistake will inevitably be made. It would be frivolous to suggest otherwise.

Nevertheless, I agree with what the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey said in that debate. It took place only a few weeks ago, and nothing has changed since then. I have no doubt that the commitment given by the Prime Minister in Bournemouth last year—which is, of course, Government policy—is one of the many promises that we have kept in the present Parliament and will keep in the next.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I am trying to establish what areas of agreement there are between us. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that it would not be a bad thing—I am trying not to trap him into saying anything that might push him too far—if the question of statistics, to which nurses' pay is relevant, were dealt with by an independent body? The Minister suggested the Audit Commission; I have suggested the King's Fund. All the matters pertaining to the hon. Gentleman's constituents—the number of beds, whether there are too many or too few, whether they are under pressure and whether there are enough hospital places—could then be evaluated independently, before the political debate about which hospitals should be built and which should be closed. That, of course, will ultimately be a political decision.

Mr. Banks: I am afraid that I cannot agree with the hon. Gentleman on that, for two reasons. In fact, I am sure that there are others, but I shall mention two.

First, the Audit Commission is there to ensure that we receive value for money. I do not think that its task is to do what the hon. Gentleman has suggested, although in certain circumstances I retain an open mind. Secondly, I believe that such a suggestion impugns the integrity of the civil service. Over the years, it has been suggested that the civil service has become a little too close to the present Government, but anyone who talks to Ministers privately will be told that that is certainly not the case. Civil servants do an excellent job; no doubt they have their own private views, but they behave very professionally. I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman that the statistics that he receives from the Government—which are compiled by civil servants—are in any need of disinfecting.

Today's debate takes place against a background of record spending on the NHS. Spending has risen by some 74 per cent. in real terms since 1979. For every man, woman and child in the United Kingdom, we are now spending about £724, compared—in real terms—to some £444 in 1978–79. That is a significant difference. The problems of this winter have led to a special cash boost of £25 million. Some of that has been used to deal with bed blocking, and has certainly helped my constituency; £4 million of it has been spent on extra intensive care and high-dependency beds, and £5 million has been used to improve mental health services, which have also been affected by winter problems.

There are more doctors and nurses than there were in the 1970s. Since then, the number of nurses and midwives has risen by some 55,000. The number of doctors and dentists has risen by 22,500. For every manager in the NHS, there are some 77 employees directly involved in patient care.

I have mentioned the Prime Minister's commitment to year-on-year-on-year real increases in the next Parliament. I remember that, when he first came up with the idea of the citizens charter, one or two foolish people laughed at the suggestion; but what a difference the charter has made. It has enabled the public to know precisely what level of service they ought to expect, and how it should improve year on year. It has established benchmarks, and if those benchmarks are not met, action is taken.

I very much hope that the Labour party will match that guarantee. I thought that the hon. Member for Dulwich was going to intervene and give me such a pledge, but she is only shuffling her papers. I do not think that we should be surprised by the Prime Minister's commitment, because he gave the same pledge in 1992, and has adhered to it. It is, however, staggering to note that there is to be a further increase of some £1.6 billion in NHS spending next year, which means a 3 per cent. real-terms increase in hospital and community health services. In 1995, the NHS share of gross domestic product was about 5.8 per cent.; in 1978–79, it was about 4.7 per cent.

I have mentioned nurses' pay, and the importance of having the flexibility of local negotiation on a trust-by-trust, hospital-by-hospital basis. Nurses' pay has

[Mr. Banks]

risen from about £68 a week in 1979 to some £311 a week in 1995: that is a real increase, over and above inflation, of around 70 per cent. I believe that locally negotiated pay is the way forward. We have seen great benefits from it in my constituency, and I was heartened to learn that the independent body had made it clear that there should be an increase of no less than 2 per cent.

Rev. Martin Smyth: The hon. Gentleman mentioned our last debate on the NHS. In that debate, the Minister who was responding gave a figure of £1.56 billion for the NHS, but did not say that £56 million was going to Northern Ireland. The hon. Gentleman has mentioned local negotiations. Our budget has not been given an increase of 3 per cent., but has been cut by 3 per cent. This year, it has been reduced to 1.5 per cent. up front.

Mr. Banks: I thank the hon. Gentleman for telling us what is happening in Northern Ireland. I know that he will forgive me if I plead genuine ignorance of the specific case that he mentioned. I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland cannot be with us, for the reasons that the hon. Gentleman mentioned earlier. Perhaps we will pick up on that matter later in the debate.

All I can say to the hon. Gentleman is that the flexibility that I have seen in and around my constituency—in the Southport and Formby Community Health Services NHS trust and the Sefton district health authority, which covers three parliamentary constituencies—has been welcomed because it has been effective in giving pay rises to people who deserve them most. With such flexibility, it is important to be able in certain instances to do what is best on a local basis. What is perhaps best in Southport is not necessarily good for Northern Ireland, and vice versa.

I mentioned the background that we have in dealing with in the debate. One further point of substance in relation to improvements in the NHS is the private finance initiative. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has in many ways, together with the Secretary of State for Transport, pioneered the PFI. It is no surprise or coincidence that both have been Treasury Ministers. Mixed public and private funding for improvements in the NHS is vital. I need to look only to my constituency to see the enormous benefit of such funding. Approximately £12 million is being used to develop new premises to ensure that one of our older hospitals has the opportunity of closing to provide better facilities on the newer site, which was built after the Government's election to power.

That site should have been built in 1970s, but, when the Labour party had to go cap in hand to the International Monetary Fund and cut the capital hospital building programme by 33 per cent., unfortunately my constituents were not able to have the site when they needed it. The PFI is vital. Its critics are being proved wrong. A combination of public and private sector capital is the way to ensure new build where it is necessary, and improvements in existing facilities.

There is no better proof of increasing satisfaction with NHS services than personal experience. I am sure that I am not alone in the House in experiencing treatment on the NHS, although I freely admit that I take the opportunity also of contributing to a private health care scheme. I have had tax relief on those contributions, which have been so opposed by the Opposition parties. I take the opportunity of ensuring that I have choice. I advocate it. That is what we Conservative Members advocate. We have done so, not least in the past, but we continue to do so as we head towards a general election. Choice is vital, but the experience that I was mentioning of hon. Members receiving treatment on the NHS is important.

I recall going to a meeting of the chairman of the NHS trust in my constituency in the early 1990s—I think 1993. I expected the meeting to last some half an hour. I actually left the hospital some seven days later, having spent a week in intensive care. The health care that I received was absolutely outstanding. I had the opportunity not just of remaining in one intensive care ward, but of going to another ward and to two or three different hospitals. I cannot fault the care that I received, and I deprecate people both inside and outside the House who all too frequently criticise unfairly and without good reason the good work by nurses and doctors in the service. We all recognise that there are problems, but too frequently we hear about those few problems and not enough about the success of those who work in the service.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I am glad that the NHS looked after the hon. Gentleman well and brought him back to health. Will he accept, however, that one of the concerns about the health service is that many people who do not want to use the private health sector feel increasingly driven to do so because they cannot be sure that the NHS will be able to do all the things that they need? One of the tests of the NHS's fragility is that there is a consistent increase in people who are opting for private health insurance—it was 11 per cent.; it is now up to 14 per cent. I remember that his previous leader, the noble Lady Thatcher, was happy to have private health insurance, but, when she needed emergency or more acute treatment, she relied on the NHS.

Mr. Banks: I have listened with care to what the hon. Gentleman has said. What I was talking about was choice and I am not going to debate what the noble Baroness did or did not do. I can tell the House my experiences only, and they have been excellent in relation to the NHS.

Mr. Gallie: Surely the words of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) underline what my hon. Friend says. He points out the values and the excellence of the NHS. It has been demonstrated that, where someone had the choice between private and NHS, the individual plumped for the NHS. That is surely a great credit to the NHS, and surely backs my hon. Friend's argument.

Mr. Banks: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is such an advocate of Ayr, despite what his political opponents say in Scotland, I believe that he will hold his seat.

I should like to make one final local point. May I make a plea to the Minister to take action? The two local health authorities that provide services in and around my constituency have been consulting over a lengthy period on the provision of health care for the future. In some instances, too few patients have been spread over two

brand new hospitals, if I can put it that way, some five miles apart—one in Ormskirk and one in Southport. South Lancashire district health authority, which covers Skelmersdale and the west Lancashire region, and Sefton district health authority, which covers Bootle to Southport, have been debating whether health care should be provided on one site and, if not, how the split between the two sites should take place.

The major concern has been that the two health authorities, rightly trying to take decisions locally, have not been able to agree. As a result, they commissioned Sir Duncan Nichol, the former chief executive of the health service, to conduct a review. He decided that there should be a hot site and a cold site, and he further concluded that the hot site should be in Southport.

As part of what I can only describe as a deal, a suggestion was made to transfer maternity services from my constituency five miles down the road to Ormskirk. There are concerns about that in relation not just to geography but to where intensive care and accident and emergency services will be located and where, without those facilities, young babies will be born.

I believe now that, after a lengthy period of consultation, South Lancashire health authority has been dragging out taking a decision on the matter because it knows that, in a few weeks' time, there will be a general election. It is vital that a decision is reached, because my constituents are fully aware that, if there were to be a Labour Government, they would ensure that the North West regional health authority intervened to transfer those maternity services away from Southport to Ormskirk.

Every historical precedent suggests that that will happen. There will be nothing for Southport under a Labour Government because, under them, we could not have even the brand new hospital that the regional health authority wanted to build in the 1970s. The only hope to ensure that Sir Duncan Nichol's recommendations are implemented will be for the regional health authority to intervene, and to do soon, before a general election.

I know that my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State, Scottish Office, is not involved in this local review of services. It has come not from the Department of Health but from the region and the locality. I want the Minister to press the chairman of the regional health authority to intervene so that a decision can be taken now. Then we can ensure that the Nicol proposals are implemented, so that all the major services are based in Southport. Once the independent review has been implemented, I shall tell my constituents that that review, commissioned by the two health authorities, has gone ahead, that it is expected that maternity services will stay in Southport and that only a Labour Government could change that.

I have no doubt that the interests of my constituents will be best served by the re-election of a Conservative Government.

5.29 pm

Ms Tessa Jowell (Dulwich): We too would like to record our condolences to the hon. Member for North–East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss) following his recent sad bereavement.

We welcome the opportunity to debate the immediate priorities for the national health service. I share the view of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) that we must take every opportunity to provide a view of the real facts of life for staff and patients in accident and emergency departments and GP surgeries up and down the country, as an antidote to the rosy view of the NHS adopted by Richmond house.

I begin, however, by dealing with the priorities outlined in the Liberal Democrat motion. Free eye tests and dental checks are top of that party's wish list. The Labour party recognises the value of eye tests and dental checks as important preventive measures, and we share the concern expressed by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey that the withdrawal of free tests has had an adverse impact on public health. But restoring free eye tests and checks would not come cheap. The combined cost would be at least £170 million and probably nearer £200 million—roughly the same amount as highly conservative estimates of the hole in the Government's finances for the NHS between now and the end of this financial year.

As the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey knows, the problems of our health authority—Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham—have led to patients in both our constituencies waiting as long as 18 months to be admitted to hospital, which is longer than patients wait in other parts of the country. The problems have also given rise to what the chief executive of King's College hospital recently denounced as the two-tier health service which he found it impossible to defend to the patients of his hospital.

The acute problems that hospitals have experienced cannot possibly be separated from the pace and scale of the cuts in acute hospital beds in recent years. That is not just our view; it is a view shared by the British Medical Association, which has today published new evidence of the continuing crisis in our hospitals. It has found that Southampton General is "just about coping". In Liverpool, the bed crisis continues. Addenbrooke's in Cambridge is

"in and out of red alert."

Torbay is

"closed to elective admission and running at full capacity",

and in Bristol,

"waiting lists have grown longer".

These problems are inseparable from the fact that a quarter of NHS hospital beds have been lost since the Government's competitive internal market was introduced. Nearly 13,000 beds in all specialties have closed in just five years as a direct result of the Government's doctrinaire obsession with competition. In the battle for patients, hospitals have been forced to cut services to the bone in order to keep costs down.

It is a simple fact that no service, public or private, could withstand such a huge reduction in capacity over such a short time and avoid deterioration in the quality of the service that even the best efforts of staff can provide. Of course we recognise that the needs of the NHS and its patients are changing—that more day surgery is being carried out, for instance; but even so the pace of bed closures has been dangerously fast.

We have in London an example of the damage done to patient care by the pace of change. As long ago as 1994, Dr. Brian Jarman warned that the Tomlinson report, on which the bed closure programme was based, was founded on flawed evidence. Incidentally, it followed the report of the King's Fund, which reviewed the health

[Ms Tessa Jowell]

needs of London. Dr. Jarman pointed out that important data relating to the availability of mental health services and of residential and other long-term services for elderly people had been omitted from the calculations.

Even though the Department of Health seems belatedly to have accepted Brian Jarman's analysis, bed closures have continued at an alarming rate. More than 17,500 beds have been closed in North and South Thames over the past five years.

We support the call in the motion for reducing unnecessary bureaucracy by introducing longer-term agreements between health authorities and hospitals. That is what the health service wants; it will provide important stability and savings on bureaucratic costs which can then be redirected to patient care. It was, after all, the Government's doctrinaire obsession with competition that created the explosion of bureaucracy in the NHS at the cost of patient care.

The BMA has calculated that the internal market costs £1.5 billion. In private the Secretary of State seems prepared to accept that. It is significant that his recent White Paper—his credo, as he put it—"A Service with Ambitions", did not make a single reference to the competitive internal market. Indeed, in one part of the country the Secretary of State has even permitted the suspension of that market. In Newcastle, the city's health trusts have returned to a system of collaborative contracting in which competition has been replaced by co-operation and three-year rolling contracts. The move, the trusts explain, is intended to

"avoid the perils of over-competitiveness . . . there is the ever-present danger of trusts becoming too competitive for business at the expense of quality. In other words, trying to do more for less. If this were to continue unchecked, staff would undoubtedly lose confidence in the market system."

When the Minister winds up, perhaps he will assure us that, if the Newcastle project can be shown to have brought benefits by improving local standards of care, the Government will immediately encourage hospitals and health authorities across the country to ditch the absurd competition that is imposing such a burden on the health service and creating such an obstacle to best patient care.

We share the concern expressed in the motion about the effect of local pay bargaining on the NHS. It has embroiled hospitals and staff in drawn-out, often acrimonious negotiations and distracted them from their main priority, which should be improving patient care. The Royal College of Nursing has found that only 196 trusts out of 488 have so far reached agreement on pay for the current financial year.

I offer the House an example of what local pay has meant for one trust this year. The Newcastle City Health NHS trust describes how it has been engaged in a long-running dispute with staff over local pay. The chief executive has spent between 80 and 90 hours on negotiations; his deputy has spent 100 hours, and a human resources manager, 200 hours. On top of that, 80 other managers have spent about 20 hours each on the subject. That amounts to a total of 2,000 managerial hours. Given that a further 1,000 hours were lost on the day of a strike, almost 3,000 hours—which could have been spent on more productive work—have been lost to pay negotiations. That is why we support the call to scrap local pay bargaining. It is another example of how the Government have allowed NHS bureaucracy to spiral out of control.

We welcome today's debate, and we support many of the calls that have been made. However, we are sceptical of the remedies suggested by the Liberal Democrats and of how those would be paid for.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for identifying the issues on which we agree. However, will she tell the House whether she and her colleagues can support our second proposal, which is

"a freeze on all finance-driven bed, hospital and service closures which represent a reduction of service to patients"?

As I said, the public desperately want a national halt to service reductions while an independent assessment is made. Can she and her colleagues endorse and support that proposal?

Ms Jowell: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we have made clear our commitment to a moratorium on any further acute bed closures in London, because of the particular circumstances and pressures that arose after the Tomlinson report. So we are committed to a moratorium in London. We have not made, and at this stage we would not make, a similar commitment nationally, as he would like. If elected to government after the next general election, however, we will carefully examine the position, particularly in deprived inner-city areas, where—for very obvious reasons—pressure on acute beds tends to be greatest.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): The hon. Lady is making a very careful and interesting speech; and I heard what she said about the difference between London and the provinces, which seem to manage these matters rather better. Nonetheless, will she now take the opportunity to appeal to local government across the country to stop blocking hospital beds? In my constituency, 50 beds are being blocked by the local social services people, who will not allow old people who have been assessed into care homes, because those care homes are private. It is a scandal which the hon. Lady's words would help to alleviate.

Ms Jowell: It is absolutely clear that the way in which the Government have tilted the balance in distributing money for community care towards the independent sector has created the bed-blocking problem in so many parts of the country. There was virtually no independent provision in my own borough—which I shall use as a specific example—and it was therefore very difficult to move elderly people out of hospital and into care funded through community care money, which was made available by the reforms. All types of perverse incentives have been created because of the Government's doctrinaire obsession with care commercialisation, rather than with patients' best interests.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Malone: The hon. Lady has confirmed that those councils—for political reasons and because they do not like the policies—are taking out their revenge on patients, and that she supports them.

Ms Jowell: The Minister is perfectly well aware that that is absolutely not so. One of the obstacles to many

councils being able to provide effective community care has been the perversity of the Government's distribution formula for care in the community money.

Mr. Matthew Banks: Will the hon. Lady give way on that point?

Ms Jowell: No, I will not give way again—*[Interruption.]* In a short speech, I have already given way many times. I shall move on to the costings—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I think that the House knows my views on seated interventions, especially when they are repeated.

Ms Jowell: I make no apology for not giving way to the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks), who made a speech lasting almost half an hour.

As for costing the proposals made by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey and his colleagues, as I said, the Library has already performed some calculations. The cost of restoring eye tests and dental checks, based on 1994–95 prices, would be about £170 million. The pledge to increase NHS expenditure in line with NHS inflation would cost an extra £594 million in 1998-99, and £1.3 billion in 1999 to 2000. The pledge to recruit 10,000 more nurses and 5,000 more doctors, which appeared in 11 October 1996 edition of the *Liberal Democrat News*, would cost at least £100 million. The pledge to cut waiting lists to a six-month maximum, crudely estimated, would cost £240 million. In short, the Liberals' proposals would cost an extra £2.5 billion.

The way in which the Liberal Democrats have tried to explain where the money to meet those pledges would come from has not been completely convincing. I reiterate that they told us at last year's conference that an extra £350 million for nursing staff would be made available by closing a tax loophole, although that loophole had apparently already been closed. I therefore ask the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey to think twice before he throws stones, and reconsider the credibility of the cost of his own policies.

Opposition Members should not be distracted by the hypothetical and irrelevant question—diverting as it might be—of how a Liberal Democrat Government would fulfil their commitments. Our main concern is the real crisis that is gripping the health service.

In recent weeks, it has become blatantly clear that the Government have only one immediate priority for the NHS—crisis management, so that they can get through to the general election and the end of the financial year. Health authorities and hospitals are being told to keep problems under wraps, so far as possible. We have heard how the chief executive of the NHS has dispatched a memo to hospitals on "managing the winter crisis". We have been told that hospitals are being advised not to pay bills so that they can make ends meet, although that means that small businesses which depend on that cash may go to the wall. We have also heard of a hospital in Liverpool being urged to find ways of "judiciously eliminating" patients from the waiting list.

Those are not the actions of a responsible Government who put patients' interests first; they are the actions of a Government and Ministers engaged in a desperate bid for survival. The needs of the NHS take second place to the electoral prospects of the Conservative party. While all that is going on, patients across the country wait on trollies in casualty; elective surgery is being cancelled, often at the last minute; and staff are working under intolerable and unacceptable levels of pressure. The Government should be dealing with those problems as a priority, rather than being concerned with news management and drawing a veil over the circumstances facing hospitals daily.

Every day, we read further evidence of the crisis. This week, the Greater London Association of Community Health Councils published a new report on how accident and emergency departments in London have coped this winter. It paints a bleak picture of the quality of patient care in London's hospitals. It states:

"People are regularly waiting unacceptably long periods of time on trolleys in A & E departments".

New terminology has had to be invented to explain how hospitals are dealing with the crisis. The report states:

"Overnighters, people waiting overnight in casualty, are becoming a regular feature of London's health services."

In the past five years, a new nursing protocol has been created to deal with the pressure sores and dehydration that inevitably follow when very elderly people spend any time waiting on trolleys. The GLACH report adds that this year's crisis is affecting all patients, not just those admitted to A and E. It talks of

"hospitals running at near to 100 per cent. occupancy and elective surgery frequently cancelled—including cancer operations".

Cancer operations are being cancelled elsewhere, too.

A letter from a consultant neurosurgeon at the Salford Royal Hospitals NHS trust to a patient awaiting surgery shows the intolerable pressure on his patients. The letter reads:

"Because of the problems in other district hospitals brought about by the recent bed crisis, we have not been able to move patients out of the unit and, therefore, this has restricted our ability to bring in patients for treatment. I wanted to reassure you that your brain tumour is not growing rapidly and that you will come to no medical harm as a result of the additional delay which has been forced upon us by this difficult situation. At the moment I cannot give you a date for admission but you can be reassured that you have not been forgotten."

The Secretary of State's view that there are no waiting lists for cancer operations does not tally with the experience of patients across the country. Labour has already pledged to treat an extra 100,000 patients and take them off hospital waiting lists by releasing £100 million from the red tape which is the result of the Government's bureaucratisation of the NHS. As part of this pledge, we will ensure that cancer patients do not have to wait for surgery.

There are other immediate priorities to which a Labour Government will give urgent attention. We will end the two-tierism which has been the hallmark of this Government's treatment of patients needing primary care—the division is between people who are patients of fundholders and those who are not. We will extricate the NHS from the perverse incentives of the internal market and halt the moves towards the privatisation of the service.

This debate is an opportunity to pay tribute to the staff of the national health service, not only the doctors and nurses but all who work in it—very often in the most

[Ms Jowell]

difficult circumstances—and who provide the very best care that they can. We will end the commercial internal market and restore the NHS as a public service which puts patients first because that is what the staff and the people of this country want—the immediate priority for the NHS is a Labour Government who will rebuild it.

5.52 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): I wish to offer my condolences and those of my colleagues to the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss), who is responsible for health in Northern Ireland. At talks yesterday at which all parties were represented, there was a public and unanimous expression of sympathy for him. I trust that the Ministers here today will convey that to him as soon as they can.

I must pay a brief tribute to the Under-Secretary. The Minister for Health said that some people were on another planet. I assure him that North Antrim is not on another planet; indeed, it is not far from Scotland—just 20 miles across the water.

When I entered the House in 1970, there were eight hospitals with acute units in my area. Today there are no such acute hospitals within the bounds of my constituency. Ballycastle, Ballymena and Ballymoney are three local government areas which make up my constituency. Ballycastle hospital is closed, Ballymoney hospital is being closed, and Ballymena hospital, which was to be the main hospital, is also closing.

As Ballymena is the geographical centre of the locality, we were promised that it would be the site for a new acute hospital. That was put on the long finger, and then rejected. A new hospital—or a third of a new hospital—has been erected in Antrim. No one knows when the rest of it will be completed, but I am sure that it will not be in the lifetime of anyone here.

The northern part of the district lost out, and we were then promised a new hospital outside the area, nearer to Coleraine. That was put on the long finger for 30 years. The recent cuts in the finance to Northern Ireland meant that there was a question mark over that, too. In fact, building was stopped, and it was decided not to proceed. It was thanks to the Under-Secretary that the project was retained.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland told me himself that the Under-Secretary was lacerated for the bold stand he took to ensure that the promise of 30 years ago was implemented. I pay tribute to the Under-Secretary—but for him, we would not be getting that hospital, although it is outside the bounds of my constituency. I am glad to have put that fact on record.

There is no increase in NHS expenditure in Northern Ireland. As the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) said, there has been a year-by-year 3 per cent. cut. We are told that the reductions can be made in so-called efficiency savings, but that is impossible, and the health service is being decimated. The flesh is disappearing, and the bones are beginning to show—anyone can see that by going to the Province. The facts cannot be covered up or argued away. All sections of the community agree on that.

I pay a warm and whole-hearted tribute to all who work in the health service. This is a difficult time not only for the health service but for our Province. The people who work in the service have even more pressure on them; they need even greater patience, and have to make sacrifices. They are providing care and making sacrifices, but if they do not have the finances to do the job, services are seriously curtailed.

Wards have been closed, waiting lists for elective surgery are increasing, and people waiting for major operations are being telephoned on the very day they are due to enter hospital and told that, because of a lack of funds, the operations are cancelled. Indeed, even patients prepared and ready for theatre are being sent back to the ward and then home. That has happened time and again. Of course, the Minister receives representations from all Members of Parliament about such incidents.

Assessments are taking ever longer to complete. There are numerous examples of bed blocking because the community trusts have no money to put care packages in place or provide residential or nursing home care finance. Surely it must be more cost-effective to keep a person in their own home or in residential or nursing care than in a hospital. That has to be faced up to. If we do so, money could be made available. We need to take a decision on that.

The Government's decision not to proceed with adjustment capitation funding will have devastating consequences on the Eastern health and social services board, which covers Belfast, where the major regional hospitals are. A report was submitted last year, but so far the Government have put it on the long finger.

The main hospital in Belfast is the Royal Victoria hospital, but the House must recognise that it is in the heart of IRA Provoland. People do not want to go there, and more and more are objecting. Mr. Nigel Dodds, who is my assistant in the European Parliament and was the youngest Lord Mayor of Belfast, had his young child in the sick children's hospital in the Royal complex. Before Christmas, the IRA attempted to kill him and his wife on the ward when they were going to visit their boy. A bullet from an IRA gun went through an incubator. We cannot ask parents to go to a hospital under those circumstances. It is a very serious situation.

I do not visit the Royal Victoria hospital any more, even though I have pastoral duties that I should attend to, because a massive security operation is needed to get me in and out. I cannot put 40 members of the security forces at risk just because I want to visit one patient. I once went to see one of my church officers, who was seriously ill. When I left the ward, two IRA men came in and demanded to know "the bed that Paisley visited". That is what is happening in the Royal Victoria hospital. We must decide whether to continue pouring money into that complex, where people are afraid to go and where life is being jeopardised. The Government must consider that.

The current review considering the possibility of introducing charging into health provision in the community is rightly causing alarm in my area, where we have the most vulnerable and needy sections of all communities. It would be scandalous for the Government to introduce charges for services such as home help, occupational therapy and a range of other vital work. The people in my area need those services on a no-charge basis. They cannot meet the commitment otherwise.

It is also reprehensible that trusts should be proposing to introduce charges for nurses and other hospital staff to park their cars in the hospital grounds. Just think about that. That is what is happening at the Royal Victoria hospital. Surely there is no better place for them to park their cars than an area where the police have to keep them under surveillance. They have to pay for parking. Even though they have already paid up, nurses from the Royal group of hospitals are not even guaranteed parking space if people get there before them. How can we expect the best from our nurses and doctors if we do not look after them? They need to be looked after. The hospital trusts in my country must think again.

The Government introduced the patients charter, which was widely welcomed by my party, but we warned at the time that a charter is meaningless if the funding and resources are not in place to allow its targets to be met. How can targets be met without the financial wherewithal? That is particularly true on the reduction of waiting lists, which, as I have already said, are on the increase. Many hospitals in my country have made it clear that there will be no more surgery for non-emergency patients until the new financial year in April. They are all stopped.

There is also great concern—mentioned by the hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell)—about the two-tier health service, which we now have, in effect, in Northern Ireland. GP fundholders have no difficulty getting treatment for their patients, while the patients of non-fundholders have to take their place in the queue. They pay the same taxes and rates as anyone else. Why should they be discriminated against? When everyone has to pay the same taxes to provide health care, can the Government allow discrimination in patient care because of a patient's choice to stay with a non-fundholding doctor?

The hon. Member for Belfast, South mentioned nurses' pay. A serious situation has arisen on that, and I shall not go over the points he made. I remind the House that 80 per cent. of the female work force in Northern Ireland are employed by the NHS. Pay and conditions for those female workers are being driven down, destroying quality standards and equality. I have raised in the House before the on-going dispute between workers, the NHS trusts and Compass. We are in great difficulty. We have had strikes, and there is a lot of opposition.

The Government and the trusts have not lived up to their responsibilities. The Government cannot wash their hands of the issue and claim that it is a matter for the trusts, which has nothing to do with them. The Government have tried to shunt the matter off, saying that it pertains to the private sector. Remember that 80 per cent. of our female work force are employed in the NHS. The pay they are offered is atrocious—it is an insult to them. The Government must take that into account. They cannot wash their hands of it.

Those are some of the serious difficulties that the health service in Northern Ireland is up against. We have rightly emphasised those issues today. We are not trying to do down the health service. The Government have taken credit for building the health service. I ask them not to destroy what they have built. Being a preacher, I am reminded of the apostle Paul's words that, if I pull down that which I once built, I am a transgressor. My final homily to the Government is, "Please do not be a transgressor."

6.7 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): I am glad to follow the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley). In particular, I share the concerns he expressed about nurses, who are waiting with great interest and hope for the announcement from the pay review body and the Government's reaction to it.

My party's view is that the presumption should be that the Government accept the findings of an independent pay review body that they established. That must be the starting point. If we are to believe what prior indications and leaks suggest, the proposals are likely to be modest. It certainly ought to be within the Government's capability to meet in full the award, which should have been taken into account in the Chancellor's forward budgetary predictions.

I emphasise the importance of nurses and those who deliver the health service, because they frequently work under enormous pressure.

We often hear about the predicament of young doctors who spend very long hours in hospitals when they are training and in the early years of their specialisations. I am the son of a gynaecologist and a specialist in public health, and have always been conscious of the long hours that doctors work. However, there is considerable evidence that recently the pressure on people upon whom we rely so heavily has become too acute.

Another sector of health providers to whom I pay tribute is the general practitioners. Although the Secretary of State for Health has not attended the debate, the presence of the Minister of State, Scottish Office is most welcome. I believe that, when the House is debating a central issue of policy such as the health service, there is no more important ministerial duty than to be present and hear hon. Members, representing all parts of the United Kingdom, relating widely differing experiences.

Rural doctors can also be under great pressure, not from hour upon hour of accident and emergency treatment, although that may form part of their care and concern, but because they are on constant duty without necessarily having any back up. The case of the inducement practitioners in the highlands of Scotland has to be kept under constant scrutiny and regard lest the pressure upon them becomes insupportable.

I find it unsatisfactory that, in my constituency, there should be arguments about whether 0.5 per cent. of a doctor should be included in the medical resources available to a practitioner whose practice may cover hundreds of square miles, where he is the only person providing medical cover.

Mr. Simon Hughes: My hon. Friend and I probably represent the most different species of constituency in the United Kingdom. Mine is in the heart of London, and my hon. Friend's is in the most remote rural part of northern Scotland. Does he agree that one of the real concerns that affect us both is that, unless a real effort is made and funds are allocated to recruit people to general practice, there will be a shortage of general practitioners in all parts of the United Kingdom, in a way that none of us have known in our adult lives?

Mr. Maclennan: I agree with my hon. Friend, and I call in evidence in support of what he has said what I was told by general practitioners I recently met in Thurso

[Mr. Maclennan]

in Caithness. They drew my attention to the substantial number of general practitioners who chose to emigrate to Australia and other countries not entirely different from our own. That is a disturbing factor, which requires advanced consideration. It will not do for us to be scraping around in other countries in five or 10 years' time trying to induce practitioners to come to Britain. That would not be a reasonably priced, cost-efficient option.

Mr. Gallie: The hon. Gentleman comes from Scotland, as I do. Is it not a fact that Scotland has the greatest teaching hospitals in the world, and Scots have always taken their excellent skills worldwide? Should we not be proud of that rather than bemoaning it?

Mr. Maclennan: I take great pride in that fact. My father was a teacher at one of those great teaching hospitals. He was president of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, which was a Commonwealth college. Of course I welcome to the United Kingdom doctors from abroad, as I understand the impulse of those who want to find their fortunes elsewhere. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that I was seeking to make not a partisan point, but the point that doctors in Scotland have told me that their numbers are becoming dangerously depleted. They are worried about the effect on the service in future. It right for me to convey that anxiety to the Minister.

Many general practitioners, particularly in rural areas, feel that their job has expanded in recent years, not because of the influx of new patients or the necessity of keeping abreast of the latest developments in medicine—although that may be true—but because of the requirements of form filling and meeting the demands of the health authorities to provide information for which they receive no additional emolument. That is another factor that is not adequately taken into account, particularly in rural areas with single-handed or small practices with few partners.

I am not suggesting that the work should not be carried out. Some of it is necessary to provide a proper audit of health treatment and to enable the formation of policy to adequately meet the demands of health in Scotland today. However, it is not adequately taken into account in evaluating the service of doctors.

I now turn from doctors to other servants of the public, in ancillary and related spheres. In the north of Scotland, there is great pressure from the lack of certain services, some of which may be regarded as paramedical, such as speech therapists, of whom there is gross under-supply. That can create serious medical problems. I have to ask the Government why we have been aware of the problem for so long, yet the demand is still unmet. I feel that it has much to do with the inadequate reward offered to people providing those services.

I now draw the Minister's attention to a matter with which he is familiar. Although many ambulancemen provide an excellent service, as I found out 20 years ago, when I fell off the edge of my constituency in north-west Sutherland and was taken some 120 miles over fairly rough terrain by an ambulanceman and have been grateful ever since, there are considerable anxieties in the north of Scotland about the management of the ambulance service.

The hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker), my hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) and I have expressed those anxieties to the Minister. We have amassed a number of cases that show that there is something seriously rotten in the management of the service, particularly in Inverness, and we look forward to the possibility of discussing our concerns. Although they involve management issues, they raise extremely grave matters that cannot be tackled without ministerial intervention.

I turn from various tributes and concerns to some of the priorities that we have highlighted in today's debate, not because we consider that they are the only issues that matter, but because they touch immediate needs that can be addressed effectively and immediately.

The first requirement that we have put forward, to which I was rather surprised to hear the Minister taking such extraordinary exception, and to which he reacted in such a partisan fashion, is that there should be a proper independent survey and an analysis of the needs of the NHS. He treated that suggestion as though it was somehow impugning the statistical integrity of officials.

The reality is quite different: it appears that Ministers are indicating that there are certain statistics in which, for whatever reason, they are not interested. They apparently do not want to know about hospital closures on a nationwide basis. That is to do not with the integrity of statisticians, but with political bias, the purblind attitudes of those in charge. For such reasons, it is necessary to conduct an independent survey—one that is not capable of being pushed around by Ministers who are anxious to cover up the defects of our NHS.

There are two reasons why such a survey is necessary. The first is that we need to know the outturns of the services that are being provided. That they are different in different parts of the country is absolutely clear. I serve on the council of the Cancer Research Campaign, which spends substantially more money on cancer research every year than the Government.

One of the things that the council put its hand to was a survey of the outturns of cancer treatments in different parts of the country. It revealed quite disturbing figures, of which the Government are aware. Such work should not be left to charitable organisations to fund, albeit in conjunction with particular health authorities. Such work needs to be done all the time if we are to continue to ensure that our treatments and the delivery of services meet the challenges and standards that we demand and expect, especially in a technologically rapidly advancing area of society.

The second reason is the cognate one that it is important that we know where to invest. That should not be a matter of happenstance or of political pork-barrelling, with Ministers looking favourably on their friends' constituencies, or anything of that kind. It should be decided according to need. We need independent facts and figures to calculate that need. Although we certainly have to aggregate and accumulate those figures locally, they must be interpreted nationally. That was missing from the Minister's response.

I turn to the other proposals in the motion. We should recognise that the imposition of prescription charges is becoming so punitive that impoverished people—there are a substantial number of them, perhaps 10 per cent. of the population—are seriously deterred from going to the

doctor because they know that they cannot afford what they may be required to pay. We believe that there should be a standstill on prescription charge increases. We have costed that at £9 million per annum, which we believe can be funded by a portion of our proposed tax on cigarettes.

We have also recognised two other specific areas of importance: dental and eye checks. There is very great anxiety that the failure to provide free dental checks is leading to a general deterioration of the dental health of the community. That can have effects far beyond teeth. It can lead to the general debility of an individual. Reinstating free dental checks is a form of preventive medicine that can be extremely cost-effective, and I therefore commend it strongly to the Government. It is not one of the more expensive measures that one might propose. It adds up to £60 million per annum at current prices.

Eye checks are of such importance. There is evidence of people failing to have their eyes checked. There is concern among eye specialists about the spread of glaucoma and preventable diseases due to inadequate cover. I have no doubt from surveys in my constituency that there has been a substantial downturn in attendance in doctors' surgeries for such things of late.

We also recognise the need to increase the number of nurses, and, in some cases, the numbers of doctors. The shortages of doctors have been rather haphazard and very disturbing. I know that one of the great shortages we have suffered in the highlands is among orthopaedic surgeons. We began to catch up after some years of acute shortage, and we now have five orthopaedic surgeons at the Raigmore hospital. They are trying to deal with a great backlog and a long waiting list of people whose operations may be described as elective but who have been suffering great pain. I know, because they come to my surgeries and ask if there is anything that I can do about it.

It has been deeply depressing that, in the past five years, so many medical cases have been raised in my constituency. People used to ask about lawyers, doubts about legal matters or housing, and they still do, but medical matters for a Member of Parliament are something of a new phenomenon. It is due in part to the disturbing medical shortages. We have proposed 10,000 additional nurses and 5,000 additional doctors, and costed that, too. The recommendations are not irresponsible: they are particular.

I draw attention to the rather striking empty assurance from the Labour party that all that is required is the return of a Labour Government. The only money about which the hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) was prepared to speak was £100 million that would be drawn from some putative savings in administration costs. I should be delighted if we could make such savings. I hope that it is not just whistling in the wind.

There is an argument that, on occasions, administration is a little top-heavy, but, until the Labour party makes available more particulars, we must view the assurance as rather small beer, especially set against the announcement two weeks ago by the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) that Labour accepts the Government's budgetary targets for health spending for the next two years.

The hon. Gentleman made that announcement without even bothering to wait to open the books or having the opportunity to examine whether the health administration savings can be made. He has bound his party and his Government-to-be, if there is to be a Labour Government—heaven forfend, if that is to be their policy—to accepting the Conservative party's views. That is a sad thought for the country, which is left with a choice to support the Liberal Democrat party, which has been clear, prioritised and firm about things that need to be done.

I should like to cite a couple of examples of issues that have arisen in my constituency that I think need attention. The example of the Migdale hospital, to which I referred at Question Time today, encapsulates one of the pressure points on the health service: the treatment and care of the elderly. I am not attributing blame either to the health service or to the social work department. It is not satisfactory for health service hospitals to seek to edge out those who have been living there for some time, either into social work departments' non-existent care provision or into private nursing homes.

Those are hospitals which bring together, as the Migdale does, specialisms of many kinds to ease the lives of the individuals resident there and of their families. They give respite care, physiotherapy and occupational therapy, as well as specialist treatment. The health board's proposal to consider depriving Sutherland of that hospital is a retrograde step, which I hope will not be taken.

I am conscious of the fact that this is rather a short debate, so, although there are many other matters of general interest that I should love to raise, I shall follow the example of those from my party who have spoken earlier, and confine my remarks to the priority issues. As I have already said, I am grateful to the Minister for being here, and I hope that his response to the debate will be positive.

6.29 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): We have had a useful set of exchanges, and we await the Minister's wind-up speech. At the outset, I associate my right hon. and hon. Friends with the condolences expressed to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss), following his recent bereavement. Clearly, hon. Members on both sides of the House will want to extend their sincere condolences to him.

Secondly, I echo what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) at the beginning of the debate—that it is perhaps regrettable that the Secretary of State cannot be with us today. Depending on the timing of the election, this could be one of the last opportunities for the House to examine the national health service, so it might have been appropriate for the right hon. Gentleman to be here.

Mr. Gallie *rose—*

Mr. Kennedy: No, I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry if he was frozen out of the debate, but the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks), who is sitting close to him, spoke for nearly half an hour, and I am sure that he could have made his telling points in slightly less time.

Mr. Matthew Banks: Tell us where Paddy is.

Mr. Kennedy: I shall answer the hon. Gentleman in a minute.

[Mr. Kennedy]

Some of the debate, especially the opening contribution by the Minister for Health, focused on statistics, but, as he began to deploy his case, one central feature of the restructured health service under the current Administration became clear. It was much in evidence in the way in which the Minister went about his business in the debate.

If there is any credit to be taken on health issues, it is claimed nationally, but if there is any blame or downside, the information is much too difficult to collect centrally, and the issue has to be dealt with locally. That is the political purchaser-provider split that Health Ministers want to establish. If there are problems, they do not have the information centrally, and we are referred elsewhere, but if there is a good song to sing, the statistics magically happen to be at hand. People outside the House who read the text of the debate will see through that.

Sir Roger Moate (Faversham): The hon. Gentleman talks a lot about statistics, but one important statistic is missing from the Liberal Democrats' presentation. How much money are they committed to spending? We have been listening carefully. They have invented a hypothecated tax on tobacco to pay for all the extra spending, but they did not put a figure on it. Can the hon. Gentleman give us a precise figure for exactly how much the Liberal party is pledging itself to raise in new taxation for health spending in the first year, and in the second year?

Mr. Kennedy: The hon. Gentleman has not been listening with sufficient care, or he would have heard both my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness and Sutherland and my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark and Bermondsey, when he opened the debate, setting out in crystal clear fashion specifically what the commitments are. The hon. Gentleman will find them in the columns of *Hansard* tomorrow.

My hon. Friend mentioned the proposal for extra revenue to be raised from tobacco. As my hon. Friend has said many times, including this afternoon, that will be specifically earmarked for the pledges or recommendations in respect of optical, dental and prescription charges that we have made in the debate. All that has been categorically set out, and it is nonsense for the hon. Gentleman to suggest that it has not.

Mr. Gallie: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kennedy: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I want to touch on some of the points made in the debate.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I do not want hon. Members who, for whatever reason, may not have been here for the whole debate to think that there is any doubt about the figures. My hon. Friend the Member for Caithness and Sutherland and I, together with our Treasury spokesman, my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), have made the figures very clear.

There is a £200 million commitment to be raised by putting 5p on 20 cigarettes, a £350 million per year commitment to be raised by closing the employers' national insurance loophole. There is also another commitment to do with keeping pace with national health service inflation. Those three commitments have been clearly costed, on the basis of Government answers given over the past 10 days.

Mr. Kennedy: I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

On the subject of statistics, the Minister for Health showed characteristic brass neck when he talked about the use of official statistics, in view of the fact that, in the past few days, we have seen the unprecedented withdrawal by the Office for National Statistics of the official Government health spending statistics, as a result of some apparent confusion over the application of the NHS deflator.

That does not fill the rest of us with confidence that the ministerial touch on the tiller in the production of the statistics is as firm and sure as all that. The whole thing becomes all the more suspicious when one notes that the original version showed that real-terms spending on the health service did not match Government rhetoric, yet, lo and behold, when the error spotted by our sharp-eyed Ministers was amended, the graph was slightly more in accord with the Government's case.

That shows that the general point that we have argued in the debate is valid. We should have independent statistical advice, free of the Department of Health, which would do a lot not simply to boost public confidence in the information made available to us but to enable debates on health—debates about the kind of priorities that my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark and Bermondsey described—to be conducted in a more rational and better informed way.

When my hon. Friend opened the debate, as well as calling for that form of independent assessment, he stressed the need for investment—the hon. Member for Faversham (Sir R. Moate) will be able to read about that tomorrow, too—for planning and for accountability. I do not want to go back over those issues, but I shall refer to one or two of the points that came up in the debate.

First, I shall reply to the hon. Member for Southport, who paid advance tribute to our friend and former parliamentary colleague Ronnie Fearn, by wishing him many happy returns for his birthday tomorrow. I do not want to be churlish, but the hon. Gentleman will appreciate the fact that, in the electoral sense, I cannot wish him many happy returns. I hope that Councillor Fearn will be back among us after the election.

The hon. Member for Southport asked about my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), the leader of my party, who was in the Chamber for a brief part of the debate—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman wishes to listen, he will hear that my right hon. Friend has spent the afternoon visiting Bart's. When political parties are debating the national health service, it is entirely sensible, fitting and appropriate for a party leader to be visiting such a centre of excellence and listening to the people there at first hand.

I shall reply to a couple of other points that the hon. Gentleman touched upon. He said that he chooses, as is his legitimate right, to have private medical insurance.

Mr. Banks: I have never used it.

Mr. Kennedy: The hon. Gentleman happens not to have used his insurance, and I certainly hope that he does

not need to. However, the philosophical point that we want to make about our party's stance is that no Liberal Democrat opposes the right of any individual to make private provision out of his or her own disposable income. But we object to the fact that the rest of the tax-paying public should give such a person an additional tax incentive.

Mr. Banks: What about choice?

Mr. Kennedy: Choice is entirely open to the individual in the marketplace, but that choice should not be bankrolled by the state via the tax system. It was the former Prime Minister who insisted on allowing that, although, as was well reported at the time, it went rather against the instincts of her then Secretary of State for Health, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), who is now Chancellor of the Exchequer.

I note in passing that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has not used his present office to reverse that policy, although as Secretary of State for Health he made little secret of the fact that he did not agree with it at first.

The hon. Member for Southport sees the private finance initiative as central to the future delivery of the fabric or infrastructure of health. The jury is still very much out on the PFI in terms of the longer-term accrual of debt that it loads on to future generations, but I should point out to him that, if he thinks that the PFI is the answer to all the problems, he should note that this debate will be answered by the Minister of State, Scottish Office. He is something of a world expert on the subject, having delivered the Skye bridge by means of the PFI. His reputation in Scotland has never, and will never, recover from his involvement in that fiasco.

I was disappointed—although not surprised—by the timid nature of the Labour party's stance on these matters, but I was even more surprised and disappointed by the general tone of the rhetoric of the hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell). Had one come into the Gallery without being aware of the party politics at work here, one might have thought from listening to the hon. Lady that she was an up-and-coming young Conservative health Minister, speaking in a rather patronising way about proposals to reform and improve the health service, while doing a rather good job of defending the establishment line.

We should note for the record that the only specific commitment that the Labour party feels able to give in terms of the wording of our motion this evening, which refers to

"a freeze on all finance-driven bed, hospital and service closures",

relates to bed closures in London only. There is no commitment whatever from Labour on service withdrawals and bed closures across the whole of the UK.

Mr. Gallie: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kennedy: No, I am sorry. I only have a few minutes to speak, and I must move on.

The Labour party is not in a position to give a commitment on the system of charges to which we drew specific attention during the debate. That has been made clear from the strictures placed by the shadow Chancellor on Labour's overall tax and spending proposals. We need not look with much hope in that direction if we want to see significant improvements in both the administration and the funding of the NHS.

Turning specifically to charges, there is no doubt, from the surveys and analyses that our party has carried out across the country as to the severe disincentive effect that the current system of check-up charges is having, that it is not just turning people away, but runs against what is supposed to be the central thrust—agreed by all parties—of health care policy, which is in the direction of prevention and promotion.

One cannot have effective preventive and promotional health strategies when, for example, people are making savings on multiple prescriptions when issued by a doctor, when people are not undertaking the entire range of dental treatment recommended by their dental surgeon, and when serious medical conditions—very serious, in some cases—are going unchecked, or are not being picked up in time, as a result of people not resorting to optical tests when they should.

I carried out a survey in my constituency, and I was genuinely surprised by the results. Local opticians were asked how many times in the past year they had detected any of the following conditions. *[Interruption.]* Please let it be noted for the record that Conservative Members are laughing. The opticians discovered these conditions: brain tumours, on six occasions; cataracts, 718; diabetes, 49; glaucoma, 253; detached retina, 12; multiple sclerosis, two. These conditions are slipping through the net on some occasions at GP level, but—thank goodness—thanks to the technology available to opticians, they can be detected when people go in for a perfectly routine eye test. If more people are being turned away from eye tests, more of these serious medical conditions will not be picked up, and the Government must directly address that.

In respect of general practice, it was alarming to discover the number of doctors—this is a reflection of what is happening nationally—who were contemplating early retirement because of the sheer pressure of the paperwork, the bureaucracy and the demands that have been loaded on to them as a result of the changes that have taken place to their status and to general practice as a whole. The Government will be making a severe long-term error if they do not pay attention to the warnings that are coming from general practitioners, and to the fact that more and more GPs are choosing at an early age to vote with their feet. That is creating long-term difficulties in terms of health care as a whole.

We must look at the question of the annual year-on-year contract negotiations, and hon. Members will be able to provide many examples from their areas, where, because of the protracted length and complexity of the negotiations between the health authorities and individual NHS trusts and the amount of management time devoted to them, all too often the negotiations spill well into the financial year, with the contracts still not signed. Therefore, short-term ward closures and service downgrading must take place.

The Minister of State should consider whether we can have a more flexible rollover system to extend the negotiating period from one to three years, and whether we can allow the managers on both sides greater flexibility than the somewhat artificial constraints represented by the need for the annual renewal of contracts, as they presently stand.

[Mr. Kennedy]

This has been a useful opportunity to set out our priorities for the NHS on behalf of the Liberal Democrats, and to explore the priorities and the scale of the commitment from other directions. If the voters are looking for a real choice in terms of the funding and future of the health service, it is between the maintenance of the status quo—under whichever of the two major parties might be in power after the election—and a genuinely funded and costed improvement. Only the Liberal Democrats will be arguing unequivocally and honestly for the latter at the election.

6.46 pm

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): We have heard some constructive speeches in the debate. The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) referred to Raigmore as a centre of excellence and, having visited it, I endorse that view. Our whole purpose is to ensure that the NHS is engaged in the pursuit of excellence. I also wish to associate the rest of the House with the expression of sympathy from the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) towards my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland following his recent bereavement.

The fact that Scottish National party Members and Labour Back Benchers have not attended the bulk of the debate in no way diminishes the seriousness and validity of the points raised by the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley). He will know that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office made it clear on 10 December that he was delighted to confirm the investment at Lodge road, Coleraine and the long-standing commitment to replace it. He added that the facilities there, together with the new Antrim hospital, will provide the whole of the north-east of the Province with the most up-to-date acute services available, and that represents an investment of almost £100 million during this decade.

The hon. Member for North Antrim asked when we expected the project to be completed, and the current estimate is that it should be completed towards the end of 2000. He also referred to the McKenna review, and my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office has consulted widely on the recommendations put to him by the project steering group. He is considering all aspects of the matter and is hoping to announce his decisions in the near future.

The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland referred to pressures on rural doctors. I entirely agree with him that rural GPs face particular pressures, and that is why we have schemes such as the inducement practices in the more remote areas of Scotland. The needs of particular practices are best considered locally. Highland health board is well aware of the importance of maintaining a comprehensive and well-motivated network of GPs in the area. I also accept that it is important that GPs are able to take part in audit and to contribute their views. It is particularly difficult, of course, for those who are in practices on their own and we are conscious of the need to deal with that problem.

The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland mentioned the proposed closure of Migdale hospital. Every closure proposal requires ministerial approval and I assure the hon. Gentleman that the matter will be considered with the utmost care. At this stage, the health board is consulting. The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the shortage of orthopaedic surgeons at Raigmore. I am glad to be able to confirm that there is now a full complement, and he will be pleased that I can also confirm that the hospital is rapidly eliminating the backlog of operations that had built up.

I can tell the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye that we have been able to make a further £2 million available in the current year to Highland health board, under the bridging finance scheme for community care developers. Also, the health board and the Highlands community trust have recently submitted proposals for a new acute psychiatric unit and new continuing care and rehabilitation facilities at Craig Dunain hospital. The preference of the board and the trust is to locate those facilities on the site of the existing Craig Phadrig hospital in Inverness.

The trust will be exploring the scope for proceeding with the projects under the private finance initiative. We look forward to learning what conclusions are reached. It is in everyone's interests that the outdated facilities there are replaced at the earliest opportunity, but we shall want to be satisfied that firm plans are properly in place to provide new facilities that fully reflect the needs of patients, before agreeing that the hospital should close.

Mr. Gallie: Does my right hon. and learned Friend get the impression from the comments of the spokesmen for both the Opposition parties that they are obsessed with buildings and beds? Conservative Members are concerned about patients. We want waiting lists to drop and treatment to be improved. We want new techniques to be adopted. Is not that Conservative policy?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Our policy is driven by the needs of patients. That is our top priority and we shall ensure that that happens. I can make one obvious point in response to my hon. Friend. There has been a demand for an increase in day surgery, and we have increased the amount of day surgery enormously. That is to the benefit of families and, above all, patients themselves. It is a shift in the pattern of care that is in accordance with patients' needs.

We are supporting some key themes throughout Britain. The time that people have to wait under the health service is steadily reducing. In Scotland, the number of patients who had to wait a year for in-patient treatment dropped steadily from 1,745 in March 1994 to only 126 last month. In England, the average wait reduced from nine months to around four months between 1990 and 1995. That is undoubtedly progress. The NHS continues to treat an increasing number of people year on year, not only efficiently, but producing good outcomes in terms of curing illness and improving health.

Wherever I go—whether to Raigmore, which is next to the constituency of the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland, or to hospitals throughout Scotland—I invariably find patients saying that the care and dedication with which they are looked after are admirable. We are determined to maintain services free at the point of delivery.

On resources, we have fully honoured our manifesto commitment to increase health spending in real terms. Planned Government spending on the NHS is more than

70 per cent. higher in real terms than in 1978–79. Current NHS spending will grow by £1.75 billion in 1997–98—a substantial real-terms increase. In the United Kingdom as a whole, the NHS will spend more than £116 million every day in 1996–97. During my remarks, well over £1 million will have been spent—in fact, the sum will be more than £1.5 million. For the United Kingdom as a whole, spending is £724 for every man, woman or child in 1996-97, compared with £444 in 1978-79 at constant prices. That is, without question, a record of commitment.

I can confirm to the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), who is temporarily absent from the Chamber, that we have now been able to make an additional £3.5 million allocation to boards in Northern Ireland in 1996–97, to help alleviate the resources problems arising from emergency admission levels, high-cost blood products and elective activity pressures.

The hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) mentioned winter pressures. All parts of the NHS have experienced additional pressure this winter. They always do, and I pay tribute to the hard work of all involved to cope with the peak in emergency admissions. It is right that trusts should constantly keep the way in which they provide acute services under review. With increased numbers of day cases and of non-invasive surgery, the number of patients treated can be increased.

The review of acute services planning assumptions that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland commissioned last year came to the conclusion that it would be counter-productive to prevent acute hospitals from making changes to the acute services that they provide, including the number of beds, in response to changing needs. The same arguments apply to England and Wales. We encourage all health authorities and trusts to plan carefully to cope with the level of admissions that they are likely to face. We believe that the national health service is performing well.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) mentioned various hospitals in his constituency. Despite comprehensive consultation, the proposed plans remain contentious. They envisage the closure of the Christiana Hartley maternity hospital in Southport—maternity services would be centred on Ormskirk. The Sefton and South Lancashire health authorities are considering the responses to the proposals and all views will be taken into account. As Ministers may be asked to take a final decision, I cannot comment further at this time, but the views that my hon. Friend expressed tonight will be kept in mind.

Remarkable advances have been made in the national health service. The example that I found particularly moving was when I visited the hospital in Kilmarnock where cochlear implantations are performed. There have been more than 100 operations, and persons who experienced profound deafness—both young and old—were given hearing for the first time. I was able to talk to the patients, whose quality of life had been improved enormously. It is not merely the profoundly deaf who have benefited. Thirty years ago, there were no hip replacements, and keyhole surgery has advanced by leaps and bounds.

I should make it clear to the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye that one advance that we look forward to is telemedicine—when his constituents go to a health centre, they might be able to speak to a specialist several hundred miles away, who will give them the best possible advice, followed by the necessary treatment where appropriate.

The use of scanners has enabled much quicker and more effective diagnosis and treatment. Heart transplant units are performing effectively and well, as are the liver transplant units that have come into existence throughout Britain. We are developing cancer services steadily and ensuring that there are specialist cancer centres, where expertise and skills can be concentrated and patients assured that they will get the best possible treatment. Similarly, we are ensuring that specialist palliative care is developed throughout Britain. We support the extension of palliative care for conditions other than cancer, and its introduction as soon as possible after diagnosis.

We are determined to ensure that our health service becomes the best in the world. We want to make certain that, when GP fundholders have remarkable pioneering innovations, those should be spread throughout the national health service. We want better access, responsiveness, information and continuing care, and more emphasis on prevention.

The NHS has an overall record of success, with more patients treated, shorter waiting times and improved treatments. We are determined that it should be the best in the world.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 44, Noes 309.

Division No. 69] **[6.59 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Beith, A J
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Chidgey, David
Cunningham, Ms R *(Perth Kinross)*
Dafis, Cynog
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, John
Harvey, Nick
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Sally Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McCartney, Robert *(N Down)*
Maclennan, Robert
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Maginnis, Ken
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Mullin, Chris
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
Paisley, Rev Ian
Rendel, David
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Salmond, Alex
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Steel, Sir David
Taylor, Matthew (Truro)
Thurnham, Peter
Trimble, David
Wallace, James
Welsh, Andrew
Wigley, Dafydd
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and
Mr. Paul Tyler.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel G)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Sir Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia

Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cartiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, John
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howell, David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Onslow, Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Riffkind, Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Scott, Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim (Beaconsf'ld)
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian (Esher)
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bex'y'h'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Richard Ottaway.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 308, Noes 246.

Division No. 70] **[7.13 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allen, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel G)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Sir Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Roch'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dava, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hat'fd)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, John
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Hasselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howell, David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Scott, Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John

Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Richard Ottaway.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashton, Joseph
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John
Cunningham, Ms R *(Perth Kinross)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Davies, Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Ennis, Jeff
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Sally Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stret'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Robert *(N Down)*
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Paisley, Rev Ian
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs B *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, William *(E Londy)*
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Speller, John
Squire, Ms R *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Sir David
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Trickett, Jon
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and
Mr. Paul Tyler.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House is committed to the National Health Service as a public service, promoting health and offering increasing volumes of high-quality health care on the basis of need regardless of the ability to pay; and welcomes the Government's continuing commitment to real terms increases in NHS spending year by year.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. At Scottish questions this afternoon, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) asked me a question and in my answer I said that the hon. Gentleman had been to Libya and referred to him as Labour's man in Libya. The hon. Gentleman has written to me stating that he has never been to Libya. I withdraw my remarks and apologise to the hon. Gentleman for any embarrassment that I may have caused him.

Education

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): I must inform the House that Madam Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

7.27 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I beg to move,

That this House believes that the Government has consistently failed to invest sufficient resources in schools to ensure a high-quality education service; and believes that any incoming Government should make a commitment to increase spending on education — if necessary by increased taxation — to pay for high-quality early-years education for all three and four year olds whose parents want it, extra resources for schools to invest in books and equipment and continuing professional development for teachers, a reduction in class sizes and extra support for pupils with special educational needs and to tackle the backlog of repairs to school buildings.

It has become somewhat of a cliché for politicians to declare that education is their first priority, but for Liberal Democrats that has not suddenly become a priority; it always has been. Liberal Democrats seek a society made up of self-reliant individuals who are able to take control of their own lives, to make their own choices and to fulfil their own potential. We seek a society in which each person is valued, each person is different, each person is respectful of others and each person is entitled to be heard. We seek a society in which each person accepts responsibility for his or her actions and each person contributes to the nation's worth, self-confidence and success.

We believe that it is to education that we must turn for the key, because education equips all people with the knowledge and skills that they need to live free and fulfilling lives and to escape from poverty, ignorance and conformity. It must be admitted, however, that, with the mystic milepost of the millennium just three years away, we have a great deal to do.

The forthcoming general election, whenever the Prime Minister has the courage to call it, will provide the people of this country with the opportunity to make choices about the way forward. They will, for example, be able to choose which view to support—that of the Home Secretary, which is that prisons work; or that of Stephen Tumim, which is that the solution to prisons lies in pre-school education. They will have the opportunity to choose which is more important: a genuinely critical thought in each child's head, or a grammar school in every town; a computer for every child, or an income tax cut; an education system based on partnership and co-operation, or one based on competition and market forces.

Despite the excellent work in many of our schools, much more needs to be done. In Germany and France respectively, 62 per cent. and 66 per cent. of young people achieve the equivalent of grades A to C at GCSE in mathematics, the national language and one science subject. Sadly, the figure for Britain is 27 per cent. English pupils are often two years behind their Swiss and German peers at number work by the time they leave primary school. Our national targets for education and training for 2000—which many of us believe we are unlikely to meet—have already been surpassed by

[Mr. Don Foster]

Germany and Japan. Standards must rise if we, as a nation, are to have any chance of competing internationally in the 21st century.

Against that background, it is hardly surprising that, as Nigel de Gruchy of the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers said recently, people throw up their hands in despair when politicians propose merely a string of education gimmicks designed to produce media soundbites rather than to address the real issues that confront the education service. There is perhaps one advantage of some of the gimmicks that have been announced. Sometimes they show politicians' willingness to change their minds.

The House will be aware that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) recently made a pronouncement on the importance of school uniform. The House may be further interested to know that a motion was passed by Sheffield city council on 7 October 1981, which was supported by the hon. Gentleman. It banned all Sheffield schools from punishing, suspending or barring from school any pupil for not wearing school uniform. I hope that he will apply the same willingness to change his mind on the issue of increased funding for education.

Improving standards in our schools is not merely about increased investment. We should also recognise that raising standards depends on high-quality teachers. We could begin to increase teachers' enthusiasm and raise their morale as well as their school's level of achievement if we dropped the blame and shame approach, or the three-course diet for teachers of criticism, criticism and criticism, as the chief executive of the Teacher Training Agency recently described it. We could certainly make better use of existing resources.

As the recent Audit Commission's report "Trading Places" showed, the Government's education policies—particularly their reliance on market forces—have led to millions of pounds being wasted, and thousands of parents being denied their first choice of schools. The nursery voucher scheme is bureaucracy gone mad: the Conservative party would have been breathing hellfire had it been proposed by Brussels. According to local authorities, nursery voucher administration alone is estimated to cost about £43 million a year.

More and more power has been handed to educational quangos. More than 50 per cent. of the Department's educational expenditure is now administered by one or other of them. The average expenditure on salaries and benefits to the chief executives and the chairmen of those quangos has rocketed since 1987.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Robin Squire): The hon. Gentleman knows that two of the larger quangos are the Further Education Funding Council and the Higher Education Funding Council. The logic of what he says is that they should be funded directly by Government. Is that really what he means?

Mr. Foster: No. The Minister should look at our policy documents, because we have made it clear that the work of the Higher Education Funding Council is vital. We have, however, called into question the work of the Further Education Funding Council. We have proposed a different mechanism for the funding of further education, which would enable strategic planning to take place locally. Sadly, strategic planning has now disappeared, which has led to much duplication and a waste of money in the FE sector.

The Minister did not refer to the Funding Agency for Schools. We would definitely abolish that quango and save the administrative costs. I am sure that the Minister would be interested to see the figures that I recently received on the cost of education quangos, particularly the cost of their senior employees. The annual payment to the chief executives of education quangos has risen by a staggering 165 per cent. since 1987: they now receive £1,451 a week on average. The payments to the chairmen of those quangos have risen by 146 per cent. during that period to £452 a week for an average week of only 1.6 days. If we want to find further questionable rises in central expenditure, we have only to look at the Department's education publicity and advertising expenditure. From 1987 to 1994–95, it rose from only £1.7 million to £11.1 million.

Notwithstanding the better use of resources, if educational standards are to improve significantly—as I believe that they must if we are to compete in the increasingly global market—we must increase our investment in schools. The Government will no doubt argue that they have increased investment. If we take into account changes in legislation and increasing pupil numbers, such a claim falls far short of reality.

On the ground, parents, teachers and governors see no evidence of improved funding. Even if the Cabinet failed to hear her words, parents, teachers and governors agreed with the leaked memorandum from the Secretary of State in September 1995, in which she said:

"Insufficient resources now threaten the provision of education in the state school sector".

In recent years, those people on the ground have seen a massive rise in class sizes. The number of primary pupils in classes of 31 or more has risen to more than 1.28 million, which is an increase of 9.1 per cent. Almost six out of every 10 local education authorities experienced a rise in the number of pupils in classes of 37 or more in just one year—1995–95. In more than one in 10 local authorities—which is 14 per cent.—there was a rise in the number of classes of 41 or more.

Teachers, parents and governors have seen evidence of a shortage of books and equipment. They do not even have to take my word for it. The chief inspector's annual report, which was published yesterday, shows that one in four secondary schools and one in eight primary schools

"have shortages of books which adversely affect teaching and make the setting of homework difficult."

He went on to point to the one in six schools that have

"insufficient books to meet the needs of the curriculum."

Increasingly, school buildings are crumbling and overcrowded. The chief inspector's report identified that almost one in five secondary schools have significant weaknesses in some aspects of accommodation, and that, in one in six of those schools, it has a direct impact on specialist teaching, especially in science, design, technology and art. He also pointed to the one in seven schools that have difficulties with accommodation, which he says has

"a detrimental effect on teaching and learning."

He also says that the shortage of space is a feature of almost one in three schools.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman says about the desirability of extra investment in our schools, particularly those catering for the younger end of the age range. Does he agree, however, that it is equally important to ensure that the money is spent to best effect? The management of local education authorities, and the way in which they handle such matters as admissions policy, are important in that context.

Is the hon. Gentleman aware, for instance, of Barrow Hedges primary school in my constituency, which comes under local management of schools in a Liberal-controlled authority? Many parents are worried about the fact that their children, having been allocated places in the nursery class, are now being excluded from the reception class in the primary phase. Will the hon. Gentleman convey a message to his colleagues in local government—that they should sort out those problems as well?

Mr. Foster: That is an interesting point, which was the subject of some debate today. The Select Committee was discussing the problems caused by the nursery voucher scheme, and the way in which some schools are changing their admissions policies. The hon. Gentleman, however, makes an even more significant point about the crucial importance of efficient use of existing resources. I entirely agree with him about that. He may be surprised to learn that all the surveys that have been conducted show that Liberal Democrat-run local education authorities use resources most efficiently, and have the smallest amount of money held back centrally. They delegate the most to individual schools.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I am rather perplexed about the Liberal Democrats' claims about extra resources for education. They talk of crumbling schools, the need for more books and the desirability of smaller class sizes, but a total of more than £4 billion would have to be spent to deal with the problems, and I cannot equate that with the imposition of just 1p on the basic rate of income tax. Will the hon. Gentleman please tell us where the money will come from?

Mr. Foster: I am delighted to learn that the figure on the hon. Gentleman's briefing note, calculated by his friends in Conservative central office, has dropped so dramatically from the £7 billion to which they referred on a similar briefing note only a year ago. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that, by the time of the general election, he will have sight of the detailed costings for our education proposals, as, indeed, will the whole country. The fundamental difference between the Liberal Democrats and the other political parties is that we believe in being honest with the electorate—telling them what our policies will cost, and where the money will come from. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) will contain himself for a moment, I may touch on a few of the issues that interest him.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Foster: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not. I want to make a little more progress; I will happily give way to him later. He cannot deny the problems that exist in our schools, and the cuts that we have seen—and I hope that he would not deny the comments of the chief inspector of schools.

Having drawn attention to the deficiencies in school premises, the chief inspector would presumably accept that other figures show capital expenditure on schools to be around half what it was 20 years ago. More than 600 primary schools still have outside loos, and two fifths operate in temporary buildings: three quarters of a million pupils are educated in such buildings. The backlog of repair and maintenance that is needed just to make our schools safe amounts to some £3.2 billion.

Why is that? First, despite their claims to have improved education spending, the Government should acknowledge that, according to their own figures, the percentage of gross domestic product spent on education since the last general election had fallen from 5.3 per cent. to 5.1 per cent. by 1995-96. Secondly, if we look at the figure that the Government believe local authorities need to spend on primary and secondary education, the standard spending assessment—I refer to figures provided by the Library—we see that the primary SSA per pupil fell by 0.4 per cent. between 1992–93 and 1996–97, while the cut in the secondary SSA has been a staggering 9 per cent.

If the Minister and other Conservative Members are not happy to use the SSA—they acknowledge that it is not necessarily the same as the amount actually spent in schools—they may wish to look at the most reliable estimate of what is actually spent "on the ground" by LEAs—the potential schools budget. According to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, over that same post-election period—1992 to 1996—the primary PSB per pupil in England and Wales fell by around 3 per cent. in real terms, while the secondary PSB fell by 9 per cent.

When, 14 months ago, the Chancellor announced his Budget for the present year, I warned that tax cuts would mean school cuts. Sadly, I was proved right. Despite all the gloss from the Government, there was no extra money for our schools, and many had to make significant budget cuts. The Government have tried the same con trick this year. It is all very well to announce that SSAs are to be increased, but if there is no real-terms growth in Government funding for local authorities, and if local education authorities are spending above SSA—as almost all are doing already—the only way in which to avoid cuts is to impose a massive hike in council tax, which is often prevented by the capping regime, or a disproportionate cut in other council services which have already been cut to the bone. In many cases, both will be necessary.

The effect is clear: there is no such thing as a free income tax cut. The latest income tax cut will mean further cuts in our schools. In my constituency, Bath and North East Somerset council has no choice but to make savings of £10.4 million, and, even with such cuts, the council tax will have to rise well above the rate of inflation. Education must inevitably take its share of the cuts. Plans for cuts in music provision, discretionary awards, information technology support, school meals and other support services are being considered, alongside a cut in the schools budget of 4.1 per cent. this year and

[Mr. Foster]

7 per cent. in a full year. Plans for a major literacy programme may well have to be put on hold, as may plans to raise the quality of education for under-fives.

Not surprisingly, my postbag has been full of letters expressing concern about the proposed cuts. Mr. and Mrs. Lewis of Combe Down in Bath recently wrote to me:

"We were appalled to learn of the proposed cuts to the Education budget for 1997–98",

cuts which they found "totally unacceptable". They argued for increased spending to ensure that

"our schools can continue to function without having to resort to drastic measures which would jeopardise the education of our children, and lead to blight in the economy of our country in future years."

Another of my constituents, Mr. Tim Heiden, wrote to the Prime Minister:

"Your Government maintains that education is a high priority and that standards must improve. How can this be when schools are faced with further cuts in their finances?"

On Monday night, a packed public meeting in Bath started what the local media described as

"a crusade for education, rallying opposition against proposed swingeing . . . cuts."

At that meeting Annita Wright, head teacher of Culverhay school, warned that some schools could face cuts of up to £100,000 in their budgets, which would have a direct impact on staffing levels. She said:

"Any cuts to teaching and teaching staff are going to impact in the classroom. There is no way to avoid that."

As a report about the meeting in my local newspaper, *The Bath Chronicle*, made clear, all present knew where the blame lay. The report stated:

"Last Friday Education Secretary Gillian Shephard washed her hands of the cash crisis, claiming the local authority had 'perfectly adequate and substantial funds' to spend on schools.

But people at last night's meeting laid the blame for the crisis squarely at the Government's door.

St. Gregory's headteacher David Byrne said: 'Take no notice of what Gillian Shephard said. Right from the start this authority has been under-funded.'"

Bath and North-East Somerset's budget, he said,

"has not increased in line with its responsibility."

No wonder an action group, Parents Against Cuts in Education, has now been formed in my constituency.

The situation in Bath is replicated across the nation, but the people of the nation know who is to blame. They will have listened with incredulity to the Secretary of State for the Environment when he told the House that if

"council tax bills increase, it will be because Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors choose to increase them. If services are cut, it will be because Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors choose to cut them. No one is forcing them to increase council tax bills or to cut services."—[*Official Report*, 3 February 1997; Vol. 289, c. 682.]

Like the burglar caught red-handed with the stolen goods, the cry, "Not me, guv," goes up. That, however, is nowhere near the mark. The people know that that will not wash. They know that further cuts in education are the price to be paid for the Tory's cynical attempt to buy votes at the general election. When they come to vote, they will know to avoid any candidates with the word "Con" written after their names.

The electorate will be looking with caution at the Labour party, which has announced no change to the Government's figures. Further, it refuses to join the Liberal Democrats in voting against an income tax cut that will lead to school cuts. It will be difficult for Labour activists to campaign against education cuts when Labour Members fail to vote against the very measure that will give rise to them.

Mr. John Marshall: It is remarkably generous of the hon. Gentleman to give way, bearing in mind that he has been talking about the need to spend more money. Will he explain why Liberal councils spend much less than Conservative councils on education?

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): There are no Conservative councils.

Mr. Foster: My hon. Friend makes the point from a sedentary position that we are not sure which Conservative council is being used to judge us, given the few Conservative councils that now exist. People know that education in the areas that the Conservative party used to control was extremely badly damaged.

Unlike the Conservative party, which starved education of the money that it needed, and unlike the Labour party, which was too timid to promise more, the Liberal Democrat position on funding is clear, simple and unchanged. An under-funded education service is a false economy. That is why Liberal Democrats remain committed to increased investment in education and training. If necessary, we shall increase the level of taxation by 1p in the pound to pay for that increased investment. That is the equivalent of half a pint of beer a week for the average taxpayer.

That is hardly too much to ask for the future prosperity of our nation, especially when that increase in taxation can fund increased investment to provide high quality early-years education for all three and four-year-olds without using a cumbersome and bureaucratic scheme. It will fund more books and equipment, smaller class sizes and effective support for children with special education needs. It will also provide increased investment for decent buildings.

Unlike politicians of other parties, Liberal Democrats believe that those who will the ends must also will the means. The gimmicks and the soundbites are not for us. Only the Liberal Democrats offer radical policies backed by clear funding proposals. Under-investment in education is tantamount to condemning future generations to the scrapheap, along with this failing Government. Education is vital and increased investment is essential. If we fail to meet the challenge, we fail the nation.

7.53 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Robin Squire): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"welcomes the substantial extra investment which the Government has made, and continues to make, in early years, primary and secondary education, the reforms that the Government has introduced to allow that investment to be used to maximum effect and the improvement in standards in schools which has been the result."

I judge that the debate is about resources for education and standards. I shall show that the Government have invested heavily in education and that, as a direct result of our policies, standards are rising across education.

It is especially disappointing that the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), who moved the motion, is not ready to recognise increased spending on this occasion, bearing in mind that he has done so in the past. He told the House in 1994:

"I do not deny . . . that in recent years the Government have increased expenditure on education."—[*Official Report*, 1 March 1994; Vol. 238, c. 848.]

His speech this evening was the predictable gloom and doom that we have come to expect, wrapped up with his famous promise that there will be a penny on income tax for education.

Contrary to what the hon. Gentleman says, that is soundbite politics, not serious policy. Let us consider the commitments that the hon. Gentleman's penny is expected to pay for. Some have been mentioned by him this evening and others have been mentioned in Liberal Democrat documents.

The list is virtually endless. The commitments include providing pre-school education for every three and four-year-old, education or training for 16 to 19-year-olds in work, retraining and education for adults, £500 million of capital expenditure on schools, unstated additional resources for higher education, increasing funding for all schools, abolition of student loans, extra funding for pupils with special education needs in addition to the delegated schools' budget, the reduction of all primary school class sizes to no more than 30, investment in new equipment and teaching aids, including information technology, increasing funding for in-service training for teachers and giving all students, full time and part time, entitlement to social security throughout the year.

The Liberal Democrats claim that that amazing list of pledges could be paid for by a 1p rise in the rate of income tax. That is unutterable nonsense. To coin a phrase, based on audience observation:

"Never was a penny spent more often than during a Liberal Democrat speech."

Let us not just say a penny, for that sounds nice and small. The average family, which earns £21,400 a year, would find itself paying £18 extra tax every month as a result of the penny increase.

Even that is not the end of the story. The House may recall that the Liberal Democrats have been promising their 1p for at least a couple of years. In November 1996, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer again reduced the standard rate of income tax by a further 1p. I assume, therefore, that the logic of the position of the hon. Member for Bath is that his party now supports a 2p increase in the standard rate of income tax. That helps a bit with the arithmetic of the pledges, but it increases the pain, especially for those on below average earnings. I judge that the hon. Gentleman's party is rather coy on this issue, and coyness is a rather unnatural position for the hon. Gentleman to adopt.

We know, of course, that the hon. Gentleman could spend money, given the chance. After all, anyone can spend money. Even the Liberal Democrats concede that point. I quote from the internal Liberal Democrat document entitled "Towards 1996—Ideas for Research and Campaigning", which was no doubt given a wide circulation. Within it is the statement:

"Lib-Dems just want to throw money at education."

The real point is to spend money wisely, as the Government have done and will continue to do.

The prescriptions of the hon. Member for Bath are pure fantasy politics and, of course, are based on the assumption of a Liberal Democrat Government—more fantasy politics. Let us turn to the real world in which the Government have been investing in education.

Two months ago, in his Budget statement, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced £129 million more for nursery vouchers, £15 million more for grant-maintained schools and £22 million more for the assisted places scheme—all investment in education. Of course, the Liberal Democrats would abolish nursery vouchers, destroy GM schools and deny to bright children from poorer families the opportunity to be educated in some of our best schools by eliminating the assisted places scheme. Here, as in virtually every other aspect of education, they are "little Sir echoes" of the main Opposition party.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): How much money would be saved by abolishing the assisted places scheme, and how many teachers would that abolition put into other schools?

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend raises an interesting question. For the moment, I shall base my response on the Labour party pledge, for reasons to which I have already alluded. The Labour party has made it clear that it is talking of a phasing out of the assisted places scheme. I judge that, as a result, there will be less than £5 million available in the first year of the assisted places scheme. Frankly, that will provide 100 or so primary school teachers. Compare that £5 million with an estimated cost of meeting Labour's pledge on class size—which is possibly what my hon. Friend was alluding to—of approaching £200 million. The House and the country should be aware of that discrepancy.

Also on Monday, as the hon. Member for Bath mentioned, the House debated the local government finance settlement. It allows £633 million more for local authority spending on schools—a 3.6 per cent. increase. That makes £1.7 billion more for schools in just two years. That is investment in education, and it is not a one-off.

In 1979, the start of the Conservative Governments, £515 was spent per pupil. In 1994, that figure had grown to £1,890. In real terms, after adjusting for inflation, that is half as much again. In real terms, per pupil, spending on books and equipment has risen by 56 per cent. and spending on support staff by 156 per cent. Perhaps that, above all, finally sets the record straight. Despite all the hand wringing, the reality is that actual spending per pupil has increased by almost 50 per cent. in real terms since 1979.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): I have to confess that I listened to such mathematics under the previous Labour Government as well as under this one. If the number of school pupils declines in a school,

[Mr. John Maxton]

spending per pupil inevitably rises without extra expenditure, because structural, cleaning and other costs remain constant, whatever happens. As a result, total spending is divided among a smaller number of pupils. That is how the Minister arrives at the increases per pupil.

Mr. Squire: To a very small extent, the hon. Gentleman's point is valid, but he cannot seriously be suggesting that that accounts for a virtual 50 per cent. increase in real terms. It does not, and I urge him to recognise that the prime factor is that we have been prepared to continue to fund education.

We have heard nothing from the hon. Member for Bath about what other countries spend on education. Perhaps we should consider a couple of facts. Although international comparisons can be difficult to make, we know for certain that public expenditure on education in the UK, which, as he said, is 5.1 per cent. of gross domestic product, is higher than in Germany or Japan; that public spending in the UK on primary and secondary education, as a proportion of GDP, is among the highest in Europe; and that the UK spends more per pupil on pre-primary education than France, Japan and most other countries. Whichever way hon. Members examine it, the Government have been investing in education. We have a record of which we can be proud.

As I have said, however, investing in education is not about throwing public money around indiscriminately; it is about spending more, as the Government have done. However, if it were only or even primarily a question of more money, Islington, Tower Hamlets, Lambeth and Hackney would be achieving among the best examination results in the UK. All are in the top 12 local education authorities for spending per pupil, but all are in the bottom 12 in terms of GCSE results.

If that sounds a little distant for most Liberal Democrats, let me take East Sussex and West Sussex. Both are controlled by Liberal Democrat and Labour coalitions—the old one-two, as we have come to describe them. East Sussex spends more per pupil at both primary and secondary level, yet when we turn to the latest GCSE performance tables, we find that West Sussex is just in the top 10, while higher-spending East Sussex is some 40 places lower.

In truth, it is more about efficiency, effectiveness and value for money. The Government's record of encouraging greater value for money is second to none—so substantial that I have time to cover only some of the highlights.

As all hon. Members will recall, we introduced local management of schools, allowing schools themselves to decide where their money is best spent, not some bureaucrat sitting in town hall or county hall. Schools have found that, having acquired that freedom, they want to keep it. Few, if any, want to go back to pre-LMS days. After all, why should they? Now, they spend their money on the services they want; they buy goods from the suppliers they trust. The supplier is often their LEA; but now, rather than saying, "This is what you get—take it or leave it," the LEA has to offer what the school wants, so the school can obtain the best deal around and the best use can be made of our education investment.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Before the Minister leaves local management of schools, which Liberal Democrats pioneered in some regions and which I strongly support, I hope that he will recognise that the picture he has painted would simply not be recognised by many school governors. In my county of Northumberland, they talk about mass resignation, not because they do not like the freedom to choose where the school's money goes, but because they cannot make the budget work on the figures available to them. The job of being a school governor has become burdensome because it is a job of managing cuts.

Mr. Squire: I join the right hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to the role and work of governors throughout the UK. All hon. Members on both sides of the House would do that, but, as it happens, today, my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) and I met a deputation of head teachers from the right hon. Gentleman's local education authority. I listened patiently to what they said, but in the end I had to say that I still could not understand how an above average SSA increase for next year in their LEA—from memory, it is some 4.2 per cent.—was translated into a projected 2 per cent. cut in school budgets. However, I suggested that some of the answer lay in county hall. Most right hon. and hon. Members would be pleased to receive a 4.2 per cent. increase.

Mr. Don Foster: I apologise for interrupting the Minister, but this is important. Does he not understand that the SSA increases, however large they might be, are not related to the amount of money that is provided by the Government? The Chancellor's Red Book for the last Budget makes it clear that the amount in real terms made available to local government this year is exactly the same as the amount in the forthcoming year. There is no real-terms increase in the money. In effect, the Government can say to LEAs, "Spend as much as you like," but if the Government do not give them the resources, and if they then put a capping limit on LEAs as well, the LEAs simply cannot do it. The Minister surely understands that.

Mr. Squire: The hon. Gentleman must recognise that the extra millions and millions of pounds that I am describing and that go into SSAs—not just education SSAs—are being met by taxpayers. He also knows—I am happy to have a separate seminar on local government finance, but possibly on another occasion, lest I incur your wrath, Mr. Deputy Speaker—that the freedom that local authorities rightly enjoy to determine how they use that money and at what level they spend, allows them either to continue to give priority to education or, in a few cases, not to do so.

We have also introduced greater parental choice, so that parents have a better say on which school they want their child to go to. Under LMS, popular schools attract more money as they become more popular. That is the market mechanism which, on other occasions, the hon. Member for Bath has accused us of being obsessed with, but I am not shamed by that accusation. Why be ashamed of the

market, which rewards good, popular schools and provides an incentive for all schools to improve their performance? It is another way of ensuring that the Government's investment in education leads to the high standards that parents demand.

I have mentioned the assisted places scheme and I do not intend to return to the subject in detail, beyond confirming that, last summer, assisted pupils recorded pass rates of nearly 97 per cent. at GCSE grades A* to C. Independent research shows that assisted pupils do better than those of similar ability in maintained schools. They take more A and AS-levels and achieve better grades. That is another example of our wise investment in education.

The next step on from LMS is allowing schools that choose it to opt for grant-maintained status. That means additional freedom to run themselves, to own their buildings, to control their admissions and to manage the whole of their budget—not just the proportion that the LEA delegates to its own schools. With this margin of flexibility—money for the school to spend itself rather than for the LEA to spend on its behalf—GM schools do wonders. The key point is that, when schools are given responsibility for their own destiny, their energy and imagination are released. They start to look afresh at what they do with their resources—money, staff, buildings—and they target their resources where they will have most effect.

The system works. GM schools get results—look at the performance tables. Look at any list of top schools. Listen to what the schools say themselves. They say that they have been able to put more money into staff, buildings and books since going GM. They say that staff morale has improved and applications per place have gone up. Their truancy levels are half the national average.

The GM route taps schools' energy and imagination to make our investment in education work harder. So too does the private finance initiative. On top of the £700 million that we have allocated from public funds for capital projects in 1997-98, schools and LEAs can now use the expertise, efficiency and investment strength of the private sector. This Government have given them both the freedom to do so and direct help—more than £50 million of additional revenue support.

This represents more wise investment in education—the money to do the job, and the freedom to do it efficiently. It has been a real success: in Dorset, where the LEA is using the PFI to replace Colfox school; in Manchester, where Temple primary school is to be rebuilt using the PFI; in Norfolk and Shropshire, where LEAs are considering how the PFI can help them increase the number of nursery units; and in Lewisham and Ealing, where the PFI is being used to improve catering facilities. Many other LEAs and schools are working with the private sector on PFI projects. They mean more wise investment, and real benefits for schools.

Over the next three years, we will be investing some £435 million more in nursery education. Through the introduction of nursery education vouchers, parents will gain the opportunity better to choose the right pre-school education for their child. The inspection regime will guarantee that, in the public or the private sector, children will be receiving high-quality nursery education. That means that our investment will once more be going to where it does the most good.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will my hon. Friend confirm that, in the past two years, Government spending on schools has increased by £1.8 billion, which represents 1p in terms of income tax? Have we not therefore already achieved what the Liberal Democrats are calling for?

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend is spot on. We intend to continue that record during the next Parliament, when we are returned at the forthcoming election.

Finally, the Education Bill currently before Parliament and the other measures outlined in our White Paper build on the success of LMS and the GM programme by offering schools even greater freedom.

Of course, success is also a question of school effectiveness. That is why we have introduced a system of rigorous inspection. As the House is well aware, Her Majesty's chief inspector published his annual report yesterday. I very much welcome the report. It contains much that schools can be proud of—especially the 167 schools that are commended as excellent. Teaching is satisfactory or better in the majority of lessons, and the proportion of poor-quality lessons has declined.

It was not as large an improvement as I would have liked, and more remains to be done: on literacy and numeracy; on improving the quality of the minority of lessons which are not satisfactory; and in information technology. Overall, the report is good news, and if the Labour party were in power we would still have only 100 inspections a year—rather less than the 12,000 that have now been carried out.

Throughout its programme of reform, the Government's strategy has been to concentrate on the outputs—higher standards, better qualifications. I should like, for instance, to take this opportunity to welcome the splendid news that Phoenix high school in Hammersmith and Fulham has today joined the number of failing schools that have been turned around and are now certified as delivering a good education. I pay tribute to the LEA, which has supported the school, to the Office for Standards in Education for its regular and thorough monitoring, and above all to the school—the head teacher, governors, staff, parents and pupils who have worked so hard to achieve this improvement.

By concentrating on the essentials, we are sticking to the big issues, not on arbitrary limits to class size, meaningless minimums for homework or even parental ballots on school uniform. If that latest wheeze from the Labour party truly meant that it was listening to parents' views, Labour would drop its proposals to destroy GM schools, where parents—having voted for freedom from their LEA—would find that freedom lost without any question of a second ballot: "So parents, you can have the consolation of a vote on school uniform if you like—but we're taking back your school." By contrast, our strategy has worked. The facts clearly demonstrate that standards have been rising. That is corroborated by HMCI.

To sum up, the Government have invested money in education: 48 per cent. more, in real terms, per pupil, since we took office. We have allowed schools to make the best use of that investment, through LMS, through GM status and in early years education funding; and we

[Mr. Squire]

have ensured that schools will make the best use of the investment: through inspection and through greater parental choice, much as that discomfits Opposition Members.

The result has been rising standards across education—a record of which any Government would be justly proud. I therefore support the amendment and oppose the main motion.

8.15 pm

Ms Estelle Morris (Birmingham, Yardley): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) on persuading his party to give an Opposition day to the subject of education. I notice that the motion is couched mainly in terms of investment, which is of course important, but I want to start by talking about what I might crudely term output—the word the Minister used.

I recognise, as did the Minister, the many achievements of our young people, schools and teachers; and I add my congratulations to the others offered to the Phoenix school in Hammersmith. I also congratulate the eight schools described in the Ofsted report as having been taken out of "special measures" over the past 12 months. That is a major achievement—a great recognition of their efforts. We wish them even greater success in the future.

I do not think that there is any doubt that our young people who achieve at the highest level are comparable with those anywhere else in the world; yet, over the past 18 years the Government have failed to tackle the continuing and growing problem of under-achievement. The result is that, as we approach the millennium, we are failing to reach even the modest targets that we have set ourselves as a nation.

Let us look at the evidence. This year's results showed that about 45 per cent. of pupils gained five or more GCSE passes at grade C and above. That falls well below the target of 55 per cent. of young people achieving that much by the year 2000. The proportion of young people gaining advanced-level qualifications is smaller in the UK than it is in our competitor nations: 80 per cent. of young people in Japan qualify to university entrance level, and in Germany, 75 per cent. of 25 to 28-year-olds have an advanced-level qualification. A smaller proportion of our population qualifies at level two or above in vocational skills than in countries that compete with us.

This under-achievement at 16 and into adulthood must be a cause for concern, but perhaps of greater concern is the fact that, lower down the age range in the years of compulsory school, it looks as though we are not likely to catch up with our competitors before 2000 or even beyond it. Yesterday's Ofsted report pointed out that, in the schools inspected this year, literacy rates at key stage 1 were lower than they were in the schools inspected last year. I agree that the sample of schools was different, but we tend to draw conclusions from chief inspector's reports.

We have known for a while that the number of 11-year-olds not achieving the literacy skills that could be expected of them is above 40 per cent. It is thus not surprising that among 16-year-olds there is still a long tail of under-achievement. One in 12 young people did not gain a single GCSE pass in last year's examinations—the figures for boys are worse than for girls. So the problem we face amounts to a pattern of poor literacy at seven and 11, no examination passes at 16, and a failure to stay in education and training beyond the years of compulsory schooling.

I do not want to take away from pupils' excellence and achievements or from the percentage rise in last year's GCSE passes, but, as a country, we have a cultural problem because the divide between achievers and under-achievers is greater than in other countries. That must be a great concern. Let us encourage excellence, and let us look for it in every child and in every school. But that excellence must include higher attainment levels for all pupils and all young people. In recent years, the divide between achievers and under-achievers has grown so much that it is becoming not only an educational problem but a social problem.

In this country we have somehow to create a culture in which young people know that to earn they have to learn. To achieve that, however, we will need a Government who understand that we must invest to succeed. I do not think that money is the answer to all our difficulties in the education service, and I do not think that the hon. Member for Bath or any Opposition Member thinks or would suggest that, but money is important, and it is a crucial element. We have a Government who claim, on the one hand, that money is not important; but, on the other, they try to claim credit for increasing expenditure. They are wrong on both counts. Yes, money is important; and, no, the Government have not increased expenditure in recent years.

The hon. Member for Bath quoted some figures from the Library, according to which, since 1992–93, the standard spending assessment has fallen in real terms in both the primary and, more particularly, in the secondary sector. That is what the officials say; but the Government claim otherwise. This financial year, Ministers claim to have invested an additional £878 million in schools. They also said that they were making available an extra 4.5 per cent. In the overall settlement for local authorities, however, there was no real increase over the previous year.

The truth is that, if local authorities managed to protect or increase their education budget this year, as many did, they did so at the expense of other services. They juggled the money in the bank, but the money in the bank did not increase by one jot.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): Is the hon. Lady aware—I learned of it today, on a visit to the Wirral—that, next year, Labour-controlled Wirral council is planning an education cut of £1.2 million, but that, if it chose to, it could spend that money? It is planning a budget for next year which, unlike those of most authorities, will be £4 million under cap.

Ms Morris: The Liberal Democrats are beginning to sound a little like the party in government, because, when they attempt to fight Labour at the local level, they manage to find imagined money in the budget to spend on education. They do exactly the same thing in Birmingham. I do not know the exact breakdown of expenditure in Wirral, South, although I thought that there was an agreement between the hon. Member for Bath, who leads on education for the Liberal Democrats, and the Labour Front Bench that there is no extra money for

education. I cannot imagine how on earth the hon. Member for Newbury supposes that Wirral, South has somehow—above and beyond every other local education authority in the United Kingdom—managed to make available extra money, unless it has something to do with a forthcoming parliamentary by-election.

This year the Government have tried the same trick on expenditure as they tried last year. They claimed in the Budget that an extra £830 million would be made available for education—but where is it? Where is the cash? Where is the money? When Ministers talk about an increase, they are not talking about real pounds and pence or about real money; they are talking about the standard spending assessment, which is the amount that they think that local authorities should spend. So it is all words. It is not cash, but words, and it is certainly not an increase in grant. It is a con trick. It is also a rather silly con trick, because, from current budgets, councils would have to cut spending by £41 per pupil if they were to spend at the level advised by the Government.

So there we have it: there is no extra 4.5 per cent. for education next financial year, and local authority associations have estimated that the grant appears set to rise, in real terms, by as little as 0.5 per cent. I do not know whether Ministers believe what they say about expenditure, but I can assure them that no one in the real world believes a word they say about increased education expenditure.

Parents do not believe the Government, because they can see class sizes rising. In the past four years, the percentage of children in classes of more than 30 pupils has risen from 24.9 per cent. to 31 per cent. Teachers do not believe that there is an increase in expenditure, because they know that there is comparatively less money for books and equipment. Local governments do not believe that there is more money for education expenditure, because they know that there is less money for capital expenditure and repairs.

What about the great Conservative conversion to nursery education and the great flagship policy—the "clear blue water"—of nursery vouchers? The scheme has not even got off the ground, and £56 million has already been cut from the Budget. The same difficulties exist in further education.

Mr. Robin Squire: After the hon. Lady's repeated comments, I should say that the figures that she has quoted are the result of updated estimates on four-year-olds. Not a single parent will be denied their voucher or the opportunity to use it.

Ms Morris: They may not be denied their voucher, but they will be denied their place, and I think that they will be far more concerned about places than about vouchers. I am always staggered that the number of four-year-olds changes as they change from being three years old to four years old. I do not know where they have all come from—perhaps they are born rather late in life. However, if the Minister has managed to secure sufficient places for four-year-olds within the current Budget, why did he not use £50 million to extend nursery provision to three-year-olds rather than cutting it from the Budget?

Mr. Squire: The simple answer—although I do not think that the hon. Lady will discover it for herself in the next few years—is that, when the Government present their Budget each year, they make their best estimates for the subsequent two years. Those estimates are invariably updated, in many ways. That figure is simply one example, which she has latched on to.

Ms Morris: I am still staggered to think where all the four-year-olds have gone to. However, the Minister did not answer the question that I asked. As he has been able to cost the policy at less money, perhaps his commitment to nursery education would be more credible if he had transferred that money to expanding nursery provision for three-year-olds.

Further education has been badly treated in recent weeks. It has been thrown into confusion and chaos by the Government's refusal to meet the Further Education Funding Council's claim for demand-led student enrolments beyond the end of last term. No commitment will be made to fund the demand-led element in the remainder of this year, or in 1997–98. That is a clear breach of promise. Those enrolments have been used to stimulate growth in further education, and at comparatively low cost. However, now the Government refuse to pay, and thousands of students across the country are likely to be affected.

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North–East): I am intrigued by this passage on funding, because presumably—if the hon. Lady is upset about it—she will make a spending pledge to make that funding available, which she says is not there.

Ms Morris: The hon. Gentleman is anticipating comments that I will make later in my speech. Perhaps he will wait, and I will make those comments.

Ministers have not only failed to invest sufficiently in education, but they have wasted some of the resources that they have spent. Millions of pounds were wasted because the Government got the national curriculum wrong; £220 million has been spent on propping up the assisted places scheme; £3 million has been wasted on advertising the nursery voucher scheme; and £10 million has been wasted on administering that scheme. Millions of pounds have been spent on wrong priorities or on waste, and that money could have been spent on raising standards for children in our schools.

We need to invest more money in our education service—but we need more than money: we need to invest in people. We need to ensure at that all our head teachers have appropriate qualifications so that schools get the leadership that they need and deserve. We need to invest in our children under five, so that they get the benefit of nursery education. We need to concentrate and target early literacy, so that children do not transfer to secondary schools without the levels of literacy necessary to cope with a secondary school curriculum.

The hon. Member for Bath was honest enough to say that his party wishes to increase income tax by 1p to cover increased spending plans. The only problem with that is that it is the Liberal Democrats' solution to everything. They make more uncosted pledges than the Home Secretary has court judgments against him. Education, health, you name it—they put a penny on income tax to pay for it. In fact, the cost of some of their major pledges would mean increasing income tax by 5p in the pound.

[Ms Morris]

Were the Liberal Democrats ever in a position to set the level of taxation, they might reflect that it would be wholly irresponsible to increase income tax by that amount.

Mr. Don Foster: Does the hon. Lady believe that it would be irresponsible to increase it by just 1p?

Ms Morris: The hon. Gentleman cannot change his policy in an intervention—*[Interruption.]* But then again, he is a Liberal Democrat. His party's policy is to increase income tax not by 1p but by 5p in the pound. If we are to have a bargain basement in which I have persuaded the hon. Gentleman to drop his proposed income tax increase by 4p, let him produce new policy documents so that we can have another debate. But I am happy to argue with the Liberal Democrats about their costings and their commitment to increase taxes by 5p in the pound.

The hon. Member for Bath knows that people are taxed more heavily now than in 1979, and that 22 new taxes in the lifetime of this Government is enough. To them, however, he proposes to add a Lib-Dem special tax. That is easy to say, but when people are already reeling from the Tory tax increases of the past five years, it does not make sense to suggest another. The public would not buy it.

I share the hon. Gentleman's wish for more resources to be spent on priorities on which I suspect he and I agree, but the first course of action must be to use the existing money, and to use it more wisely. Switching money from the assisted places scheme and using it to reduce class sizes to no more than 30 for five and seven-year-olds will give a better start to thousands of primary school children. By using the money spent on nursery voucher bureaucracy, we can make sure—this is the Government's own costing—that every four-year-old has a pre-school place. By taxing the excessive profits of the privatised utilities, we can provide employment and training to 250,000 young people who are currently unemployed and claiming benefit.

We will invest in people by making sure that all heads are appropriately qualified; we will invest in school buildings by bringing together the public and private sectors; we will invest in the under-fives and in the primary years; we will invest in out-of-school learning and in education and training—

Mr. Nigel Evans: Where will the money come from?

Ms Morris: I have just explained where it will come from.

We can make a difference by changing priorities and cutting waste. Over the lifetime of a Parliament, we will make a further difference by getting people back to work and reinvesting the money that is currently paid in benefits.

Mr. Nigel Evans *rose—*

Ms Morris: I have given way several times already and I am keen to make progress. I have nearly finished, so I will not give way now.

The Government insult people by pretending that they have invested more in education. The Liberal Democrats make extravagant, uncosted promises in the sure and certain knowledge that they will not be called on to implement them. What we need, however, is a switch in resources to benefit the many, not the few, and to create an economy that uses the skills and talents of our people and gets everyone off benefit and back to work. That is what will make the difference in education standards, and it is exactly what a Labour Government will do.

8.33 pm

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): I rise to speak a few minutes earlier than I had expected as I was waiting for the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris) to say what Labour party policy was. However, like my hon. Friend the Minister, she dealt very effectively with the Liberal Democrat policy of putting an extra 1p on income tax. It is worth pointing out in passing that the justification for the tartan tax in Scotland is extra expenditure on education. In other words, under the Liberal Democrats, the poor Scots would pay twice as much as the English and Welsh.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Three times as much.

Mr. Stewart: Almost certainly, but I wish to give the Liberal Democrats the benefit of the doubt on this point.

It has rightly been said that education standards are not dependent on money alone—that is common ground between the parties—but it is worth noting some of the figures for Scotland as well as those south of the border.

Between the period just before the Conservatives came to power and 1993–94—the last year for which the figures are available—expenditure per primary pupil in Scotland rose in real terms by 50 per cent. That is a measure of the Government's commitment to improving standards, although people such as the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) might argue otherwise. My hon. Friend the Minister mentioned the levels of achievement in England and Wales. In Scotland, the comparable figure is three or more highers. The percentage of pupils obtaining that number rose from 18 per cent. in 1979–80 to 29 per cent. recently. That is proof of a real improvement in standards under the Conservatives.

Mr. Maxton: Why is it that any improvements in education in Scotland are down to this Government even though education in Scotland is run almost entirely by Labour-controlled authorities? When any blame comes to be apportioned, it rests on those authorities. Will the hon. Gentleman be a little more even-handed?

Mr. Stewart: On education matters, I always listen to an expert such as the hon. Gentleman, especially as, earlier in his career, he exercised his choice to teach in a Scottish school in the private sector. It is a pity that the hon. Gentleman's party wishes to deny many parents in Scotland the ability to choose to send their children to such a school.

The Government have set an effective framework within which those who deliver education in Scotland and across the country are able to improve standards. I wish

to tackle the three controversial aspects of education policy in Scotland: total expenditure, the assisted places scheme, and nursery vouchers.

From the hon. Member for Yardley we heard cries about the lack of expenditure and the need for more investment. On hearing those cries, it is not unreasonable for people to say, "Well, the Labour party claims that it will be in government in a few weeks' time; what would it do about expenditure?" I asked that question on Monday in Selkirk at a meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee. I asked whether a Labour Government would increase the aggregate external finance or the capping limits or do something about distribution, as they are the only options. I received no answer.

The question has been asked not only by Tories but by teachers and local authorities across the country. Perhaps the answer has wended its way to the Under–Secretary of State for Scotland, my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson)? Has Labour told him what it would do? Answer comes there none.

Reference was rightly made to the assisted places scheme. The hon. Member for Yardley suggested that abolishing the scheme would in itself provide the resources for nirvana in education. Of course, the Labour party is against the assisted places scheme because it provides choice. Labour was also against the right-to-buy scheme for council house tenants. The scheme works in Scotland. Let me give the House an example of a Glasgow boy whose mother worked as a domestic cleaner. He has represented Scottish schools in sport. He got six highers and two A-levels. He is studying law and French at university. That outstanding achievement was made possible by the assisted places scheme. It is important to retain and develop such opportunities.

Labour Members have talked about phasing out the assisted places scheme and the resources that that would release for reducing class sizes. Of course, reducing class sizes does not guarantee an improved education. As the House knows, classes in the London borough of Islington are smaller than at the London Oratory. Abolishing the assisted places scheme—I am indebted to the Scottish National party for this analysis, which has not been challenged by the Labour party—would provide less than one thousandth of Scotland's total education expenditure, corresponding to about one teacher per school. Leaving aside the merits of the scheme and the philosophy, the idea that abolition would release resources that would enable anything significant to be done for the rest of Scottish education or for education south of the border is nonsense.

The hon. Member for Yardley referred to nursery education vouchers. The position in my constituency is clear. Under Labour-held Strathclyde regional council, we were deprived of resources. There was a huge unmet demand for nursery education in my constituency. It is now a pilot area for the vouchers, and everyone who wants a nursery place has one.

My hon. Friend the Under–Secretary of State for Scotland is in danger of appearing in "The Guinness Book of Records". He has introduced a major Government initiative in my constituency and no one has complained. Everyone is happy. I hope that any nonsense peddled by the Opposition parties that the scheme does not work will be firmly sat on. It works in practice. It has brought about an increase in local authority provision, in private provision and in voluntary provision in my constituency. The authority is Labour-held, but the scheme works.

My constituents would like to know what would happen if there were a Labour Government. I have asked on many occasions and there has been no answer. What would a Labour Government do? Labour Front Benchers told us on Monday at the Scottish Grand Committee that "in the medium term" there would be places for all four-year-olds. What about the short term? There are nursery education places now under the Conservatives for everyone in my constituency who wants one, but Labour would abolish the scheme. Ordinary people in Eastwood want to know what would happen. The Labour party cannot get away with ignoring the detailed questions while claiming to be an alternative Government.

8.43 pm

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): The hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) sat down without any real ending to his speech, so I was taken slightly by surprise. I do not intend to follow his arguments, except to say that I know his constituency and in my view it was relatively easy to introduce the nursery voucher scheme there. In other parts of Scotland, particularly rural areas, people will be wandering round with a voucher in hand, but no nursery to spend it in. That will not give four-year-olds the necessary nursery provision. Money must be spent in specific areas, to ensure that nursery schools are available.

I do not want to spend much time talking about what is happening in Glasgow, because I know that this will be an English-dominated debate, even though the Under–Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), is winding up and the hon. Member for Eastwood has just spoken. I was proud to be part of the recent 20,000-strong demonstration of teachers, parents, local government workers and Members of Parliament in Glasgow against the cuts in education that are happening not just in Glasgow but throughout Scotland. They are real cuts. I was talking to teachers on that demonstration who have already been given their notice of redundancy, which is a statutory right, by the local authority, because it has no choice but to reduce the number of teachers.

The Parliamentary Under–Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Raymond S. Robertson): When the hon. Gentleman intervened on my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), he asked for credit to be given to Labour local authorities. Will he now give the same credit to those Labour local authorities? It is Labour local authorities that are making cuts in education. The Conservative Government have passed on more money for education for next year than last year. If the hon. Gentleman wants Labour authorities to get the credit, they must also take the stick when they make the cuts.

Mr. Maxton: As I tried to say this afternoon during Scottish questions, the local elected councillors are not alone in saying that there is a crisis in education in Scotland—they are joined by the director of education, his deputy and the head teachers. Everyone involved in running education in Glasgow is telling us that there is insufficient money. The Minister may be calling them all

[Mr. Maxton]

liars, but I know whom the people of Glasgow will believe when the election comes. They know that there has been a real-terms cut in the money for education in Glasgow.

However, that is not the main point of my speech. I have put on record my feelings about what is happening to education in Glasgow. What depresses me—it depressed me when I chaired the Scottish Grand Committee on Monday in Selkirk; it depressed me when we considered education during the debate on the Loyal Address last November; and it depresses me tonight—is how little attention is paid to new technology in education.

I am the fifth Member to speak in this debate. The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) mentioned the idea of a computer for every child. I thought, "Good, at last someone will talk about new technology in education." But that was it. The Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, who has now disappeared, made passing reference to the inspector's report on information technology. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris) did not mention the subject, and neither did the hon. Member for Eastwood.

In the rest of the world, a learning and information revolution is taking place, of which we in education seem unaware and which we are ignoring completely. No office—not even those of most Members of Parliament, who are not the most technologically minded people in the world—lacks a computer. Our researchers use them; the Table Office uses them; the Department of the Serjeant at Arms uses them; every solicitor's office uses them; and in the supermarket, every item that is bought is scanned, not just to show the price on the till, but to help with stock control by telling the supermarket that it has to order more produce.

The world is becoming computerised, but when I went into a school in my constituency recently to take a modern studies class, the classroom could have been the same one that I sat in when I was at school, or one that I went into in the 1970s, when I was in teacher training, or one that I taught in at a school—yes, a private school—in Glasgow. There was one 1980s BBC computer at the back. Of course, upstairs there was a computer room with up-to-date networked computers, but computing is considered a separate subject. It is still taught as if it were somehow different from everything else. Surely, in this day and age, it is time that we appreciated that the computer is not separate from the rest of education. It should be as much a tool for every child as books, pens or any other learning device.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I shall be interested in the hon. Gentleman's answer to my question, as he is an educationist. Earlier today, I was discussing a similar matter with an educationist, who drew my attention to a table showing that the United Kingdom was about three quarters of the way down the list in mathematics and science, yet we were virtually at the top in respect of computer provision per child. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that more computers should be provided. Perhaps he can explain the reason for that imbalance.

Mr. Maxton: I also fail to understand that. A recent "Newsnight" programme covered education in Minnesota. It was not about computers, but was about the organisation of schools in Minnesota. Every shot showed children sitting at computers. They were not learning about computers, but using them to learn. We need a major shift in education, from learning about computers to using them to learn. Unless we do that, we shall be way behind other countries.

There are several reasons why we need a simple education policy—a computer on every child's desk within the next five years. First, we need it as a country. The United Kingdom will fall behind economically if we do not have a computer-literate population that understands computers—in every walk of life.

Secondly, for the first time ever, we could switch our education system from one where the teacher teaches, to one where children learn. Children would be able to learn at their own speed, depending on their ability. As anyone who teaches knows, that does not happen in the classroom. When one teaches a class of 30 kids, one has to aim at the norm. Bright pupils fall behind and so do poorer ones, because none of them is getting what is needed. With a computer-led system, at last children could learn at their own pace. If they could not do something, they could try again. Brighter children could move ahead faster, learning more and developing at their own speed. Surely that is what is required.

Such a system would also help children with learning difficulties. My son is dyslexic and it would have made a great difference to him to have a voice-activated computer, so that he did not have to worry about spelling or writing. It would have been a great boon and he would have done so much better at school if he had not had to toil with what I would term the mechanics and the tools of learning rather than learning itself.

Equally, such an approach would be a great incentive to children and would solve some of, but not all, the problems of discipline and truancy in schools. The evidence in the States, particularly in Los Angeles, where universities have adopted sink schools and given every child a computer, is that truancy rates have fallen and the indiscipline problem has almost disappeared. Kids want to go to school.

There are three reasons why children learn in school. First, parents give them the incentive and motivation to learn. Secondly, in the 1950s and 1960s, we could all get jobs when we left school, so the motivation was to do well and get a better job. Thirdly, education can be made into something that children actually want. They want to go to school because they want to learn. Surely that is what education ought to be about. For the first time, we can achieve that by giving children computers.

What about the cost? I have done a quick sum in respect of Scotland. I appreciate that it refers only to Scotland. A new wave of computers is coming in the next few months. They will be linked to a network. It will not be necessary to buy big boxes costing £2,000 or £3,000; the computers will be in the computer stores for £250 each. There are 750,000 pupils in Scotland, so it would cost £187 million to provide each pupil with a computer. That is 8 per cent. of the total Scottish education budget. Of course, if we were buying 750,000 computers, the price would be considerably less. If we could do it at half price, it would cost 4 per cent. of the total education budget in Scotland. It would be a one-off purchase as the computers do not need upgrading; the upgrading is done at source.

I know that some of my colleagues think that I am obsessive about new technology. Sometimes it seems to me that I am the only person in the House who is prepared to stand up and talk about what really matters in education—children learning—and how we can best improve the way in which they learn. I feel that that can be achieved by ensuring that everyone has access to modern technology.

8.54 pm

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) on the timing of today's debate, which enables us to draw attention to the report of the chief inspector of schools, which has shown that more lessons are good, there are fewer poor teachers and head teachers and there has been a significant improvement in standards in the past 12 months.

Listening to the speech of the hon. Member for Bath and the frequency with which he spent that famous penny, I could only surmise that he must be rather incontinent. Listening to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris), I decided that the Brown straitjacket did not fit her either. She seemed to want to spend the £5 million saving from the phasing out of the assisted places scheme many times over.

Ms Estelle Morris: Just once.

Mr. Marshall: No, many times over.

As the House knows, I have twice introduced Adjournment debates over the past 10 months on standards in education, and I make no apology for concentrating on that subject again. Education is the escalator of opportunity, which provides poor children from inner cities and children living in squalor on some of our rundown council estates with the chance to escape from that background and make full use of their skills and opportunities.

One of the tragedies in the United Kingdom is the way in which local education authorities, such as the late and unlamented Inner London education authority and Islington council, have failed entire generations of children. They have condemned them to life in squalor because they have not allowed them to leave school with a full and complete education. That is a scandal. It is a pity that the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) is not here in sackcloth and ashes to apologise for her record as leader of Islington council.

I have expressed my fear in many speeches that standards have dropped over the past 30 years. If we look for the reasons, we can see them. They include the abolition of many grammar schools, the decline of traditional teaching methods, the refusal to stream and set in comprehensive schools, and calculators taking the place of mental arithmetic. Some schools do not believe in homework. I met a headmistress who said that she did not believe in setting homework, because it was unfair on the children who were not given it, as they did not have the opportunity to benefit from it.

Ms Estelle Morris: Why then does the hon. Gentleman not support homework for everyone, which is the Labour party's policy?

Mr. Marshall: Everyone should believe in homework.

Ms Morris *rose—*

Mr. Marshall: I have only a few minutes, so I am not giving way.

We have seen a decline in discipline as a result of the abolition of corporal punishment. We need a drastic rethink in the way in which some of our comprehensive schools work, because they have failed many of the bright pupils and certainly many of the not-so-bright pupils, who want not necessarily an academic education, but an education that will fit them for life outside school.

I always remember going to a school in Israel, where children were being taught hairdressing and how to become a motor mechanic. The head of the school said, "You may wonder why we are teaching those skills, but we can guarantee that every child who leaves this school will have a job," and pointed out that nearly all the small garages in Jerusalem were owned by graduates of the school. We fail some of the less bright children by saying that they need an academic education, when in fact a practical education would be much more suitable.

It is important to emphasise the role of grant-maintained schools, which have had a tremendous record in increasing staffing and spending on books and teaching equipment, and in widening the curriculum on offer. Hendon school, one of the first grant-maintained schools in London, has become a language academy and now offers a much wider choice to its pupils. Indeed, 60 per cent. of schools have improved their position in the league tables since they became grant-maintained. The reason why they have done so is that, instead of spending 12 per cent. of their budgets on administration, as local authority schools do, they spend only 6 per cent. Less administration is good for education. That is where grant-maintained schools have succeeded and local authority schools have failed.

Why is the Labour party opposed to such schools? It is because it puts dogma before democracy and socialism before standards. The sheer hypocrisy of the Labour party sticks in the gullet of the people of this country. The leader of the Labour party sends his children away from Islington to a grant-maintained school, yet seeks to deny that freedom to others. Those are double standards. When one hears the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) say that the education of Southwark local education authority is suitable for her constituents but not for herself and her children, one believes that double standards are alive and kicking in the Labour party today.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is currently considering applications from three schools in my constituency for grant-maintained status: from Pardes House, Menorah Foundation and Torah Teminah, all of which teach the children of many parents in my constituency. I hope that he will listen to what I say and grant those applications in the very near future. I have been asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) to ask my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to look favourably on an application for a voluntary aided school in Hertsmere that is sponsored by the most excellent and go-ahead Rabbi Plancey.

I am surprised at the Labour party's opposition to the assisted places scheme. I suppose that one needs only to have a party led by an old Fettesian to prevent poor children enjoying the same benefits as he did. It is surely wrong that bright children of low-income parents should be denied the opportunity that the Leader of the Opposition was given by his parents. I suppose that that is called socialism today, but most of us call it humbug and hypocrisy of the worst sort.

[Mr. Marshall]

We have seen the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) rush around the Wirral saying that the Labour party is interested in standards. Let him visit Wirral grammar school again and remind those there that the only reason why it is still a grammar school is that my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Thatcher saved grammar schools in 1979. If she had lost the election that year, there would not be a grammar school left in the country for the Conservative party to defend. Whatever the hon. Gentleman may say now about standards to the parents of Wirral, South, he should say that Labour local authority after Labour local authority has shown itself to be quite indifferent to standards.

There is only one party committed to standards, and that is the Conservative party. Every measure that the Government have introduced to improve standards has been opposed by both main Opposition parties. The Opposition prattle on about spending more money, but have done nothing to improve education standards one jot or tittle.

9.3 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick–upon–Tweed): How distant all the talk of grammar schools, opting out and grant-maintained schools seems to the majority of my constituents. I live in and represent a constituency in which the schools, for the most part, went comprehensive under a Conservative Government and a then Conservative-controlled local authority. There is only one grant-maintained school in the entire constituency, and that became grant-maintained because the Labour-controlled county council threatened to close it. In other schools where the grant-maintained issue has been raised, the proposal has been heavily defeated. The assisted places scheme, too, has a limited impact in the area, and what the vast majority of parents want to know is how the schools to which they send their children can be enabled to do an adequate job.

I shall talk about the situation in Northumberland in particular because, as the Minister will be aware from his meeting earlier today and from many other representations, people are greatly concerned about it. However much he may disagree with them on the implications of the figures, he must know how great that concern is.

I must declare an interest, in that my wife is employed by Northumberland education authority as a teacher, and both my children are in further education in Northumberland, having received the whole of their previous education in the county's schools.

Northumberland has particular difficulties, because it is such a thinly populated county. It has the smallest population, yet the largest area, of any mainland county in England. That creates serious problems, because of the number of schools that need to be maintained in remoter communities and the transport costs of getting children to school, especially if some schools are closed as an economy measure.

Northumberland has also had problems with education settlements over the years. It lost about £7 million when the standard spending assessment replaced the previous scheme of education funding. The authority was especially disadvantaged by two factors.

First, the additional educational needs factor cost the county £5 million. It was a big factor in the standard spending assessment formula, and reflected needs different from the main needs in Northumberland. For example, it stressed needs connected with ethnic minorities, but not those connected with sparsity or with some of the social problems of the county.

Secondly, the area cost adjustment was increased substantially when the SSAs were introduced, and that affected Northumberland badly, too. The problem has continued, and as a result there have been cuts year after year in Northumberland schools and in the overall education budget. The cuts have been mitigated to some extent by making savings in other parts of the county's budget and in central education administration costs, and by drawing on reserves. But one cannot go on drawing on reserves, as has happened in recent years.

The way in which the Government discuss the figures has a fairyland quality. They talk about additional money, when all they mean is permission for local authorities to spend more, whether through their SSAs or their capping figures. They refer to substantial increases this year compared with last year, although last year's figure was so much higher than the SSA that this year's "increase" does not even completely cover it.

That is a factor common to many local authorities. Were the authority to spend next year what the Government now, with a great flourish, say that it can spend, it would be spending only what it actually spent in the current year. That has been the problem for Northumberland, as for several other authorities, and, for the reasons that I have given, it has been especially acute there.

Far from providing for a 3.4 per cent. increase, Northumberland's SSA for the coming year represents no more than current spending. The cap allows an increase of only 2.4 per cent., whereas even a standstill budget would have required 5 per cent. That means a £10 million gap. So schools face a possible 2.5 per cent. budget cut, and central services a much bigger one.

Year on year, the county has drawn heavily on central services for cuts, to try to protect school budgets.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): I understand the problems that Northumberland faces because of its sparsity, but does the right hon. Gentleman accept that, nevertheless, the county has the highest SSA, and the highest capping level, per head of population of any shire county? It gets the largest grant per head of population of any shire county, too.

There might be greater sympathy for Northumberland county council if it were not, for example, wasting £1 million fighting the Army, and wanting to hold a public inquiry into the plans for Otterburn training area. If it had withdrawn its objections, it could have saved £1 million, which would have meant much more money for schools.

Mr. Beith: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will explain to his constituents in Ponteland his view that they cannot have a public inquiry into the substantial increase in traffic through the town, which they are concerned about, because to do so would impair the education budget. That is not the way in which we are supposed to run the local government system.

Public inquiries into major planning decisions are held if there are legitimate objections and matters of concern that have not been resolved by negotiation beforehand. The county should not be told that it has to choose either education or democracy in planning but cannot have both. That is not the way in which the local government system is run.

The hon. Member for Hexham must be well aware that the Conservatives on the county council share the concern about the current and previous settlements, and have been involved in regular representations to Ministers on the issue.

The Secretary of State wrote to me before Christmas:

"Northumberland does not get as much as some other authorities, because it does not serve an area of high socio-economic deprivation and it is not a high cost area in which to work."

I think that she is wrong on both counts. There are areas of very high deprivation in Northumberland, some of which are in my constituency. Some of the wards in Berwick and Alnwick have the highest socio-economic deprivation in the county, and rate high by national standards. It is also a high-cost area in which to run an education system because of the high cost of sparsity, involving the school size issues and transport costs that I have mentioned.

Mr. Robin Squire: These are well-trodden paths, but I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will allow me to put it on record that sparsity is the only element within the entire SSA system which includes what I think is called a judgmental uplift—in other words, a greater value is applied to it than the evidence alone would suggest was justified. That, in part, recognises the sort of difficulties that he is outlining.

Mr. Beith: We could get into a complex statistical argument about whether there is such a thing as super-sparsity, and whether the sparsity factor fails to reflect the extent of sparsity in Northumberland. Sparsity is a significant problem in the education system in Northumberland. It makes it difficult for the authority to meet some of the obligations that the Department seeks to impose on it in terms of reducing surplus places, for example. Normally, the surplus places in a remote rural school cannot be removed without taking the school away from the area altogether.

The end results of the budget cuts that we have had in recent years—and which we look likely to face this year—are serious for the schools. There will be cuts in staff numbers, and senior staff will be retired to enable the recruitment of cheaper, more junior staff.

Much of the pressure which fuels the problem of early retirement that the Secretary of State is seeking to address—in an unsatisfactory way, in my opinion, although they need to be addressed—arises because schools cannot afford their present staff structure, and have too many good experienced teachers. The schools have to let some of those teachers go by early retirement so as to get people straight out of college who are lower on the salary scale.

When new appointments are made, governing bodies have to look at staff from the standpoint of what they will cost. It is not a case of whether this is the right person to fill the particular vacancy, but whether this is a cheaper teacher—that is to say, someone at the bottom of the salary scale. That cannot be good for the schools.

In addition, spending on books, equipment and maintenance is being abandoned. Educationally important activities are being curtailed, and there is an excessive dependence on business sponsorship and parents for the basic essentials. Clearly, the involvement of parents in fund raising is enormously valuable, and we want to encourage it by giving charitable status to schools—such as the private sector already enjoys. But when that becomes necessary for the basic essentials in schools, something has gone wrong with the funding system. All of this has gone on year after year, and schools as well as authorities have drawn on their reserves.

Northumberland is seeking to make bigger cuts in its central education expenditure to try to protect the schools budget, but the threat is significant. Facilities such as Ford Castle in my constituency—which provides residential environmental education—are now threatened. I hope that there will be a way around this, so that the institution can be floated off. But that will work only if schools can continue to make use of the facilities it provides. It would be a failure if the very facilities that it provides cannot be used by schools in the future, and if a new system for running it cannot be set up with reasonable starting finance.

The learning support team for first schools provided by Northumberland is one of the items that may be removed entirely under the current cuts. Small schools cannot expect to have all the expertise required for special needs purposes, and the support provided by this team is enormously valuable in those schools. To quote St. John's Roman Catholic first school in Alnwick:

"Prior to our recent inspection by OFSTED invaluable advice and support had been given to the staff and, as a result, this was recognised in the report for the provision of SEN pupils in the school. For some schools post inspection assistance has also been given. This help can only lead to more successful schools in the authority who are working with the 'Code of Practice for Special Education Needs' outlined by the LEA, which has been approved by OFSTED. However, if such important services are not maintained, then working with the 'Code of Practice' becomes increasingly difficult."

In addition to those problems, we have the funding problems in further education, to which hon. Members have referred. Kirkley Hall college, which many of my constituents, including my son, attend, has been badly hit by what has happened over the demand-led element, which was introduced to encourage colleges to grow on a marginal cost basis, improving efficiency and increasing the number of students benefiting. The FE sector was led to believe that DLE funding was uncapped.

Now colleges have been told that they are unlikely to get that funding even for the spring and summer terms this year. That places them in an impossible position. In contractual and staff terms, they planned to provide training services, for which they will not now be funded. That poses severe dangers to the further education of many of my constituents.

I argue for an improved system of distributing funds in education, but I also strongly support the case for additional funding made by my hon. Friend the Member

[Mr. Beith]

for Bath (Mr. Foster). I can tell the Labour Members who are present that the argument that we have been putting forward has been supported by the Labour party in Northumberland. The Labour-controlled county council passed a resolution just before the Budget statement, which said:

"this County Council believes that safeguarding the quality of the Education and Community Care services should take priority over tax cuts in the forthcoming national Budget, and urges the Chancellor of the Exchequer to protect these services by . . . investing at least the equivalent of 1p on income tax for Education".

Labour county councillors voted for that. Labour Members should therefore support our motion tonight.

9.16 pm

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North-East): When the debate started, the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) rightly outlined some of the principles or objectives of education in terms of wanting to ensure that all youngsters who came out of education were valued, respected and able to contribute to our society in its various forms. All parties would, in general, echo those principles. We all recognise the need for a well-educated work force.

A lot has been said this evening about the need for high standards in education. I would certainly agree, as would all hon. Members, I am sure. The problem is that higher standards in education cannot merely be wished. They have to be achieved by having the measures in force that will enable those standards to be delivered. As the Ofsted inspectors' report outlined, the challenge is to ensure that all schools come up to the level of the best, and deliver a first-class education for the children in them.

There are too many poor lessons—too many lessons in which teachers are unprepared and unsure of what they are trying to achieve. The real task is to ensure that those lessons are improved. Indeed, if teachers do not deliver over a certain period, they should be rooted out of the profession. No one should shy away from that. Children get only one chance in education.

It is crucial that we ask why, in the 1950s, our inner-city schools were apparently able to achieve a great deal more for some of the children of lower ability than similar schools today. Was it to do with the organisation, particularly in primary schools? Was it to do with the teaching methods used? We do not hear much of that sort of talk. We heard nothing about the Leeds report, which showed how much time was wasted in primary schools with children sitting around in clusters trying to work out what to do in their lessons. We have all visited primary classes and seen evidence of far too much noise, and a lack of purposeful work.

Once and for all, we need to nail the excuse that any failure in education is to do with funding, which appears to be the thesis of both Opposition parties. If that were the case, why was education able to deliver as much as it did in the 1950s?

My hon. Friend the Minister was right to mention the increase in funding per pupil since 1978–79 of about 50 per cent. in real terms. It is also significant, although it is not often appreciated, even by hon. Members, that, in the coming years, we as a nation will spend £38 billion on education. I mention that because I was amazed a couple of weeks ago to hear a couple of Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen alleging that this country now spent more on unemployment than on education.

I thought about that, and was sure that it could not be right. I now realise what trap they had fallen into: they had looked at the Red Book and seen only what central Government spend on education, without taking into account the vast amounts spent by local education authorities, which of course appear on another page. Let us nail that once and for all. We spend £38 billion a year on education, and that spending has reached 5.2 per cent. of gross domestic product. I welcome that.

The evidence from schools throughout the country is that there is no correlation whatever between spending and results. My hon. Friend the Minister mentioned Islington—a favourite borough these days—with its high expenditure and poor results. There are many other examples. There were problems at Hackney Downs school, but investigations showed that there was one teacher to every eight pupils there; that was hardly a funding problem.

We have heard many arguments about standard spending assessments. I served on the local education authority for most of my 16 years on Croydon council. It is fair to say that, when considering spending on particular services, most council committees consider the needs, rather than simply deciding to spend to the limit of the SSA; the SSA is completely irrelevant. That canard is mentioned too often in the House. Local authorities do not work like that. Of course the authorities have to take into account their capping limits—that is only right—but we have not heard how much more the Opposition, and especially the Labour party, would make available for education.

One of the most interesting things about the funding of education in this country is the significant difference in funding per pupil in local authorities throughout the land. There are bound to be differences, because some areas have greater social problems and some schools have more pupils who are statemented, but the scale of difference between some authorities that spend a small amount per pupil and others that spend a large amount is excessive.

I looked for the lowest and the highest spending in the 1994-95 figures. Gloucester—I apologise for mentioning Gloucester—spent £1,305 per pupil in primary schools; Doncaster spent £1,478; and Lambeth £2,635. It is also interesting to note that results were in directly inverse relation to those figures. The difference of more than £1,300 per pupil between the lowest and highest figure for a typical two-form entry primary school would mean that one of the schools would get just over £500,000 and the other just over £1 million.

In the longer term, we must consider, as is being done in the case of grant-maintained schools, some form of common funding to iron out some of those disparities, because in my view they are too great. If authorities such as Gloucester can deliver a first-class education on £1,305, why cannot others, especially when they spend £2,635? Funding is a red herring in terms of education.

We have heard about all sorts of funny ways in which the money can be spent; it is important to come to grips with standards and to be prepared to use the published results and inspection reports to drive up standards in both primary and secondary schools.

I look forward eagerly to seeing the results of the standard assessment tasks for 11-year-olds, which I understand are due to be published on a school-by-school basis next month, despite great opposition from teacher unions and educationists. There was opposition throughout the 1980s to the publication of results in any shape or form.

I strongly believe that it is only by publishing results that we can put a spotlight on low standards and force schools to improve them. I urge the Government to resist any and every attempt to prevent publication of results, which is one of the best ways to drive up standards.

9.24 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I have an excellent 20-minute speech, and a less good six-minute speech. However, beggars cannot be choosers, and not even a penny on income tax will buy me the extra time that I need to make all my points.

I speak as a former councillor, and chairman of a governing body. I know the excellent work of our teachers and governors, who give up their time to help youngsters and ensure that they get good-quality education. I am grateful for the extra money that the Government have provided, especially in Lancashire. I plead with Labour-controlled Lancashire county council to ensure that all the money gets through to the schools, and that none is retained at the centre for bureaucracy, which does not benefit youngsters.

I represent a rural area with some good small rural schools. One such school, Brennans endowed school in Slaidburn, is under great pressure. It has two full-time teachers and one part-time teacher. It risks losing the part-time teacher this year, because it is already using its reserves. All the reserves will have gone. We must pay more heed to ensuring that our small rural schools get the resources they need to provide the necessary teaching staff. In such schools, classes must be larger, and they contain more than one age group, so they need extra attention. I hope that we can pay more attention to them.

Ribble Valley is particularly blessed with excellent schools, whether in the state sector or outside it. I want to discuss the assisted places scheme, so I shall mention one or two schools in the private sector.

One such school is Queen Elizabeth's grammar school, a quarter of whose youngsters benefit from the scheme. At Stonyhurst college, 35 youngsters are on it. If the scheme was abolished, youngsters from the poorest backgrounds, and others from not so well-off backgrounds, would miss the life chance of going to such schools. We know from the educational standards they attain that they do better than some children from wealthier backgrounds. We must not deny them that life chance.

My constituency includes Clitheroe royal grammar school, a grant-maintained school with 1,100 youngsters. It was three times over-subscribed this year, because parents want their youngsters to go there, and the youngsters want to go, too. The school would dearly like to expand, but the Opposition parties have denied it that opportunity. I hope that we will address the problem of popular schools that should be allowed to expand. Less popular schools should be punished.

Parental choice is important, and not only in my constituency. For some reason, Wirral, South has been mentioned during the debate. I shall mention it, too. It has two grammar schools, the Wirral grammar school for girls, a county local education authority school, and the Wirral grammar school for boys, a grant-maintained school.

Of course, had it been up to the Opposition parties, those schools would have lost their grammar school status years ago. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) said, it was the intervention of Margaret Thatcher that allowed them to keep their status, by ensuring that parents were consulted. They said, time and again, that they wished to retain that status.

The future of both schools is now in jeopardy. Already, the chairman of the council's education committee has stated:

> "I hope that in time we'll see the end of selection. There are already murmurings here, and I think it is only a matter of time before this leads to action."

The writing is on the wall for those schools. I hope that the parents and the electorate of Wirral, South make their voice heard when the by-election is held. It is not just there are good grammar schools in Wirral, South; there are good comprehensive and secondary modern schools there that are to be commended. We should remember the old adage: if something is not broken, why fix it?

There are many issues that I should like to have spoken about this evening if I had had the time. Such issues include new technology in schools, in which I have a great belief. British Aerospace in my constituency is assisting some schools in a partnership to ensure that youngsters have an opportunity to use the state-of-the art technology they desperately need. As has been said, computers can be used not just in computer classes, but throughout the curriculum and in all lessons.

I cannot overstate the importance of ensuring that our youngsters are taught about the dangers of all sorts of drugs, particularly so-called designer drugs such as Ecstasy. They should be taught at an early age, not just about the dangers, and the fact that one pill can kill, but of the long-term damage that such drugs can cause.

I am proud of our contribution and commitment to education in this country. Expenditure is an investment in education, not merely a means of spending money. The Liberal Democrats have not learnt the lesson. One penny can buy many things; it can even buy thoughts. But we need a massive investment in maths education in our schools, because there are Liberal Democrats in this country who believe that 1p can buy £4.4 billion-worth of expenditure in our schools. It simply cannot.

9.30 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I do not know whether it can be described as common ground, but, at some time or another in recent months, all the parties have suggested that education is their priority. This has been a useful debate to measure the degree of commitment of the respective parties, with the obvious exception of the Scottish National party, none of whose members has been present for any of the debate.

[Mr. James Wallace]

The motion contains an element of common ground. All parties would subscribe to the principle of the importance of quality early-years education. It is interesting to consider what commitments the various parties have made in terms of implementing that principle. Most educationists talk of the value of early-years education. We are all familiar with studies from the United States that show that $1 spent on pre-school education saves $7 in later life.

Mr. Maxton: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that such provision is more important in the poorest and most deprived areas, where the need is greatest? Some of us were brought up on the great book of Peter Townsend, "Born to Fail", which was so true. Such provision is necessary for children from deprived areas, rather than those from the leafy suburbs of the constituency of the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart).

Mr. Wallace: All pupils can benefit. I would hate to say that some children should be deprived of nursery education, but I take the hon. Gentleman's point—such provision is particularly important in areas of deprivation.

Early-years education also provides an important opportunity to pick up at an early stage learning difficulties and other special needs. If those problems are tackled early, the pupil involved often has much greater chances later in life.

The hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) referred to commitments made by the Labour party at the Scottish Grand Committee on Monday, when the hon. Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) said:

"In the medium term, we would seek to extend that provision to every four-year-old, and in the longer term to three-year-olds."—[*Official Report, Scottish Grand Committee*, 3 February 1997; c. 19.]

The hon. Member for Eastwood said that that did not seem to be much of a commitment. Perhaps I can give him an explanation.

On my calculation—which will depend on the quality of the education system in the 1960s when I was learning arithmetic—in Scotland it would cost an additional £90 million above the sum invested before the voucher scheme to implement nursery education for every three and four-year-old. When challenged in the Scottish Grand Committee, the hon. Member for Monklands, East was able to find only £30 million, the money used for funding the nursery voucher scheme, so the Labour party is still a long way short in terms of that funding commitment.

I take issue with the Government over nursery vouchers. I am sure that the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), will wax lyrical about that subject when he replies to the debate, as he did on Monday. The scheme has many deficiencies. The commitment is only to four-year-olds. In some areas, three-year-olds may lose out as four-year-olds take their places.

There is no provision for capital build in the local authority sector. If new capital units are to be built, they must be paid for through private sources. The budget set by the Scottish Office does not allow for the training of nursery teachers. When the Secretary of State was challenged about that a year ago, he said that he did not think that high-quality trained teachers were necessarily required to implement the nursery voucher scheme.

The value of the vouchers will be inadequate, and the scheme will be bureaucratic. In Scotland, we are about to have an expensive advertising campaign. The Secretary of State justified the higher cost pro rata than in England by saying that perhaps the Scottish media charged a bit more, but he was not very convincing. More significantly, I challenged the Secretary of State at Scottish Question Time today to explain to parents who see the adverts that tell them that they will receive a £1,100 voucher why there is nowhere to cash them in. It is important to make the point that the voucher will have a value only if a nursery place is available for which it can be cashed in.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Rather than asking my right hon. Friend that question, has the hon. Gentleman asked his hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) how the parents in her constituency, which is one of the pilot areas, are coping, because 97 per cent. of them are using vouchers?

Mr. Wallace: I have indeed asked her that same question. Even if there is provision, there is no choice, and we are told that choice is the key. Many parts of Scotland will not have provision. We still have not received an answer to our question: the Minister cannot answer it by asking another question.

There is a growing body of evidence from the pilot schemes south of the border that the voucher system neither expands provision nor extends choice. In some areas south of the border, local education authorities try to retain the money by encouraging early entry into reception classes. That is not what was intended, but that is what has happened.

The Select Committee on Education and Employment has had evidence that, in Norfolk, eight playgroups closed in November, and six more are expected to close by the end of March. Some playgroups have had their numbers reduced due to the local authority's policy of taking children into school early. We do not believe that that is the way forward.

The report of the Commission on Scottish Education, which was published last year, concluded:

"If the monies the Scottish Office intend to devote to the voucher scheme were allocated to local authorities instead—with an obligation to deploy them in the pre-five sector in conjunction with the other partners—a planned expansion which took account of the wishes of parents could more readily and fairly be achieved."

It remains my party's position that the first claim on the revenue raised by the 1p increase in income tax would be for high-quality education for early years.

Even where we had high-quality education, it is essential to build on what has been achieved. The quality of schools varies, but generally it is right to say that inspectors have praised the quality in many of Scotland's schools. A recent inspectors' report says:

"The picture is one of schools which are performing effectively overall. Much that we report is of high quality and justifies a continuing pride in the Scottish education system".

We do not want to throw away that achievement, but we are concerned that we are in danger of doing so because of the cuts that are being imposed on many local authorities. It is no use Ministers talking about standard spending assessments, or saying, as the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland said when he intervened on the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton), that the

Government have passed on more money for education. In the global budgets—the money allocated to local authorities—once inflation has been taken into account, and even before all the other responsibilities of local authorities are taken into account, less money is available.

Across Scotland—it was obvious from the debate that it applies to England as well—concern is growing about the effect of the cuts. Catalogues of concerns were expressed when we debated this issue on Monday in the Scottish Grand Committee held in Selkirk. My concern is that the Government will start to believe their own propaganda that there are no cuts, until the cuts that were very real in 1996-97 become even more real in 1997–98.

As many as 1,500 teaching posts could go, on top of the 1,200 that have been lost this year. That will lead to bigger class sizes. There will be less support for children with special needs and less breadth in the curriculum, and the delivery of highers will be even more difficult. The number of peripatetic teachers will be cut. Spending on books and equipment will also be cut. An average of £35 per primary school pupil is spent on books and equipment, but reading schemes can cost £28 per pupil, and it is therefore almost impossible for a school to change its reading scheme in one year. The hon. Member for Cathcart spoke of the importance of using information technology in education, and of using computers as a learning rather than a teaching tool, but it is clearly not possible to embark on any such provision with budgets that have been cut rather than increased.

The lack of repair and maintenance is causing more and more difficulties. An average of £15,000 per school is available for repair and maintenance in Scotland, but, in 1995, the Public Accounts Commission reported that an average of £150,000 per primary school and £350,000 per secondary school was necessary to bring those schools up to scratch. That does not take into account the upgrading that was necessary as part of curriculum development, or the cost of replacing old, battered accommodation.

Charges will be made where they do not currently exist. There will be charges for music tuition—if, indeed, such tuition continues in some parts of our country. There will be charges for transport. At present, councils are sometimes generous in providing free bus transport for pupils who live within a statutory distance. In return for the 1p cut in income tax which the Conservatives supported—while Labour Members sat on their hands and acquiesced—many parents will be faced with increased costs. They will pay higher council taxes, and receive fewer education services.

The hon. Member for Eastwood had some fun at the expense of the hon. Member for Monklands, East. He recited a penetrating question that he had asked in the Scottish Grand Committee, which elicited no answer. He asked whether Labour would spend one penny more in the aggregate external finance for local authorities in Scotland. He received no answer because the Labour party has no answer, but he himself has not said how he would deal with the concerns of those who campaign in Selkirk, the 20,000 who marched in Glasgow the other weekend and the 40,000 who marched through Edinburgh last year to complain about education cuts.

Much of the debate has come down to the basic question of finance. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) pointed out, it is all very well to talk about standard spending assessments, but this year's SSA for Northumberland is no higher than spending was in the year that has just passed.

Mr. Congdon: It has always been like that.

Mr. Wallace: It has not always been like that. The SSAs are lower today than they were at the time of the 1992 general election. While I believe that there is a good deal of agreement on the fact that money is not the whole answer, I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman honestly believes that things were so much better in the 1950s than they are today. In the 1950s, many children who were branded as failures after failing the 11-plus were denied achievements that would have been possible if they were being educated now. The number of people proceeding to further and higher education was much lower then than it is today. We have moved forward immeasurably in the past 40 years, but that also costs money.

The Labour party has accepted the Government's expenditure plans. I think it rather odd that a party whose members were saying, "Enough is enough," in November should now be saying, "Two more years of the same." It does not really stand up.

When the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris) berated my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) and the Liberal Democrats, she sounded like an aspiring Conservative junior Minister. Her figures were even more inflated than those of the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans). Oddly enough, in the earlier debate on health, my hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) said the same about the hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell). It is like Tweedledum and Tweedledee: there is no difference.

Perhaps the only difference that we shall see as we go into the next general election will come in the form of a party that is prepared and bold enough to say that it will make a difference, and is prepared to say that, by investing an extra 1p on the standard rate of income tax in education, there will be the necessary investment for our country's future and for the aspirations and opportunities of our young generation.

9.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Raymond S. Robertson): I am glad to have the opportunity to respond to the debate. In opening on behalf of the Government, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment clearly set out the Government's position. We fully recognise the importance of education. We are committed to ensuring school education of the highest quality, and we are making resources available to achieve that. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary set out the Government's plans and priorities for England and Wales. In summing up, it is my intention to show how that same commitment is taking effect in Scotland.

The Government's amendment draws the attention of the House to the investment that we have made, and continue to make, in early-years primary and secondary education, and to the reforms that we have introduced that ensure that available resources are used to the best effect.

I take particular pride in the evidence of those commitments in Scotland, and I wish to set them out clearly. The House well knows how we in Scotland pride

[Mr. Raymond S. Robertson]

ourselves on our education system. It knows that we are not shy of blowing our own trumpet when it comes to education achievements. The House knows also that we have good schools, a highly proficient teaching force and a proud record. It knows further the priority that the Government have attached to education in Scotland. The House will share my surprise, therefore, at the speeches of the hon. Members for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) and for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace). Members from south of the border may be asking:

"Stands Scotland where it did?"

I am glad to reassure the House that a system described as in collapse and bled dry is nothing more than a travesty. The House may find it helpful if I remind it of a situation that will be found if it focuses on the good work that is going on in schools throughout the country. If the hon. Gentleman did so, he would find evidence of the additional resources that have been made available and the achievements and the progress that they are bringing. The Government's reforms have stimulated quality, diversity and choice in our system, and some simple facts might help the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Wallace: The problem with the Minister reading his prepared speech is that he fails to take account of the fact that I quoted from a recent report of the inspectorate that praised the quality of Scottish schools and acknowledged it. We must build on that quality and not destroy it through spending cuts.

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman spent 30 seconds praising that quality and about 14 minutes running it down, as anyone who listened to his speech will know.

Spending per pupil in Scotland is over 50 per cent. higher in real terms than in 1979. That is hardly a system being bled dry. Class sizes are smaller and teachers' salaries are higher in real terms than in 1979. The hon. Gentleman will be well aware of how favourable spending figures are in Scotland when compared with those in England. Again, it is hardly a system being bled dry. There is more and better equipment in schools, despite what the hon. Member for Cathcart said.

The growth in information technology equipment has been especially impressive. The number of computers in primary schools has tripled over the past seven years and has quadrupled in Scotland's secondary schools. In real terms, more has been spent on books and capital maintenance. Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools commented positively on resources available in schools for learning in his report entitled "Standards and Quality", which was published last year.

I am not making a casual observation but producing hard evidence that has been gathered during many school inspections throughout Scotland. Local authorities have more resources available to them next year, and our investment is huge and growing.

Last Friday, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and I, together with my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, launched a White Paper on education entitled "Education—Raising the Standard". The title of the document was chosen carefully. The paper sets out clearly where our priorities have been and where they must remain. It sets out also the true measures of our achievement since 1979, and the achievements of the education system in Scotland.

Opposition Members have said that they are concerned with standards and quality. They will find in the White Paper evidence of just how far we have come and where we intend to go. "Education—Raising the Standard" reflects rising achievement. Examination results have improved. As my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) said, 35 per cent. of school leavers gained five or more ordinary grades in 1980, and in 1995 more than 50 per cent. of pupils were awarded five or more standard grades. The percentage of pupils who left school with three or more highers increased from 18 per cent. in 1980 to 29 per cent. in 1995. In 1995, 8 per cent. of school leavers left with no Scottish certificate of education qualification; in 1980, the figure was 31 per cent.

Mr. Maxton: I understand that the Minister is talking about the Scottish system, but the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment made similar points about the English system, and the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) spent the whole of his time talking about declining standards in schools. Will the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland perhaps explain that dichotomy?

Mr. Robertson: I think that the hon. Gentleman knows that we are talking about different time scales. My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) was talking about a time scale of 30 years. I have been going over the past 18 years, which coincidentally coincides exactly with the Government's period in office.

Between 1979–80 and 1995–96, the number of pupils in nursery schools increased by 55 per cent. Many more young people stay on in full-time education post-16—82 per cent. in 1994 compared with 60 per cent. in 1980. In higher education, between 1980 and 1993, the total number of students increased by 64 per cent. and we have one of the highest participation rates in higher education anywhere in Europe.

Choice has increased. Eleven thousand children have benefited from assisted places, and nearly 27,000 placing requests were granted last year. We are modernising all stages of the school curriculum through the five-to-14 programme standard grade and the higher still development programme.

We have focused on quality and the need for schools to take responsibility for improving their performance. That has been recognised internationally. We ask schools to look carefully at themselves, to ask, "How good is our school?" and to set out the way in which they will improve.

Devolved school management has put decisions on the use of resources where it should be—at school level and not at town hall by bureaucrats. People who run the school on a day-to-day basis know what its needs are and they should be allowed to decide its spending priorities. As a result, resources are being used more effectively. They can be targeted to where they will deliver most for an individual school's performance.

Self-governing schools have even more ability to make the best of their resources. Our White Paper gives the example of Dornoch academy, Scotland's first self-governing school, which managed to save £10,000 on

its heating bill, which it could then spend on classroom equipment. We shall make further progress on those initiatives to put control into the hands of the people who know best how to use the resources.

We have opened up the education system to give parents much more information about schools and their performance. We have introduced a better and more open school inspection system. We have given parents the opportunity to participate through school boards or by seeking self-governing status.

I shall deal with some of the more far-reaching of our proposals, but let me first address some of the particular points that have arisen. Quality is central and I have illustrated our approach in Scotland through our quality initiative and the drive to self-evaluation and improvement, but we can go further. Her Majesty's inspectorate are closely engaged with schools to assist them, to identify good practice and to ensure that it is shared.

We propose to increase the focus on quality through a new excellent schools award. Schools that perform well should be recognised as such and all aspects of performance will be relevant. What will be of most importance is the drive to improve and the planning and monitoring for improvement. We are not frightened to look for excellence or to reward it. Our programme of change has been guided by a radical vision of an education system in which schools, colleges, universities and teachers focus on quality and standards; a system where schools and colleges are responsive to the needs and wishes of the society and the individuals they serve.

The demands of international competitiveness mean that we must continue to raise achievement levels to ensure that our young people are able to take their rightful place in the world. The principles in the vision that I have outlined will remain valid and increasingly so. "Raising the Standard" shows how we can take that vision forward to continue the remarkable progress that has been made and to meet the major challenges that lie ahead.

In winding up, the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland made much of the level of resources that he thinks are required, but he has not said how he would spend the money or what his party's priorities would be. He conveniently forgets that the White Paper sets out proposals that carry additional money and that will contribute directly to the continued improvement in performance that we seek and require. They include extension of the nursery voucher scheme, bringing £30 million of new money year on year; a new £9 million programme on early intervention; a new £3 million programme on alternatives to exclusion; the doubling of the assisted places scheme; and making £25 million available for the improvement of school security to ensure that our pupils learn in as safe and secure an environment as possible.

That is hardly a system that is being bled dry or run down. As I have said, our highly successful pre-school voucher scheme will be extended to the whole of Scotland from August 1997. Parents will be looking forward to 27 February, the date when application forms will begin to be issued.

The pilots that are under way in four authorities show the success and popularity of the scheme. Ninety-seven per cent. of eligible parents applied for vouchers; 93 per cent. of parents with vouchers have been using them. Parents actually like having the ability to make the choice of what facility their child will attend.

Many new centres are coming into being. The number of local authority centres has multiplied, from 21 to 63. Eighty-seven private nurseries and playgroups have had their educational quality endorsed by HMI for the first time ever.

The pilots also prove that vouchers are a convenient way of arranging for pre-school education. I have had not one representation from parents or from providers in the pilots complaining about the mechanics of the voucher system. As I have said, 97 per cent. of parents have applied for vouchers, and 93 per cent. have used them.

Moreover, the issue and redemption of vouchers cost less than 1 per cent. of the cost of the entire scheme, so where is the elaborate bureaucracy that we keep hearing about? It is in imagination of Opposition Members. Vouchers are efficient and simple to use. The reality of the growth of provision that vouchers can offer is clear enough from the pilot areas. It is a growth right across the board, and the pilot authorities deserve credit for the part that they have played in encouraging it both in their own provision and elsewhere.

The best opportunities have been offered to parents. In an area of traditionally low provision, as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood, East Renfrewshire was able to claim even before the beginning of the first term that a place was available for every eligible child for the first time ever. The vouchers have had a startling effect in the other pilot areas, and from August they go nationwide.

I have dwelt on pre-school vouchers because they are such a major development in our education service, but many of the other proposals in the White Paper are equally innovative. The importance of teachers in securing higher levels of achievement is fully recognised. We have a high-quality teaching profession which we are committed to continuing and improving. We therefore made a number of proposals designed to improve their status.

We shall remove the statutory basis of the Scottish joint negotiating committee and design legislative proposals to establish a teachers' pay review body. Teachers are respected members of the community and undertake a highly professional job. They deserve to have their pay professionally determined in the same way as doctors, dentists and other professionals. A pay review body is the answer.

I have set out clearly the progress that our focus on standards has brought us in Scotland. I have shown how we have funded it over many years and how we propose to increase funding to develop certain initiatives. However, what has been missing from Opposition contributions to this debate has been any recognition of the generous extent to which Scottish local government is financed. Therefore, in closing, I must make the position clear.

We are used at this time of the year to all sorts of scaremongering from authorities and teachers' unions, and parents rightly get very concerned—but they are being misled. Let me set the record straight. Contrary to all the talk of cuts, the local government settlement in Scotland provides for an increase in expenditure next year. That

[Mr. Robertson]

increase is £132 million, before any account is taken of the scope for efficiency savings across the full range of council services.

The level of Government support for this expenditure has also been increased by over £60 million. For the second successive year we have, in determining the local government finance settlement, improved on the plans that we announced in the preceding year. Yet we continue to hear that councils are facing a budgetary crisis and are having to make massive cuts in education. I find that scaremongering irresponsible. Let me make it clear that no council in Scotland has a lower spending limit for next year than it has for the current year.

Parents must therefore ask authorities what their priorities are. We have made ours clear; progress is being made. We have set out our proposals for maintaining that progress. The Government's commitment to investment in early, primary and secondary education is clear and unequivocal. We are investing in quality, we are investing in people, and we are investing in equipment and buildings. We are raising opportunities, we are widening choice and we are improving levels of achievement. In every way, as the title of our White Paper puts it, we are "Raising the Standard". I therefore ask the House to reject the motion.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 31, Noes 300.

Division No. 71] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Paddy
Beith, A J
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Cunningham, Ms R *(Perth Kinross)*
Dafis, Cynog
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Harvey, Nick
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Dr L *(Bham Sally Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Llwyd, Elfyn
Maclennan, Robert
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
Randel, David
Salmond, Alex
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tyler, Paul
Welsh, Andrew
Wigley, Dafydd

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Don Foster and
Mr. James Wallace.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allen, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel G)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Galle, Phil
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howell, David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'he)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul

Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Scott, Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs Gillian
Shersby, Sir Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Roger Knapman.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 299, Noes 253.

Division No. 72] **[10.14 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel G)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Egger, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hat'fd)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howell, David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian

Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Scott, Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs Gillian
Shersby, Sir Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bex'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Roger Knapman.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashton, Joseph
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alex *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Colley, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John
Cunningham, Ms R *(Perth Kinross)*
Dalis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Davies, Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Ennis, Jeff
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Strat'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Robert *(N Down)*
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice

Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs B *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew (Blaenau Gwent)
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms R *(Dunfermline W)*
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and
Mrs. Diana Maddock.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the substantial extra investment which the Government has made, and continues to make, in early years, primary and secondary education, the reforms that the Government has introduced to allow that investment to be used to maximum effect and the improvement in standards in schools which has been the result.

POLICE (HEALTH AND SAFETY) BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Police (Health and Safety) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenditure attributable to the Act incurred by the Secretary of State, and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums so payable under any other Act.—*[Mr. Peter Ainsworth.]*

SEXUAL OFFENCES (PROTECTED MATERIAL) BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Sexual Offences (Protected Material) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other Act.—*[Mr. Peter Ainsworth.]*

Flood Prevention and Land Drainage (Scotland) Bill

Ordered,

That, during the proceedings on the Flood Prevention and Land Drainage (Scotland) Bill, the First Scottish Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it shall meet.—*[Mr. Peter Ainsworth.]*

Higher Education

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Peter Ainsworth.]*

10.30 pm

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): I have instigated this somewhat intimate debate—*[Interruption.]* It will be intimate in a moment. I have instigated the debate since it is one that would not occur naturally. That is because the condition of our universities is something that Parliament instinctively avoids. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I ask hon. Members to carry out their negotiations elsewhere.

Mr. Walden: Higher education faces severe problems—the students know it, the academics know it, the vice-chancellors know it, the media know it and Members of Parliament know it. But the subject cannot be openly debated in the House of Commons, because the solutions are as unpalatable to the public as they would be to their parliamentary representatives. The public are not anxious to hear the truth about higher education, and we in this House are in no hurry to tell it to them. In that sense at least, the cover-up over the state of our universities is fully democratic.

I have seen the recently published Government evidence to the Dearing review—published, I believe, only yesterday—and I see no mention there of what I consider to be the realities about funding. Yet whatever they say in public, I doubt whether either the Government or the Opposition believe that the present position on funding is sustainable. The Dearing review will be a handy means of procrastination and obfuscation during the election period—which is why, it can be assumed, it was welcomed by the Opposition.

I make no criticism of my hon. Friend the Minister of State for using the existence of the review to postpone, rather than to seek to answer, questions. In his position, I would no doubt do the same. But someone has to win the election—whether or not they come to regret it—so it is worth putting on record the position as one Back Bencher sees it. Should my hon. Friend the Minister chance to agree with any part of this speech, let me assure him that I fully understand why he will not feel able to say so.

Schools need more money. Universities need more money. It goes without saying that neither of them will become better at education merely by having it, and that cash is a necessary but by no means a sufficient condition of their prospering. Nothing I say this evening should be seen as distracting from that self-evident central truth. Nowhere can so much money be spent to so little effect as in education. Yet that assuming we know what we are about in the classroom or lecture hall, adequate funds are needed for reasons to obvious to spell out.

It can safely be assumed that the Dearing review will not be so irresponsible as to conclude that the Government of the day should give the universities the cash they ask for. In any case, that would be a waste of breath, since no Government would do so. Nor is there a case for any more state money. Seen internationally, our universities are far better funded than our schools.

If money is to be made available for education, it should go to the schools, and be made conditional on changes of educational practice and philosophy. Our universities would then benefit to the extent that they would not find themselves in the position of acting as remedial institutions, which they do now to a far greater extent than they are ready to acknowledge in public.

My preferred solution to the cash crisis in universities is for students to contribute to tuition fees, through a graduate tax of some description. I see no long-term alternative. When, as Minister with responsibility for higher education, I was asked whether loans for maintenance were the thin end of the wedge, I was wary of denying it, because that is exactly what it seemed to me that it would be.

The debate has moved on since then—outside Parliament, at least. The Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals has come up with imaginative and realistic proposals in its evidence to the Dearing review, which includes the words:

> "It may therefore be necessary for all students to make a contribution towards the cost of their tuition as well as their maintenance. This private payment would be in addition to funding council grants and tuition fees made to Universities under current funding arrangements."

Since I was a little rude about the vice-chancellors in a book that I published recently, I should like to take this opportunity to retract those criticisms, and to praise them for their contribution to the Dearing review.

Not so many years ago, I was spat at while selling the notion of loans for maintenance. Now, opposition to the principle of loans has dried up, along with the expectoration. It is encouraging that the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals was not mobbed or vilified for taking the logic of loans to its predestined conclusions.

When I spoke at a recent debate at the London School of Economics on the subject, the atmosphere was as civilised as the treatment of the issues was constructive. Nicholas Barr and Iain Crawford especially are to be congratulated on their work in this field, as is Professor John Ashworth, the former director, for daring to put the issue on the agenda.

I do not approach the problem in a spirit of market dogmatism. I have no metaphysical belief in the market—like democracy itself, it is simply the best way that anyone has thought up for getting things done—and am happy for Government to subsidise the arts, broadcasting and higher education to the extent that is sensible. But to promise to pay full tuition fees in perpetuity for a million or more students at the level necessary to maintain the traditional quality of our universities is not sensible, because, given other priorities, it cannot be done.

The consequence of spreading available funds increasingly thinly will be a dilution of standards in what was once, by international comparison, the best part of our educational system. We have done two things that, taken together, will prove a terrible blow to the quality of our higher education: we have tripled the number of students without providing the means, and we have expanded universities on the basis of inadequate schools.

Despite a more mature debate outside the House, student contributions to fees are still treated by many as immoral. By that yardstick, many of the best foreign universities operate on an unethical basis. The best moral

guide to the question is still that provided by Lord Robbins. When he rejected loans as undesirable in 1962, he made an important proviso. As higher education continued to expand, he said, and more women entered, the time would come when there would have to be an experiment with student loans. He gave three reasons: social equity, distributive justice, and the need to encourage a sense of financial discipline and self-reliance among the students.

Contrary to folklore, for that is all it is, there is no ethical difference between loans for maintenance and contributions to fees. Lord Robbins's wise arguments about equity apply to both. In his time, there were 200,000 students. Now there are over five times as many, of which nearly half are women. A fivefold expansion is surely enough to trigger what could be called the Robbins caveat on student finance in an era of expansion.

The same arguments that applied to loans apply to contributions to fees. Yes, higher education benefits society, but it also benefits the individual. Seen that way, the equitable solution is simple. Why not split the cost?

We are told that many people would be prepared to pay more taxes if that meant ensuring for themselves and their children a better quality of higher education. Such a position is presented as evidence of civic virtue; it is nothing of the kind. The minority would get more money for themselves from the public, the majority of whom do not, and will never, receive a university education.

For those who insist that people would be only too ready to pay more taxes, a graduate tax would be the ideal opportunity to do so. Not only would their itch to swell Treasury funds be assuaged, but they could be assured that the proceeds would go directly to higher education rather than, say, to nuclear submarines. For that reason, among others, the case for the tax knows no natural political frontiers.

At this point, the objection is made that a graduate tax would dissuade people from aspiring to higher education. The middle classes are notoriously resourceful in defending their interests, but that is one of the most cynical and least intelligent defences of the status quo that I have heard.

The idea that the overwhelmingly middle-class student body must continue to receive free tuition out of solidarity with its less fortunate brothers, many of whom do not make it to university at all, is cant of a high order. There is something a little indecent about students and parents from well-to-do families using the poor as a human shield against contributing to the true cost of their own privileged education.

The argument does not wash. The point of a graduate tax is that it would be payable only after a graduate had secured a job that was well enough rewarded to enable him or her to contribute, and the objection that the tax would put off the poor neglects the real source of inequality in access to higher education: poverty of aspirations and inadequate education at lower social levels. Children who are born in dismal places tend to go to dismal schools, with dismally low expectations of what they can achieve. People at that level of society are not privileged enough to get into a state about university fees.

It will nevertheless be maintained as a last line of defence that some people from modest backgrounds have an in-built fear of getting into debt. Such people exist, and one understands their fear, but the force of that argument depends on our readiness to base the entire financial structure of our universities on the irrational apprehensions of an unfortunate minority. We should not base policy on such fears; we should try to dispel them.

Student contributions to fees would have academic as well as material benefits, of a kind alluded to by Lord Robbins. At a time when there appears to be some uncertainty about what higher education is for—that, too, needs to be addressed by Dearing—a graduate tax would concentrate minds usefully.

I am sure that the Opposition would agree that the tax would give students a stakeholding in their institution and make them more demanding about the teaching and quality of their courses, and their intellectual content and utility. Few students will get indignant about a mediocre course of dubious use to themselves or the world if someone else is paying. Many more would wake up to their responsibilities if they were contributing to the cost.

I will not say that things cannot go on as they are. Things are going on as they are, and can go on as they are pretty well indefinitely. There is no reason why British higher education should not go on sliding gracefully downhill for many years to come, assuming that we are prepared to contemplate a mass, low-quality system of the kind that the French have found themselves historically saddled with.

Not all academics feel it politic to tell the truth about what is happening to standards, but there are distinguished exceptions. On his recent retirement from Manchester university, Sir John Mason said:

"The present system which allows any student with minimal qualifications to follow any course or mixture of courses without regard to intellectual or vocational quality, utility, social or economic need, and at the taxpayers' expense, is unsustainable . . . The decision to expand higher education before attending to the schools was like adding an extra storey to a house with crumbling foundations."

Baroness Warnock recently said openly what everyone knows to be true: that A-level standards are at risk, to the point where some of our universities could end up as little more than sixth-form colleges.

As a former Minister with responsibility for higher education, I must accept my mite of responsibility for some of what has gone wrong, but one should never forgo the luxury of being right after the event.

In fairness to myself, and, above all, to the late and sincerely lamented Lord Joseph, it was understood at the time that the question of student fees would one day have to be faced. He made a typically gallant and naturally foredoomed attempt to do it.

At that time, about a decade go, neither Parliament nor the country was ready to contemplate the truth. Everyone favoured expansion as a matter of conscience, and to ask who was going to pay for it was to sully their ideals with base materialism. Now that we have seen the results on our campuses of the peculiarly distasteful brand of high-toned evasion that afflicts much of our national debate on education, perhaps it is permissible to raise the question again.

10.44 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) on bringing this important debate to the

[Mr. Eric Forth]

House, and on the way in which, through his writings and speeches, he has persistently sought to focus attention on the issue. He has made an important contribution to generating debate on the difficult issues involved in the funding of higher education.

My hon. Friend will not be surprised that I cannot agree with all that he says about the state of higher education. In many ways, we can be justifiably proud of our higher education system and its achievements over the past 17 years. Hon. Members know the figures, because they are often quoted, so I shall be brief. The number of students has doubled since 1979; some one in three of our young people enjoy the privilege of higher education, compared with one in eight all that time ago; our spending plans allow for that record level of participation to be maintained.

Nor can I agree with what my hon. Friend said, or perhaps hinted, about the possible adverse impact of expansion on standards. I believe that it can be shown that expansion has been achieved without evidence of a loss of quality. For example, on entry standards, the average A-level points score for students entering with GCSE A-levels has remained the same for the past six years, at 18 points.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England's quality assessments confirm that quality is being maintained. Universities and colleges have continued to offer a high-quality service, while achieving significant reductions in unit costs. New patterns of teaching, new methods of organisation and increased use of technologies offer scope for further productivity improvements. Those are achievements for which our universities, colleges and students deserve great credit.

The UK has the highest graduation rate for bachelor degrees in the European Union. That reflects lower wastage, and greater efficiency in our higher education system. The skills audit commissioned in the second competitiveness White Paper confirmed the UK's strong international position on higher education qualifications.

I do not say that we can be complacent—the skills audit also showed that our competitors are not standing still—but it is worth noting that the number of newly qualified graduates gaining first degrees each year has doubled since 1979. More than one third of those are the science, mathematics and engineering graduates who are so vital to our international competitiveness. The UK is near the top of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development league for science and engineering graduates entering the young work force, ahead of Germany and the United States.

My hon. Friend has talked about expanding universities on the basis of inadequate schools. I contend that standards in our schools are improving all the time, with more young people than ever getting good school-leaving qualifications: 1996 saw the best ever GCSE and A-level results. We are determined that GCSE standards should be maintained, and have introduced a wide range of measures to secure rigour and standards.

Sir Ron Dearing's 16-to-19 report mapped out an agenda of action to strengthen the rigour and standards of A-levels still further from 1998. We have placed the quality of teaching and learning and the standards of qualifications at the very centre of our education polices. We accept that it is paramount that quality in higher education is maintained, and that standards remain of the highest.

My hon Friend expressed concern about the prospect of what he has called a "mass, low-quality system" of higher education, and has written:

"degrees rain down like confetti in a mass, underfunded system of suspect quality".

I am sure that he would not expect me to agree.

My hon. Friend will recognise that universities are responsible for maintaining degree standards. The available evidence suggests that they take that responsibility seriously. Last year, with our encouragement, the Higher Education Quality Council embarked on a series of studies on academic standards known as the graduate standards programme. The HEQC has published a number of reports of specific studies within this programme during 1996, and will be publishing an overall report on the programme next spring. We have also been working with the CVCP and the HEFCE towards a single quality assurance agency.

I turn now to funding. My hon. Friend says that schools and universities need more money. Let me remind him that, notwithstanding the generally tight controls over public spending, the 1996 Budget allows for an increase in planned spending on schools, colleges and universities in 1997–98 of £875 million compared with 1996–97. That includes an extra £100 million in each of the next two years for higher education.

Total public spending on higher education in the United Kingdom, including student support, is now more than £7 billion. Total support for students through grant and loan increased by 2.5 per cent. for the year 1997–98, in line with forecast inflation, following rises of 2.6 per cent. and 2.5 per cent. in the previous two years.

But my hon. Friend is right to identify funding as a key issue for the future. Total public spending on higher education—more than £7 billion—represents 20 per cent. of total education spending, which is a substantial share of available resources. As my hon. Friend said, there is a limit to what the taxpayer can be asked to afford.

The future funding of higher education is, of course, one of the issues currently being considered by the national committee of inquiry into higher education led by Sir Ron Dearing, which is due to report this summer. The committee is considering questions such as: what are the purposes of higher education, and how have they changed? We have encouraged the committee to consider how higher education's links with the wider community, and in particular its role in lifetime learning, can be enhanced.

How should the appropriate participation rate in higher education be decided? Do standards acquired by graduates meet the requirements of the modern world? Crucially—this was the key question raised by my hon. Friend—who should pay for education, and how? I shall say more about the committee's work later.

The Dearing inquiry will be looking at a range of proposals for meeting the future cost of higher education, including my hon. Friend's proposal that the cost of tuition should be met by students themselves through a graduate tax. I am aware that there are many proposals on the table—including the CVCP's, to which my hon. Friend referred. It would be wrong for me to try to

pre-empt the inquiry's recommendations. At this stage, nothing is ruled out, nothing is ruled in. But I should like to offer a few comments on my hon. Friend's thoughts, by way of points that should be borne in mind.

My hon. Friend said that the concept of student loans has been widely accepted. The Government's policy is to seek to spread the cost of student maintenance more equitably among the taxpayer, parents and graduates themselves.

The student support package has more than held its value since 1990, when loans were introduced. Grant and full-year loan together are 59 per cent. higher in cash terms, and about 16 per cent. higher in real terms in 1997–98 than they were in 1989–90. The arrangements remain generous on any international comparison. But I also contend that there is no evidence that the introduction of student loans has had a deterrent effect on participation. The introduction of loans has, if anything, improved the position of students, by reducing their reliance on assessed parental contributions and replacing those with a guaranteed loan facility.

Whether or not charging for tuition would have any deterrent effect on participation requires further examination. Student income and expenditure surveys show that the majority of students now in higher education now come from social classes C1, C2, D and E, in contrast to the position in 1988, when students from those groups were in the minority. It is important to consider the likely impact on such entrants of any move towards charging students the cost of their tuition and collecting it through a graduate tax.

We need to be clear about the difference between a graduate tax and a system under which student loans are collected through the tax or national insurance system. Under a graduate tax, graduates would pay additional tax throughout their working lives, regardless of the cost of their education. The complexity of administering a graduate tax and the resultant cost would be significant for employers as well as for the Government. Without careful structuring, it is possible that such a tax regime could act as a disincentive to participation in higher education.

The option of collecting loans via the tax or national insurance system was looked at in some depth when the current loans scheme was being set up. The Government concluded that the current system of payments by direct debit to the Student Loans Company was superior.

Current repayment terms are income contingent: those earning less than 85 per cent. of national average earnings pay nothing. We must expect the Dearing inquiry to consider the implications of this and many other proposals for meeting the costs of tuition in future, and to make recommendations.

In the short term, the Government do not believe that top-up fees are either necessary or desirable, particularly in the light of the additional funding I mentioned. I am glad that the CVCP has encouraged its institutions to defer any decisions about charging top-up fees until after Dearing has reported.

I said that I would return to the Dearing inquiry. Much has changed in the 30 years since the Robbins committee completed the first major review of higher education, and we can no longer rest on the old assumptions. It is recognised that we now need to consider afresh the purpose of higher education, what its objectives are, and how it should best develop to meet those needs.

Those fundamental questions prompted us to start a public debate. We wanted a broad national perspective, so we consulted widely on the purposes, size and shape of higher education for the year 2000 and beyond. We sought the views of the higher education community, its students and those in industry and elsewhere who employ graduates and use the findings of university research.

Responses to the review showed a shift in emphasis towards the role of higher education in providing skills for employment, and exposed the full scale of the choices facing higher education. That is why, early last year, the Government set up the Dearing inquiry. We have asked the committee to make recommendations on how higher education should develop to meet the needs of the United Kingdom over the next 20 years.

I know that many people see future funding as the principal issue for the inquiry to deal with, but it will be important for the committee to consider how the shape, structure and size of higher education should develop before looking at funding options. Indeed, a proper consideration of funding issues can only be predicated on a full and prior analysis of the purpose of higher education, of what proportion of young people should receive initial higher education, of how long it should last and what form it should take, and of how the needs of mature people and of employers should be addressed.

Our economic success will increasingly depend on improving our knowledge, understanding and skills. Higher education has a vital role to play in raising the levels of the nation's skills and competitiveness, thus enhancing our capacity to generate wealth and to improve our quality of life. That is why issues of the future size, structure and funding of higher education are so important, and why I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising them tonight.

I doubt that I have entirely satisfied the purpose of the debate. I hope that the content and spirit of what I have said show my hon. Friend that his questions have in no way been ignored or dodged. We are taking a structured approach. We have entrusted Sir Ron Dearing and his colleagues with the enormous responsibility of responding to the questions that we have posed them. In that way, we can take the issue forward and approach the questions raised by my hon. Friend, albeit at a slower pace that he may wish.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 6 February 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Cattle Cull

1. **Sir Mark Lennox–Boyd:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the implementation of the selective cull scheme in the north–west. [13102]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Tony Baldry): A scheme booklet will be available shortly and will be distributed to beef and dairy farmers, setting out the arrangements for the selective cull throughout Great Britain.

Sir Mark Lennox–Boyd: It seems probable that farmers in the north-west will have to import cattle to replace those taken out by the selective cull. Bearing in mind the fact that bovine spongiform encephalopathy exists in other countries, can my hon. Friend assure the House about the health status of any cattle that may be imported?

Mr. Baldry: It is likely that a large proportion of the replacement animals will be bred in the United Kingdom. There is already evidence of farmers rearing more animals to replace culled stock. Trade in live animals between member states and the importation of live animals from third countries are subject to detailed animal health rules, most of which are harmonised within the European Community. The rules lay down precise conditions for trade, including a requirement that consignments are accompanied by health certification, signed by an official veterinarian in the exporting country.

Mr. Olner: How many of the carcases have been disposed of during the selective cull? I am led to believe that the number is very small. Perhaps the Minister could inform the House on the matter.

Mr. Baldry: I think that the hon. Gentleman is confusing two schemes. The selective, accelerated cull has only just started—the tracing has just begun. As soon as the animals are taken, they will be slaughtered and incinerated. The hon. Gentleman is confusing that with the over-30-months scheme, under which, to get rid of the backlog of 1.3 million cattle, it was necessary to store some carcases to maximise rendering capacity.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: May I support the gist of the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Sir M. Lennox–Boyd)? There have been problems with the veterinary inspection and certification of imported cattle. As we shall have to import more cattle, there are serious concerns to be addressed about the standards of veterinary inspection and certification in some European member states, although everyone in the House will have full confidence in the veterinary profession in this country.

Mr. Baldry: The veterinary rules are harmonised throughout the Community. If we come across any examples of other member states not being up to standard, it is important that we deal with them. The House recognises that we have to get on with the selective cull to fulfil the Florence agreement. That means that farmers must have replacement animals. I hope that the majority can come from the United Kingdom herd.

Sea Defences

3. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research his Ministry has (a) commissioned and (b) evaluated into different methods of sea defence. [13105]

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Mr. Tim Boswell): The Ministry invests more than £1.5 million annually on strategic research aimed at ensuring a better understanding of coastal processes and stimulating the use of new techniques in the design of flood and coastal defences. We also issue guidance to operating authorities.

Mr. Whittingdale: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. May I also thank him for taking the trouble to come to my constituency to see the experiment in managed setback that is taking place at Tollesbury? He will be aware from his visit that there is concern in the farming community about the possible adoption of managed setback as a widespread method of sea defence. Will he assure me that no decision will be taken until there has been a full and proper evaluation of the costs and benefits of such a policy?

Mr. Boswell: I very much enjoyed visiting my hon. Friend's constituency and looking at the fascinating managed setback experiment at Tollesbury creek. However, as my hon. Friend says, it is an experiment. It is part of our effort to inform ourselves on the various options available which will be considered as part of the Essex shoreline management plan. As a native of that county, I am conscious of the fact that, with 250 miles of sea walls, it will not be the automatic expectation or recourse to retreat and avoid our responsibilities. We shall consider the appropriate solutions, having regard to various criteria and informed by research. There is no hidden agenda.

Mr. Dalyell: The Minister referred to best design. Is not the best design of coastal defence actually the sand dune? What is being done to protect sand dunes, especially from those who want sand for commercial purposes?

Mr. Boswell: The hon. Gentleman is on to a good point in respect of particular parts of our coastline. I have seen some fascinating activity designed to build up sand dunes

and reinforce natural defences. We all now know much more about various options that allow the nap to work with the grain of nature rather than fight against it. Clearly, sand dunes represent an important opportunity in Tollesbury, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale) referred, where there is the possibility of recreating a salt marsh as part of the natural defences.

Genetically Modified Food

4. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what further action he intends to take to enable consumers to make a choice over whether or not to consume genetically modified soya and maize. [13106]

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mrs. Angela Browning): We intend to continue to encourage food manufacturers and retailers to provide information for consumers about the use of these products.

Mr. Pickthall: No doubt the Minister is well briefed on public anxieties about genetically modified ingredients in food. Does she agree that consumers should be free to choose non-genetically modified food and that their freedom depends on accurate labelling? Will she join United Kingdom producers and retailers in campaigning to get Monsanto, the American firm, to segregate genetically modified food from non-genetically modified food to allow for such labelling? Will she urge the Commission to reinstate its ban on unprocessed genetically modified maize?

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Gentleman touches on exactly the point in the production chain where segregation is needed—right at the beginning. Under legislation, it is not possible for me to ban a product; but, as he rightly pointed out, it is possible for the people who are sourcing the product to stipulate quite accurately whether or not they will buy genetically modified foods. I had a series of meetings with the industry on 7 January to discuss exactly this point. Some companies, such as Iceland and Tesco, have publicly said that they are making that a requirement. The hon. Gentleman will know that three committees of the Commission examined the issue which he raised. They decided not to change their mind about it and we are bound by Commission rules in terms of what we can and cannot ban in this country.

Sir Donald Thompson: Arising directly out of the question asked by the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall), clearly the new food safety council will need to be carefully harmonised with the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee and other advisory councils, otherwise there will be duplication and a muddle, which would be unusual for the Ministry.

Mrs. Browning: The chief food safety adviser will have an overview of all the committees. In respect of the matter that we are discussing, the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes chaired by Professor Burke has been in place for many years to scrutinise and examine applications for genetically modified foods. We believe that strict scrutiny is necessary—something that is not available in other countries such as the United States—and we are pleased that the European Union has now adopted the British system whereby an advisory committee makes recommendations to Government. The point that my hon. Friend raised means that, when a chief food safety officer is appointed, he or she will also have the opportunity to comment on the advice that the Government receive and how they put it into policy.

Mr. Tyler: The Minister may have seen early-day motion 280, which I tabled more than two months ago and which gained all-party support from Members. Does she accept the view of the Consumers Association published in today's *Which?*, which suggests that she and her colleagues throughout Europe may be simply too late to be able to guarantee segregation of genetically modified ingredients in our foodstuffs? Is it not a classic case of the horse charging around the countryside, having long since bolted, while we are trying only now to shut the stable door?

Mrs. Browning: I wish the hon. Gentleman would do his homework a little more carefully. We have just agreed, in December, with the European Commission—a body of which the hon. Gentleman and his party are very much in favour—that we should have Europewide regulation in this matter. It has been the United Kingdom Government who have been pressing—

Mr. Skinner: In the lead.

Mrs. Browning: I could not have put it better myself. I notice that today's Consumers Association report does not question in any way the safety of the product. It raises the point about labelling—

Mr. Tyler: And segregation.

Mrs. Browning: And segregation. As a Minister I cannot insist on segregation; if I were to insist that only segregated crops came into this country, I would be in contravention, first, of European Union rules and, secondly, of World Trade Organisation rules. It is a matter of the industry, of which we are very supportive, sourcing its product by making it very clear what it will and will not buy.

Dr. Strang: Following on from the Minister's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall), will she make it clear that the Government accept the principle that consumers should be able to choose whether they eat genetically modified foods? That means that there has to be proper labelling and segregation at the point of production. Is it not of concern that genetically modified maize incorporates a gene that confers a resistance to the antibiotic Ampicillin and that there is a danger that such resistance will be transferred to humans? Having failed to block the entry of that maize at European level, what are the Government doing about it?

Mrs. Browning: The Advisory Committee on Novel Food and Processes, which looked at genetically modified maize, gave the product its approval, but added a caveat. The caveat was not sufficient for it not to allow the approval to come forward as a recommendation to Ministers. The committee stipulated, however, that work

was needed in respect of unprocessed modified maize that could go into animal feed. We accepted that and took that case to Europe. Three committees of the European Commission looked at the advice of Professor Burke's committee that was given to us, and rejected the case.

I have just given the hon. Gentleman an account of why it is not in legal terms possible for Ministers to block entry into this country. However, there is an opportunity for the industry, which we are supporting, to make it very clear what it will and will not buy. For our part, I can tell him that we will take forward work and research and look at the effects—

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Too late.

Mrs. Browning: It is all very well the hon. Gentleman shouting out, "Too late." We have an extremely good and well-qualified advisory committee, whose advice the Government take. If European committees do not accept that advice, we are subject to qualified majority voting. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman understands how that works. Unfortunately, the European committees did not accept our committee's advice.

Animal Welfare

5. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the progress in the intergovernmental conference on raising the standards of animal welfare across the European Union. [13107]

Mrs. Browning: Discussions continue on our proposal for a protocol on animal welfare, which will place a legally binding obligation on Community institutions. I am pleased to report an encouraging response.

Mr. Brown: I am glad to hear that answer. Does my hon. Friend agree that there is much opposition in this country to the export of any live animals? In recognising that that trade is, however, likely to continue, will she assure us that the progress being made in the intergovernmental conference will result in other European countries applying the same high standards on the issue as we have?

Mrs. Browning: That is our exact objective. It would place a legal obligation on the Community to take account of welfare requirements. I believe that we have a very good record in this country on the transportation of animals, which my hon. Friend particularly mentioned. We would like such standards to be applied and enforced throughout the Community.

Mr. Sheerman: When will the Government stop wringing their hands and give consumers a choice? In terms of animal welfare, what consumers want is to be able to walk into a shop or supermarket and buy a product made from an animal that they know has been treated humanely over its lifetime. Whether we are talking about animals or genetically modified food, the Government do not seem to understand that consumers want a good clear choice.

Mrs. Browning: Under new Labour, people probably do not do their own shopping any more—I suspect that they send out for the groceries in Islington now—so I must tell the hon. Gentleman that, if one goes into a supermarket, as most of us do every week, one finds that there is a choice. I am sorry that he has not heard of Freedom Foods, for example, which offers a range of foods and is supported by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. *[Interruption.]* First the hon. Gentleman asks for something, then he denigrates those who are trying to provide it. He has demonstrated clearly that he is just making a bit of noise, and does not know what goes on in supermarkets. There is choice, and it is up to the consumer to decide whether to support those schemes, which sometimes add a few more pennies to the price of the product.

Mr. Nicholls: Does my hon. Friend agree that many advances in the treatment of animals—those in relation to veal crates and transport conditions, for example—have been achieved in the teeth of European opposition? Does she also agree that, if we had not been content to be isolated in Europe, we would not have achieved those advances, whereas the Leader of the Opposition is not prepared to be isolated in Europe?

Mrs. Browning: Absolutely. My hon. Friend speaks with the experience of representing a farming community, and he will be aware how important it is to farmers that farm animal welfare and animal transport be considered at a European level. It is not simply a question of what goes on here; we can do things on our own, as we have with veal crates, sow stalls and tethers, but that does not offer much comfort about what goes on over the channel. The Government have pressed for, and achieved, much better standards of animal welfare at the European level.

Mr. Tony Banks: Before the Minister starts patting herself and her colleagues on the head, will she tell me why we are exporting eight and 10-week-old piglets to Spain and France, especially when we know how intelligent those creatures are? What is happening about leghold traps? What progress is being made? I understand that Commissioner Brittan is ensuring that the ban on such traps will not be introduced. What is he doing for animal welfare in the European Union?

Mrs. Browning: I have received correspondence about consignments of piglets. The hon. Gentleman will know that, if people bring to our attention individual cases in which they believe the law has not been applied, I shall investigate them. I looked into the cases concerned, and I am satisfied that the animal welfare conditions were observed.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Will my hon. Friend make a vigorous protest to the Government of Greece about the fact that, during the recent lorry drivers' strike, horses were kept in horse boxes or lorries without food or water for eight days and then transported 1,500 miles to slaughter? Is it not time the Government of Greece and many other European Governments learned a bit about animal welfare?

Mrs. Browning: Indeed, but when we want to influence countries whose cultural background means that they take a very different view of such matters, it is no good simply castigating them. The Government have

spent many hours talking and negotiating with other countries and we have, for example, secured a Europewide agreement on animal transport, which is about to be applied. That will cover Greece, and I assure the House that, once the laws are in place, we shall expect the Commission to apply them, whether in Greece or anywhere else.

Mr. Morley: It is true that most people in this country do not support the live export of animals for slaughter; so it was surprising to hear the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at the National Farmers Union annual general meeting defending that practice. Does he not believe that most British farmers want their animals to be slaughtered in British slaughterhouses as near as possible to the point of production, so that value is added to British meat exports, rather than to be exported live for slaughter? The Minister also criticised the Labour party for receiving a substantial donation from the International Fund for Animal Welfare—a donation that we, unlike the Conservative party, made public. As the Conservatives have also accepted a substantial donation from the same organisation, will that donation now be repaid?

Mrs. Browning: On the last point, discussions are in hand. On the wider point, it is in everyone's interest to add as much value as possible to exports on this side of the channel. However, that is very different from the position of some Labour Members who have campaigned for the total banning of live animal exports and who signed an early-day motion on the matter some years ago. The hon. Gentleman will know that we export breeding pigs and, at one time, we exported nearly 400,000 calves—a trade that Opposition Members wanted to ban. These animals are now slaughtered when they are less than 20 days old. We will always need provisions for some live animal exports, and our objective is to make sure that conditions for those exports are good and are enforced—particularly on journeys on the other side of the channel.

Mr. Luff: Is my hon. Friend aware that all the farmers whom I meet in Worcestershire are rightly proud of the high standards of animal welfare that they maintain on their farms? Would not Opposition Members and animal welfare groups be better employed supporting the British Government in their efforts to ensure that the same standards of animal welfare are maintained on the other side of the channel?

Mrs. Browning: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. If a person breaks the law either on farm or in transport, he or she must be brought to book. I always welcome people bringing information on any individual to me so that cases can be properly investigated. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that farmers in this country have been the best custodians of farm animal welfare. We have a good message to send, and it is one that we shall try to enforce throughout the Community.

Beef Exports

6. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met his European counterparts to discuss the lifting of the ban on United Kingdom beef exports. [13109]

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Douglas Hogg): I met the Agriculture Commissioner on 28 January to discuss our proposals for a certified herds scheme. We will submit those proposals in writing in the next few weeks and will press the Commission for an urgent decision.

Mr. Barnes: Is not the beef ban still 100 per cent. in place? Following the Florence agreement, did not the Prime Minister come here and say that the ban would be lifted by November? The Minister has mentioned that he has not yet submitted the proposals on certified herds, despite the fact that that matter has been raised and discussed in the House on numerous occasions. The Government jump about from place to place—so much that one would think that the agreement was not from Florence but from Zebedee.

Mr. Hogg: We have now implemented all five of the Florence agreement preconditions, and we are now looking to the European states to honour their part of the bargain.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: When my right hon. and learned Friend meets his counterparts in Europe, will he give them the latest figures on BSE? Can he confirm that, last year, there was a further and dramatic decline in the number of reported cases?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is quite right. I am glad to say that the numbers of confirmed cases of BSE in the United Kingdom are falling year on year by about 40 per cent., and we hope to see the effective end of the disease in the United Kingdom national herd by around 2001. The latest figures I have—which may be of interest to the House—are as follows: in 1994, there were 23,944 confirmed cases; in 1995, that had fallen to 14,076; in 1996, the number of confirmed cases as presently assessed was 7,202. More pathological tests are to be completed, but that shows the trend.

Mr. William Ross: Even after the cull is completed, the EC will still have to satisfy itself that any region of the United Kingdom is free from BSE. Will the Minister therefore press ahead with all speed to ensure that, as each region of the UK is certified as free from BSE, the EC will investigate and confirm that that is so? Will he also urge his noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to do what she can to sort out the problem of the suckler herd holdings?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman has always been concerned about the flagged herds. I understand that, and I know that my noble Friend the Under-Secretary shares that concern.

We are indeed anxious to proceed with the slaughter as rapidly as possible. I anticipate that in Great Britain the slaughter will start before the end of the month, and we have already begun the process of tracing. I hope that we will complete the tracing and most of the slaughter within six months or so, and we are certainly anxious to involve the Commission by way of inspections and reports.

Mr. John Greenway: Will my right hon. and learned Friend concede that the ban was wrong and unjustified in the first place; that the Government's actions since it was

imposed in March last year have meant that beef in this country is of the highest quality and free from any risk; and that, if only the rest of the European Union would take the same measures on specified bovine offals and meat and bonemeal, the same would be true there?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is entirely right. I share his view that British beef is the best and the safest in Europe. It is important that the European Union should agree to a proper offal regime in its abattoirs, as we have in ours. I regret the fact that the Agriculture Council decided not to accept those proposals from the Commission. It would be enormously helpful if the European Union would copy our measures in mainland Europe, so that the prohibition on the use of meat and bonemeal in food rations was extended to all farm animals.

Dr. Strang: Is it the case that the Minister did not find time yesterday to apologise to the annual general meeting of the National Farmers Union for the fact that the Government have delayed the lifting of the beef ban by a whole six months by shelving the Florence agreement? Is it also the case that he did find time to insult his audience with a pack of nonsense about the Labour party?

As my hon. Friend the Member for North–East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) reminded us, the Prime Minister said in July that the beef ban would be lifted in November. Will the Minister tell the House when he now expects the ban to be lifted?

Mr. Hogg: I had a very interesting discussion with the National Farmers Union yesterday, in which I made a number of points, one of which was that, in respect of BSE-related expenditure, we had committed £3.3 billion, the equivalent of 2p on income tax. I asked whether those attending supposed that the Labour party would have done that; it was clear that they did not. When I raised the matter of the near certainty of the Labour party removing relief for inheritance tax purposes from agricultural land, I noticed that they all agreed with that. On the selective cull, I did not have to remind them, because they know full well that until October they were opposed to it.

Mr. David Nicholson: Will my right hon. and learned Friend continue to remind our European counterparts that in this country we have slaughtered 1.3 million predominantly healthy cattle; that we propose under the Florence agreement to slaughter a further 100,000 or so predominantly healthy cattle; and that, as he has just reminded the House, this process is costing the British taxpayer—predominantly, with some help from Europe—more than £3 billion? As we have public debates in the country over the next few weeks, not only the farming community but the taxpayers will show their resentment at the continued discrimination against British beef by our European counterparts, and at their failure to put their own house in order.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend's points are correct in every respect.

Food Safety

7. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what bodies and committees his Ministry consults regularly on food safety policies; and how many of these represent scientific interests. [13110]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Ministry of Agriculture takes advice on food safety issues from a wide range of advisory committees, most of which are able to advise on scientific issues.

Mr. Hoyle: Does the Minister remember that, 12 months ago, the Prime Minister rubbished the Labour party proposal to set up a food standards agency, yet his Department recently announced the setting up of a food safety council? Is that not another U-turn by his discredited Government? Is it not an attempt to steal Labour's clothes? Can he assure us that the council will not be a tame tabby cat for food companies but will instead defend the rights of the consumer?

Mr. Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister rubbished Labour's proposals because they were rubbish, and they remain so, in so far as I understand them. The essential difference between our proposals and those that emanate from the Opposition is that, in so far as there is any substance in Labour's proposals, they combine the function of the implementing authority with that of the commentating supervisory authority. Such a body would commentate on that which it had done. We propose to separate those functions, so that Ministers are responsible for the implementation, setting and carrying through of policy, and for explaining it as and when necessary. The council and the adviser have a duty and ability to express in public their view on food safety, including the appropriateness of the policies of the Government of the day. That is by far the most effective way of reassuring the public.

Sir Irvine Patnick: I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on setting up the food safety committee. Will he now direct his attention to other food committees, and especially to the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee? What will he do about that?

Mr. Hogg: I thank my hon. Friend for his congratulations, which are always happily received. We want to find ways of yet further reinforcing the authority of the specialist advisory committees, and we shall do so in the context of the proposal for the food safety council. We are examining SEAC's terms of reference, and its structure, membership and operation, with special regard to the points that my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary and I made on March 20.

Mrs. Golding: When did the Minister first realise that the public had lost confidence in his ability to deal with food safety?

Mr. Hogg: I have recognised for some time—

Mrs. Golding: Too little, too late.

Mr. Hogg: I am answering the question. I have no reason to be less than candid with the House. I have

recognised for some time that the public—this has probably been true for many years—has been rather sceptical about what Ministers and officials say about food safety. I have addressed that problem robustly and vigorously by proposing to set up an independent adviser and an independent council. I look forward to support from the hon. Lady because I am meeting her anxieties.

Common Fisheries Policy

9. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has received about reforming the European fisheries policy. [13113]

Mr. Baldry: I have recently received a wide range of representations about reforming the European fisheries policy, including proposals from my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess).

Mr. Amess: Does my hon. Friend welcome the news that Emma Bonino, at a meeting with my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink), local Essex fishermen and me, agreed with our criticism of the common fisheries policy and said that it needed urgent reform? Will he also reflect on the recent meeting with local Essex fishermen and, in particular, on their point about regional management?

Mr. Baldry: Everyone agrees, including Emma Bonino, that the common fisheries policy needs reforming. I welcomed the opportunity of meeting Essex fishermen with my hon. Friend. I am considering the points that they put to me and if, as I suspect, I conclude that different arrangements need to be put in place on the temporary closure of the North sea sole fishery, I shall consult the industry. I am well aware of the problems facing non-sector fisherman in Essex and elsewhere, which is why we introduced, in 1995, underpinning or guaranteed minimum quota allocations for non-sector fisheries, including North sea sole and cod. For 1997, I have extended underpinning to a wider range of stocks important to non-sector fishermen, such as North sea plaice and whiting, because I want to ensure that the fishermen of Essex and elsewhere have a viable future.

Dr. Godman: One much-needed reform would be a complete ban on industrial fishing. Does the Minister agree that industrial fishing is deeply harmful, particularly to juvenile members of commercially valuable species? Does he also agree that our once-rich seas are being swept clean, and one of the major culprits is the industrial fishing vessel?

Mr. Baldry: It was for exactly those reasons that I pressed successfully in the Fisheries Council for measures to reduce herring mortality in industrial fisheries. Just as importantly, I pressed to include industrial fisheries in the first tranche of activities, subject to satellite monitoring, and insisted that industrial fisheries had a much higher position in the next round of decommissioning. It is crazy that the Commission's proposals for decommissioning did not adequately have regard to industrial fishing and its impact in the North sea and elsewhere.

Mr. Bellingham: Has the fisheries Minister heard recent reports of fishermen who have been out fishing in the Wash for sprat and have caught herring, which, under CFP rules, must be thrown back into the sea dead? Is that not yet another reason why the CFP needs root and branch reform?

Mr. Baldry: We always have difficulty with mixed fisheries such as we have around our coasts. The whole question of discards causes understandable offence and we must constantly try to find policies that minimise the need for discards.

Cattle Cull

10. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the storage of slaughtered cattle. [13114]

Mr. Baldry: To speed up clearance of the backlog of cattle that were awaiting slaughter under the over-30-months scheme, some 69,000 tonnes of cattle remains, excluding specified bovine material, were placed in cold storage pending the availability of rendering capacity. In addition, dry storage is being used for scheme material that has already been rendered pending its destruction.

Dr. Jones: Who is paying the £250,000 weekly cost of that storage? Less than 4 per cent. of the cattle have been disposed of properly by incineration. What is the Minister doing to reduce that cost, and to allay the anxiety that meat from those carcases—thousands of carcases kept in cold storage—could find its way into butchers' shops?

Mr. Baldry: It is helpful to remember that any cattle that exhibit clinical signs of BSE are disposed of immediately by direct incineration, and that specified bovine material is removed from all scheme cattle and sent direct for rendering, so no specified bovine material has been placed in cold storage. The use of cold storage was necessary to clear the backlog of OTMS cattle as quickly as possible and to maximise the use of a limited rendering capacity. Speed was of the essence to avoid potential animal welfare problems on farms as winter drew near, and to pave the way for a start to selective culling. The backlog is now cleared; no more material is being put into cold store, and clearly we shall get rid of the material in cold storage and get it rendered as speedily as is humanly possible.

The use of dry storage for rendered material was unavoidable pending a valuation of the best option for the destruction of that material. In deciding on the best option, full regard will obviously be given to protecting human health and the environment.

Mr. Garnier: Is there sufficient storage for, or the capacity to dispose of, any cattle slaughtered under the accelerated slaughter scheme?

Mr. Baldry: Yes. I do not see the accelerated slaughter scheme in any way making more difficult our disposal problems with the over-30-months scheme.

Food Safety

11. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received in the past six months from consumer groups on his policies on food safety; and if he will make a statement. [13115]

Mrs. Browning: We have had meetings and correspondence with a number of consumer groups on various food safety issues.

Mr. Heppell: Will the Minister confirm that, following the announcement of the intention to establish a food safety council, the majority of responses from consumer groups have said that the proposals are inadequate and do not go far enough? Will the Minister tell the House why those same consumer bodies were not consulted before the announcement instead of afterwards?

Mrs. Browning: My right hon. and learned Friend this afternoon gave the House a clear outline as to the independence of that food safety adviser and the council that he or she will chair. We believe that here at the Dispatch Box is the right place for Ministers to be accountable and to defend their policy—but if they get the policy wrong, or if the experts believe that they have not implemented it properly, they will be called to book and that will be done publicly. I am always interested to hear the views of consumer bodies, to which we speak on a regular basis, but that independence is key.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 February. [13132]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Dr. Jones: The Prime Minister will know, because I gave him advance notification of this question, that, last year, the Secretary of State for Health visited my constituency to open the new £7.5 million trauma and burns unit at Selly Oak hospital. People were relieved because they thought that, at last, the future of the hospital was secure, but now there is again talk of its closure. Does the Prime Minister agree that it would be barmy to close those brand-new facilities and those in the sister Queen Elizabeth hospital? Does he realise that local people do not trust his Government on health—especially when they know that the Secretary of State for Health does not rely on the NHS and takes out private health insurance?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving me notice, an hour or so ago, that she proposed to ask that question and I have made some inquiries in the interim. I understand that the health authority is examining how best to deliver patient services. That is part of a process that, as the hon. Lady will concede, is in the interests of the health service in her region and has already resulted in improved care, more in-patients, more out-patients and more day care.

On the specific point, I understand that the trust has taken no such decisions and that local media items have been misleading. If, at any stage in the future, substantial plans for change were to be made, they would at that stage have to be subject to full public consultation.

Mr. Deva: Does my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the inspired decision to give passports to 5,000 stateless south Asians in Hong Kong? Does he recognise that those families are major wealth creators in Hong Kong and that, as British passport holders, they will enable Britain to become not only the enterprise centre of Europe, but the enterprise centre of the whole world?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, I made it clear when I went to Hong Kong last year that I wanted the ethnic minorities to be assured about their future. I am aware of the widespread concern that there has been in both Houses, as well as in Hong Kong, about their nationality status. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has therefore decided that they can register as British citizens, with a right to abode here after 30 June. I have no doubt that the overwhelming majority—perhaps even all—will continue to reside in Hong Kong, where they will continue to have a right of abode, but they were potentially stateless and they now have a nationality.

Mr. Blair: Can the Prime Minister confirm that, since he became Prime Minister, he has doubled the national debt?

The Prime Minister: I can also confirm to the right hon. Gentleman that there is not a single economy in Europe that can match our performance. If the right hon. Gentleman wishes to see debt rise further, and to see the British economy fail rather than succeed, he should follow the policies of the social model to which he is committed in Europe, with the results that we have seen in Europe.

Mr. Blair: Perhaps for once we can get a straight answer to a straight question. We now pay out on interest payments on debt every year more than we spend on law and order and transport put together. Can the Prime Minister just answer that simple question? Can he confirm that, since he became Prime Minister—he is the only Prime Minister since the war of which this can be said—he has doubled the national debt? Yes or no?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman spent the whole of the recession encouraging us to spend money to assist people in need. *[Interruption.]* He invites us to do one thing one day and something quite different the other. He says different things abroad and at home. At least on this occasion he seems to be seeking to quote me, not President Clinton.

Mr. Blair: Perhaps I can quote the right hon. Gentleman again. Does he not recall saying that he would be the Prime Minister who would balance the budget? Does he not recognise—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."]

They complain about us. We have been trying to save the Government money over the past few weeks while he and his rag-bag of outgoing Ministers have been spraying around the post-dated cheques like there was no tomorrow. *[Interruption.]* Is that not true? Record borrowing, record tax increases and still they cannot run decent public services. Is that not typical of the Tories—unfair and incompetent in equal measure?

The Prime Minister: I suppose there was never a chance that the right hon. Gentleman was going to debate the real issues of today, on which the shadow Chancellor has landed him in such trouble. I will tell him about the—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I really am getting very weary of barracking from a sedentary position, particularly from Front-Bench Members.

Mr. Skinner: That puts me in the clear.

The Prime Minister: I can for once agree with the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner): he is not barracking from the Front Bench, and I doubt that he ever will be.

The comparisons I can safely offer the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) are comparisons between this country's performance on unemployment and that of every other country in Europe; this country's performance on the recovery and that of every other country in Europe; this country's performance on exports and that of other countries; and this country's performance on manufacturing exports and that of other countries. The right hon. Gentleman should acknowledge just for once the success of British industry, the British economy and the British nation, instead of trying to do it damage.

Mrs. Roe: Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the fact that Britain is attracting more investment from throughout the world than any other European country? Is it not the case, however, that the social chapter would destroy jobs and drive out investment? What advice will he give to business leaders who have been invited to shell out £7,500 to attend a fund-raising banquet hosted by the Leader of the Opposition?

The Prime Minister: Seven thousand, five hundred pounds for a meal with the Leader of the Opposition? The Leader of the Opposition seems deeply engaged in conversation. He is perhaps persuading the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) to cough up and come to the luncheon.

Mr. Ashdown: I was interested to hear the Prime Minister admit in his previous answer that the ethnic minorities in Hong Kong were potentially going to be left stateless, as he specifically denied that in answer to a question that I asked him along those lines three months ago. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Yes, he did.

On the issue of public service pay, is it not now perfectly clear that the Government are trying to take the pay for our nurses and teachers and turn it into yet another exercise in political point scoring for the general election? Are we expected seriously to believe that a Government who can find £1 billion to pay their own private consultants and advertisers cannot fund a modest pay rise for teachers that is perfectly affordable and a pay rise for nurses that has already been budgeted for?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman will have to wait a few minutes for the decisions on public sector pay, which will be fair to the public sector and fair to the taxpayer. If he says that that is entirely affordable, why is he promising to put up tax by a penny in the pound to pay for the teachers? Why is he planning to do that? The right hon. Gentleman does not know what the decisions are, does not understand the issues and yet again asks questions based on utter nonsense.

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd: Will my right hon. Friend spare a moment to compare the position of a manufacturer in my constituency with that of his German competitor, who happens to be a friend? The German manufacturer in Bavaria is required to give each employee, every year, 29 days holiday, and an additional 13 days holiday for the religious holidays, which is more than eight weeks holiday in the year. Furthermore, it is sometimes the habit for people to arm themselves with a medical certificate and spend three weeks at Baden Baden.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend points to the different costs of the social model in Europe and the impact that that has had on unemployment.

Mr. Mackinlay: The Germans are very successful.

The Prime Minister: There is an increase of half a million in German unemployment. I doubt whether those half a million Germans consider that very successful. Business costs across Europe are costing jobs. For every £100 spent on wages in Britain, there is an extra £15 for non-wage costs. In Germany that figure is £31, in France £41 and in Italy £44. The hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) may shake his head, but those are the facts of the matter. That is why business men across Europe—including, for example, the head of the German firm BASF—have said in the past few days:

"Britain is the best place in Europe to invest."

Q2. **Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 February. [13133]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Cummings: Will the Prime Minister join me in congratulating the doctors and nursing staff at St. Benedict's hospice in Sunderland on their pioneering integrated assessment of palliative care, which has been acclaimed internationally? While recognising the importance of the voluntary and charitable sectors in supporting hospices, what steps is he taking to ensure a national policy on hospice care?

The Prime Minister: I do not know the particular details of St. Benedict's. From what the hon. Gentleman says, its staff have clearly done an outstanding job. If that is true, I am happy to add my congratulations to them and to the hospice movement as a whole. I have had the opportunity of knowing personally of the remarkable work done by the hospice movement, which is truly astonishing. It has the Government's support and will continue to have it.

Mr. Sweeney: Will my right hon. Friend find time between now and 1 May to visit the Vale of Glamorgan—a particularly interesting constituency—in order to see for himself the benefits of low taxes, low inflation, the absence of the social chapter, and deregulation in attracting inward investment to south Wales?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend offers me an extremely enticing invitation, which I shall carefully consider. Were I to take the opportunity of visiting every part of the United Kingdom that had had substantial inward investment, it would probably take me until 1 May next year, because of the Government's remarkable success in encouraging inward investment, as a result of the policies that we have followed over recent years.

Q3. **Mr. Kevin Hughes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 February. [13134]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hughes: Will the Prime Minister try to answer the question that he failed to answer on Tuesday? Can he give a categorical assurance that the Wirral, South by-election will take place on 27 February—yes or no?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman knows that I have called the Wirral, South by-election, and whatever ingenious ways he tries to produce to entice me to tell him the date of the general election, he will have to wait. The election in Wirral is proceeding.

Q4. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 February. [13135]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the rise of nearly half a million in German unemployment in January is graphic proof that, as he said in Brussels this week, one signature on the European social chapter is half a million British signatures on the dole? Is not the British approach to competitiveness under the Government working, while the European social chapter, so advocated and loved by the Labour party, is not?

The Prime Minister: It is undeniable that the social model has contributed substantially to unemployment across Europe. The average level of unemployment in Europe is 3.5 per cent. above the rate here. My estimate of an extra half a million unemployed, were we to go down that route is, if anything, an under-estimate and not an over-estimate. A moment ago, I quoted the German head of BASF. I could of course have quoted the head of the Dutch business association who said:

"The British way is best."

He went on:

"There is absolutely no need for a Europe wide set of rules."

Business of the House

3.31 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): May I ask the Leader of the House for details of future business?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 10 FEBRUARY—Until about 7 o'clock, Second Reading of the Merchant Shipping and Maritime Security Bill *[Lords]*.

Second Reading of the Welsh Development Agency Bill.

TUESDAY 11 FEBRUARY—Second Reading of the National Health Service (Primary Care) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 12 FEBRUARY—Until 12.30 pm, debate on the first report from the Science and Technology Committee on the prior options reviews of public sector research establishments, followed by a debate on the second report from the Public Service Committee on ministerial accountability and responsibility. That will be followed by debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House. In the afternoon, there will be the Second Reading of the Police Bill *[Lords]*.

THURSDAY 13 FEBRUARY—Motion on the Companies Act 1985 (Directors' Report) (Statement of Payment Practice) Regulations.

Motion to amend schedule 1 to the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975.

FRIDAY 14 FEBRUARY—Private Members' Bills.

The House will also wish to know that on Wednesday 12 February, there will be debate on raw tobacco in European Standing Committee A and a debate on takeover bids in European Standing Committee B. As usual, details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

MONDAY 17 FEBRUARY—Motions on the Social Security Benefits Up-Rating Order, the Social Security (Contributions) (Re-Rating and National Insurance Fund Payments) Order, the Social Security (Contributions) Amendment Regulations, the Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order and the Social Security (Incapacity for Work) (General) Amendment Regulations.

I regret that, once again, I am unable to go beyond that for the business in that week, but the House will wish to know that it is proposed that on Wednesday 19 February there will be a debate on future noise policy in European Standing Committee A. Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

[*Wednesday 12 February:*

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Community document: 5217/97, Commission Report on Raw Tobacco. Relevant European Legislation Committee report: HC 36-xi (1996–97).

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community document: 5147/96, Takeover Bids. Relevant European Legislation Committee reports: HC 51-xxix (1995–96) and HC 51-xiv (1995–96).

Wednesday 19 February:

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Community document: 11419/96, Future Noise Policy. Relevant European Legislation Committee report: HC 36-xi (1996–97).]

Mrs. Taylor: I thank the Leader of the House. He announced that the Police Bill *[Lords]* is to be debated on Wednesday. Will he make sure that the Home Secretary makes it clear as soon as possible what he intends to do to resolve the problem that was created by the passage in another place of two important but contradictory amendments? I am sure that he agrees that hon. Members should have as much notice as possible of what is to happen on that matter.

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm when the important Firearms (Amendment) Bill will return to the House? He will be aware that, despite the support of the Opposition, the Government were defeated on several occasions in the House of Lords, mainly by the votes of hereditary peers. Therefore, the Bill is in an unsatisfactory state at present. Will the right hon. Gentleman reassure hon. Members that that very important legislation—there is much agreement about the need for change—will be passed as quickly as possible, and that those defeats will not be allowed to delay its passage?

Will the right hon. Gentleman find Government time for a debate on the current crisis in further education? Hon. Members on both sides of the House have received representations from colleges throughout the country because of the confusion and chaos created by the Government's decision—taken midway through the funding year—to shift the goalposts. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that an interim decision about future Government policy has been taken within the past 24 hours, although the House has not been told about its possible implications? There has clearly been a significant breach of faith with colleges and students. Neither can plan their future properly until the matter is resolved, and the House is entitled to know exactly what is happening.

Can the right hon. Gentleman shed any light on the Government's intentions in respect of London Underground? Why did the Secretary of State for Transport draft a statement—which I happen to have with me—announcing the privatisation of London Underground, only to back down? What is happening? Will the Leader of the House confirm whether there will be an Opposition day before the Wirral, South by-election—assuming that the House sits that long?

Mr. Newton: As to the Police Bill *[Lords]*, I am not in a position to make the Government's intentions clear in detail today. As the hon. Lady said, contradictory amendments were passed in another place, and I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will make clear his intentions in that respect as soon as he properly can. He shall certainly bear that in mind in looking ahead to the Second Reading of the Bill next week.

The hon. Lady will be aware that the Firearms (Amendment) Bill has not completed its passage in another place. Therefore, convention dictates that I do not comment too much about the matter until the Bill returns to this place. However, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has signified that he expects to invite the House to modify—I deliberately choose an understated word—some of the amendments passed in another place.

I note the hon. Lady's remarks about further education, and I recall some comments on that subject from Back Benchers last week. The Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), who is

responsible for further education, has written to all FE colleges to provide information about further funding. The Government have also undertaken to make further funding available in the next financial year. In so far as the hon. Lady is making representations about the way in which the matter was handled, I shall ensure that her comments are drawn to my hon. Friend's attention.

I make it clear that there is no question of our altering our position regarding London Underground. We shall make our intentions clear at the appropriate time. We shall not be bounced into making premature announcements by leaks to newspapers—or even to the hon. Lady. I am obviously aware of the Opposition's wish to have an Opposition day—I was able to provide more time this week for the minority parties—and I continue to bear in mind the hon. Lady's wish.

Sir Michael Spicer (South Worcestershire): As the Opposition seem bent on breaking up the United Kingdom, may we have Government time as soon as possible to debate the future of the British constitution, and could the debate be led by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will be aware that, in recent weeks, suggestions for such a debate have been made on a number of occasions, and I have said that I shall consider them as sympathetically as possible. However, he will also have heard the business that I have announced for the week ahead, and he will be aware that there is a great deal of very important legislation on which we need to make progress.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Will the Leader of the House make Government time available to debate the important issue of public sector pay—on which we are expecting to hear an announcement in a few minutes—particularly because of the strongly heralded view that an increase is likely to be staged, despite the Government's own forecasts fully budgeting for a 3.3 per cent. increase for nurses? The difference between what has been budgeted and what has been recommended for teachers' pay is about £80 million, which is well within the amount that could be saved in central Government Departments.

Specifically, the Prime Minister, in his reply to my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), deliberately misrepresented the Liberal Democrats' position. We have said that we are opposed to a penny cut in income tax, so that all that money can go to reversing the damaging cuts imposed by the Government and to developing further education. The money for the teachers' pay award can come from central Government savings.

Mr. Newton: If there is any confusion about what the Liberal Democrats have said, I can suppose only that it is because of confusion about what the Liberal Democrats say about that and other matters. On his question on public sector pay, the hon. Gentleman will not expect me to comment in advance of the publication of the reports and the Government's recommendations.

Sir Anthony Grant (South-West Cambridgeshire): Will my right hon. Friend ask the Home Secretary to resist the blandishments of the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) on the Firearms (Amendment) Bill when it returns to the House? Will he also ask him to ensure that any modifications made fully reflect the very wise and sensible amendments to the Bill—to restore some justice to many innocent people—so wisely passed by the other place?

Mr. Newton: I shall not attempt to add to what I have already said, but I shall ensure that my right hon. and learned Friend's attention is drawn to my hon. Friend's remarks.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Why do the Leader of the House and Ministers make statements on nurses' and teachers' pay in the form of a written question, instead of making a statement in the House, so that hon. Members can make their position clear? If there is enough money to find £60 million-plus for a royal yacht and enough to pay the fat salary increases of generals, Members of Parliament, Ministers and all the rest of them, why cannot the Government say to nurses and teachers that they will immediately pay the money from the pay review in full?

Mr. Newton: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be aware that the practice—for as long as I can remember—has been for the information on those very complex matters to be made available by written answer. He will also know that the reports in question, taken together, are about 3 in thick, and require considerable study. I am sure that he will get down to his homework as soon as he possibly can.

Sir John Cope (Northavon): My right hon. Friend will have seen the Procedure Committee's report, which has just been published, on a new streamlined procedure for tax simplification Bills. It is important that we debate that matter as soon as possible, and, if possible, pass the necessary amendments to Standing Orders. There is a great push—in the Treasury, by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and in the Inland Revenue—for simplification of our complicated tax legislation. The House should facilitate that process, and not be seen as a potential difficulty.

Mr. Newton: If I remember rightly, last week, much the same point was made to me by my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), the Chairman of the Committee. I gave what I described as a "cautiously sympathetic" reply. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope), who is a distinguished member of the Committee, will similarly accept both my sympathy and my caution.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): When can the House urgently have an opportunity to debate the continuing misjudgments of the Governor of Hong Kong in chipping away at the international agreements which were brilliantly achieved by Lord Howe, then Foreign Secretary, in 1984 and which this uninformed Governor is immensely damaging? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that he managed to educate even an uninformed personality like Lady Thatcher about the realities of what had to develop between China and Hong Kong? Why on earth do HM Government allow this man to persist in damaging those immensely important international relationships?

Mr. Newton: Without in any way accepting for a moment the thrust of the hon. Gentleman's argument,

[Mr. Newton]

which was ingeniously disguised as a question, I simply point out that the House has recently had opportunities to debate Hong Kong, and I certainly cannot envisage another one in the near future.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Will my right hon. Friend take further the matters raised by the shadow Leader of the House and my hon. Friend the Member for South Worcestershire (Sir M. Spicer), who asked, respectively, for a Supply day and a debate on constitutional arrangements? Will it be possible in the next two weeks to consider a matter that has been lying around for the past two decades—whether, under some people's proposals, a Scottish Member of Parliament would be able to vote on English education but not on Scottish education?

Mr. Newton: In other words, a debate to see for the umpteenth time whether we can get an answer to the West Lothian question—

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Have a debate.

Mr. Newton: Is the hon. Gentleman promising me from a sedentary position that were the Opposition to have a Supply day, they would choose to debate constitutional matters? I should like that in writing.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Would the Leader of the House like to calculate exactly how much European legislation in the form of directives is awaiting scrutiny by European Standing Committee A? Will he then explain why the Government perpetually complain about European interference, but refuse absolutely to deal rapidly with the legislation that is pouring out of Brussels? Dealing with it rapidly would enable the House of Commons to know what was really going on, to comment on the legislation and, if need be, amend it before it became damaging, rather than afterwards.

Mr. Newton: I am not in a position immediately to give the hon. Lady the statistic that she requested, but I shall make some inquiries. On the more general point, she will know that we have made it clear that we ourselves are not satisfied with the fact that the procedures of the European Union, which can involve delays in Brussels and delays in transmission from Brussels, do not always enable us to scrutinise legislation here as effectively as we and the Committee would wish. We shall make every effort to ensure that matters are improved.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): May we have a debate on unemployment, so that we can get home to people the fact that unemployment in, for example, Dover is half that in Calais, 22 miles away? There are enormous problems in Europe, which must be dealt with; the House must have a proper debate, so that we can explain to the French and Germans that it is because they are following socialist policies, which are being pushed by the Labour party in this country, that they have higher unemployment than us.

Mr. Newton: Not for the first time, my hon. Friend makes a very good point. It is underlined by something on which, to judge from the exchanges at Prime Minister's Question Time, I am not sure hon. Members have yet focused, that is, the truly astonishing rise in unemployment that was announced in Germany today.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Will the Leader of the House inform the Home Secretary that when the House again debates the Firearms (Amendment) Bill, it is absolutely essential that the wrecking Lords amendment be overturned? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that at an event in my constituency last week, I had the honour to meet Mr. and Mrs. Martyn Dunn, whose daughter Charlotte was one of the infants murdered at Dunblane? Is it not now all the more important that the pledge that effective action would be taken over guns—a pledge that was given after the Dunblane massacre—is carried out and that there is no appeasement by the Government?

Mr. Newton: The Government have made it clear that they are undertaking effective action in the wake of that appalling tragedy. Just as I told my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire (Sir A. Grant) that I would bring his points to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, so I shall bring the different points made by the hon. Gentleman to his attention.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): May I support earlier calls for a debate on devolution? Both the main Opposition parties have resolved to set up a rival Parliament in Edinburgh and also, apparently, to set up regional assemblies in England. They would add another tier of bureaucracy in many of our constituencies. As the proposed assembly for the west country would have no defined powers, and we do not know who would sit on it, who would pay for it or which counties would be covered, it would be a fruitful subject for debate and we could learn precisely what the Opposition are planning.

Mr. Newton: I have long held the view that that would indeed be a fruitful subject for debate, although I cannot go beyond what I have said earlier on the matter. I should certainly wish to listen to my right hon. Friend's speech, were it possible for such a debate to take place.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): The thickness or otherwise of a Government report should not be what determines whether it should be launched with a statement in the House. The determining factor should be the importance of the measure. Many documents first launched in the House have been massive, including the report of the Scott inquiry. Should not the public sector pay documents be debated here, because this is the proper place to question whatever is contained in them?

Mr. Newton: I made some reply—I think a reasonable one, as always—to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and I cannot add to that.

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): When my right hon. Friend considers the many calls so far for a debate on the constitution, will he take into account the fact that that subject is not only worthy of a debate in the Chamber, but is arguably the most important subject that we can debate as the custodians in trust of the future of Britain? Such a debate would reveal the wide differences that exist,

between the Conservatives, who want to safeguard the unity of the United Kingdom and the sovereignty of Parliament, and the Opposition, who want to destroy them.

Mr. Newton: I endorse what my hon. and learned Friend says about the importance of that matter. Given the range of proposals that the Opposition appear to have made and the uncertainties about the details, I believe that they should consider using an Opposition day for such a debate.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): If the Leader of the House would care to give me an Opposition day, I should be happy to entertain a debate on the constitution.

Will the right hon. Gentleman return to the ridiculous explanation of why we have not had a statement today on public pay? He seemed to suggest that the subject was too complex for us to understand. I suggest that nurses and teachers outside this place understand the reality of a Government who prefer royal yachts and giant domes in Greenwich to properly and adequately funding people who perform vital services. Why are the Government frightened of a debate on spending priorities?

Mr. Newton: The Government are not frightened of a debate on any aspect of their policies or priorities, which they believe to be right. It has been the convention, for as long as I can remember, that details of the Government's proposals and the reports are given in the way that is being done this afternoon. That is reasonable and sensible.

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): May we have an early opportunity to discuss the serious matter that was reported in Scottish newspapers this morning? I believe that the leader of the Labour group on Glasgow council has said that he was offered trips, paid for from the public purse, for votes. That is a result of the current civil war in the Labour party, in Glasgow and elsewhere in Scotland. The matter is so serious that it must be addressed—and quickly.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend draws attention to what sounds like an important point. Given those at whom the point was directed, the matter should perhaps be considered by Opposition Front Benchers.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I understand the need for the Government to give serious consideration to important matters and the problems of major constitutional issues, but will the Leader of the House tell us whether there is a possibility, before dissolution, that the necessary amendments might be tabled to Standing Orders, to allow the Northern Ireland Grand Committee to meet in the same way as the Scottish and Welsh Grand Committees meet? The idea was mooted by the Prime Minister in October.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has been having discussions with, I think, all the Northern Ireland parties about that matter. Obviously, we hope that it will prove possible to achieve the necessary consensus that would normally be sought before proceeding with such changes. The hon. Gentleman knows that I should like the changes to proceed as soon as possible.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): The Prime Minister made an excellent speech in Brussels on Tuesday, outlining his and the Government's concern about policies in the European Union. The speech was warmly supported by European industrialists, not least, as was mentioned during Prime Minister's questions, a senior executive of BASF, which employs 3,000 people in this country, and a senior executive of ABB, which employs 10,000 people in this country. Could we please have a debate on the Floor of the House, in which the Government could outline to the people of this country and for the benefit of the Opposition why we are so opposed to the minimum wage and the social chapter? We are concerned about the creation of wealth and jobs, which guarantee the future of our country.

Mr. Newton: I share my hon. Friend's views on the merits of my right hon. Friend's speech on the importance of the point that he has made. I shall continue to bear in mind his request for a debate.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Is the Leader of the House aware of the mounting dismay around the world, from Cambodia to India, Russia—which has lost many icons—and eastern Europe, about heritage treasures turning up on the art markets of Frankfurt, Amsterdam, New York and London? In those circumstances, should there not be a statement next week about the role and responsibilities of the Department of Trade and Industry on what has apparently been revealed about Sotheby's? The problem goes far beyond one firm. It relates to the international art market and Britain's position in it. Could we have clarification of the government's supervisory responsibilities in that matter?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will, with his characteristic fairness, understand that I do not think it right to comment on a particular case from the Dispatch Box. His more general point is clearly reasonable and I shall make sure that it is brought to the attention of the President of the Board of Trade.

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the future of Channel 4? Does he agree that drug abuse is a serious matter, as will be shown on a sensible television programme on the subject later this evening? Does he also agree that for the chairman, board and chief executive of Channel 4 to sanction and condone a spoof on drug abuse, wasting the time of busy people, is beneath contempt?

Mr. Newton: I have not had an opportunity to see the programme to which my hon. Friend refers, although I am aware of his concern about it. I shall make sure that I see it if I can. I agree with him about the importance of the problem—indeed, I chair the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Drug Misuse.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Will the Leader of the House arrange for an urgent statement on the condition and circumstances of Mr. Ben Bekhiche Hamid, an Algerian on his 32nd day of hunger strike? He is currently locked up in a single cell in the hospital wing of Rochester prison. The care that he receives there amounts to an orderly occasionally coming along and peering through

[Mr. Harry Cohen]

his cell grille. Why do the Government not give Mr. Hamid temporary admission to a hospital or transfer him to Medway hospital for proper medical treatment?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office made a general statement on the matter last week. I cannot add to what she said, but I shall bring the hon. Gentleman's concerns to her attention.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will my right hon. Friend provide time for a debate next week on early-day motion 458?

[*That this House notes that, as a consequence of industrial action in Greece, British lorry drivers were detained at Patras, Greece; observes that a number of horses were held for eight days in lorries where their condition was pitiful; commends the work of the Horse Reserve Fund in offering prompt assistance and in ascertaining whether the horses had been watered; and deplores the fact that the horses then had to undergo further journeys of up to 1,500 miles prior to their slaughter.*]

The motion is signed by hon. Members on both sides of the House and draws attention to the terrible treatment of horses in Greece. They were kept without food and water for eight days during the recent strike and then taken a further 1,500 miles before slaughter. We must protest against such practices in the European Union. May we have a debate through which to do that?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend knows very well that the British Government have consistently taken the lead in pressing for improvements in animal welfare throughout Europe. He has played a worthy part in ensuring that. In respect of his early-day motion, I should inform him that the International League for the Protection of Horses is to be commended for the prompt way in which it sought to help the Bulgarian horses recently detained in Greece during their journey to Italy.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy (Liverpool, Broadgreen): Can the Leader of the House tell us when the Secretary of State for Health plans to release the current hospital waiting list figures that were expected this week? The right hon. Gentleman may like to know that on 16 July, the Secretary of State for Health held up the Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals trust as an example of how waiting lists could be reduced to below 12 months in accordance with the patients charter. It is now quite clear that the hospital waiting lists declared by that trust have been doctored. Patients have not been declared within certain specialities, depending on where they live. Can the Leader of the House ensure that when the hospital waiting list figures are finally produced, they are accurate and have not been doctored under the direction and requirement of regional executives across the country?

Mr. Newton: As to the latter point, I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will examine the allegations, as they must be described, which the hon. Lady has made. She asked about timing. I am not in a position to give an exact date, but I do not think that it is very far ahead.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): My right hon. Friend spoke earlier about a debate on the West Lothian question. Will he consider having a debate in Government time on the English question, which is why my constituents should entertain the prospect of paying more tax to support a separate Parliament, while Members of that other Parliament from the other area—Scotland or Wales—could come to London and vote on matters involving my constituents, who would have no say whatever in what happened under their aegis? Will my right hon. Friend consider that seriously and give us some time to discuss the English question, not the West Lothian question?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend asked an ingenious variation of what has long been known as the West Lothian question, which as I have said before, ought now to be known as the Linlithgow question. I entirely share his view of the importance of those matters and I have said several times that I am bearing in mind sympathetically the request for a debate.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): May I return the Leader of the House to the subject of London Underground? While I understand that he might not want to be bounced by what we read in the press, is he prepared to be bounced by a statement that has already been drafted on the privatisation of London Underground, which begins, "I can announce today that the Government have decided to privatise London Underground"? Does he accept that if such a statement is already drafted and ready to be made, the Minister should make that statement to the House, if that is the Government's intention? If it is not the Government's intention, should not the Minister tell the House why they have changed their policy? Finally, may I remind the Leader of the House that the statement ends, "The Minister expects tube users and Londoners in general to welcome such a proposal"? If we have such a debate, we in the Opposition will explain to him clearly why tube users and Londoners do not welcome that proposal.

Mr. Newton: I gave a reasonably clear answer to the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) earlier in these exchanges and I cannot add to it. I am quite sure that when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is in a position to make proposals, he will set out clearly the advantages to Londoners and all tube users.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Will my right hon. Friend consider a debate to celebrate the overwhelming success of the private pension fund industry, which contrasts so well with the shambles in France and Germany? In such a debate, we could point out the implications for pensioners of the idiotic proposals for a windfall tax on the privatised utilities, as so many of the privatised utilities' shareholders are, of course, pension funds.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend, once again, makes a very good point. Not only do we not know on whom the windfall tax would fall or at what level it would be levied, but we certainly have not heard about its inevitable difficulties, disadvantages and potential losses for either consumers or shareholders, including, as he says, the interests of many pensioners.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Does the Leader of the House agree that we should find time to debate the

astronomical increase in the death rate in England and Wales during the week ending 10 January? Can he confirm Government statistics that the death rate in that week was 19,500—5,500 above the average over the past few years for the second week in January, and 8,500 above the annual average? Does he therefore agree that it is urgent that we should debate what contributed to that death rate—whether it was a combination of a particularly virulent strain of influenza going around the country and hypothermia during the very cold spell, or our hospitals' catastrophic inability to cope with the winter medical emergencies that they faced?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman implied that—unhappily—there are, of course, variations in such a statistic, which depend very much on the level of an epidemic, if such there be, and, indeed, the weather. I shall not attempt to go into that in detail. Although I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's points to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, I should make the point that we had a debate on health matters only yesterday.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): May I support the call of the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), for a debate on the importance of stability in the finance of education institutions? During that debate, we could stress the anxieties of well over 1,000 of our grant-maintained school that they run the risk of finding that the parents' decision that the schools become grant-maintained will be overruled, resulting in up to 15 per cent. of their education funds being taken away from them and their classrooms, to be spent by bureaucrats in local education authorities.

Mr. Newton: After my hon. Friend's success in achieving a debate on Kentish matters yesterday, I had harboured the hope that he might take today off. But he has not, and has made another very good point.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Is there not a compelling case for an early debate on the operation of the law on data protection? Many of my constituents have contacted me, who are absolutely outraged at the invasion of their privacy, having received a letter from the Prime Minister. I should like the Leader of the House to comment on the letter from his colleague, the right hon. Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney), the chairman of the Conservative party, to my good friend and old colleague Harry Lees, who died 18 months ago. The letter, sent to the former Labour councillor and lifelong Labour party member, said that he could be an essential part of the Conservative election machine. Is not the law on data protection simply not working, given that people can receive such unsolicited letters from leading lights in the Conservative party?

Mr. Newton: Obviously, if the letter to a person who is deceased caused any distress, I am sure that all involved would very much regret it. I do not want to seem flippant over that matter. However, on the general thrust of what the hon. Gentleman said, it is not so long ago—although I do not think that I still have it—that I received a letter from the Labour party seeking my support in very similar terms.

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): May I add my voice to the general chorus of calls for a debate on the constitution, perhaps concentrating on a still more specific subject than that suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith): not the English question, but the Worcestershire question? Does my right hon. Friend understand that such a debate would enable me to explain the double constitutional whammy implied for Worcestershire in some of the plans floated for constitutional change: it would be dragged reluctantly into a regional assembly and dominated by Birmingham, while at the same time Scottish Members would be able to exercise a privilege that English Members did not have, and destroy our grant-maintained schools and fundholding practices?

Mr. Newton: The ingenuity with which my hon. Friends manage to make their points, disguised as requests for a debate, never ceases to amaze me. I congratulate my hon. Friend and will bear in mind his request as well.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Will the Leader of the House respond to a request already made, to make time available to discuss the crisis of funding in further education? Surely it cannot be acceptable that Education Ministers have written to vice-principals, colleges are at risk of bankruptcy—some look set to lose £1 million—yet hon. Members have had no chance to debate the matter.

Mr. Newton: I cannot add to what I said earlier to the hon. Member for Dewsbury. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's remarks will be noted by those concerned.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): May I return to the subject of the Police Bill *[Lords]*? Since last weekend, the Home Secretary has received a letter from his eminence Cardinal Basil Hume about the implications of that Bill for confession and the other pastoral counselling carried out by ministers of all denominations. Would it be possible for the right hon. and learned Gentleman to meet Church leaders before Second Reading to hear about their concerns, and for him to announce on Second Reading that the meetings that pastors have with their flock will be explicitly exempted from the police powers to bug confidential conversations?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman raised that matter last week, and I said then that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary would consider the representations. I cannot add to that at this stage. As for the meeting that the hon. Gentleman suggests, I am not sure whether he is extending an invitation or whether an invitation has gone out from those concerned. I am sure that if one has, my right hon. and learned Friend will examine the matter carefully.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North–East): Can the Leader of the House find time for a debate specifically about children's health, including the dental health of children in the north-west? Bolton's children now have the worst teeth in the country, with twice the national average amount of decay. Should we not debate the need to improve children's health?

Mr. Newton: We debated such matters yesterday, on a motion tabled by the hon. Gentleman's party. I am not sure whether he managed to get into the debate, but if he did not, I assume that what he has just said is an expression of frustration.

Points of Order

4.12 pm

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Today I received a letter from the Prime Minister. I believe that that was because I hold one share in Yorkshire Water. He got both my name and the appropriate address wrong. Do you, Madam Speaker, think it appropriate for the Prime Minister to use his position to obtain the names and addresses of millions of people for a piece of cheap political propaganda? I am assured that Yorkshire Water did not offer the Prime Minister a list of shareholders. Do you not feel that such actions rather cheapen the position both of the Prime Minister and of the House of Commons?

Mr. David Shaw (Dover) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: No, no.

Mr. Shaw: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: No, no. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) seldom raises a point of order, and it is quite a sensible one, in connection with data protection. I am sure that the hon. Lady will understand that it is not a matter for me what individual Members, including the Prime Minister, do. That does not relate to the Chair.

Mr. Shaw *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Is it a separate point of order? Is it a sensible point of order? [*Laughter.*] That is the point. Is it sensible as well as separate?

Mr. Shaw: I must, as always, Madam Speaker, leave you to judge that point. As you know, I always respect your judgment on such matters.

I want to draw attention to the fact that, although a particular matter has been raised in connection with the Prime Minister, it is more important to raise the fact that the Leader of the Opposition frequently writes to many people all over the country. We are concerned about whether he uses House of Commons resources for writing those letters to people—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must resume his seat. He now seems to be generalising. It is matter of quid pro quo. Nobody writes to me, and I am very pleased that they do not.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The Select Committee on European Legislation deals with hundreds of documents, and part of its procedures is to determine whether European documents, directives and regulations have legal or political significance. If they have such significance, the Committee may recommend that they be debated either in Committee or on the Floor of the House. Should that not also apply to the pay review body documents, so that we can determine whether they have legal or political significance? If they do, the Prime Minister should surely make a statement so that we can question him on the seven documents.

Madam Speaker: I think that that is a point of view rather than a point of order.

Let me correct something that I said earlier. I said that nobody ever writes to me, but I do not want that to be misunderstood. Hundreds and hundreds of people write to me—mostly about points of order and noise in this House, which is not appreciated by the audience outside.

Royal Air Force

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Carrington.]*

4.14 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): Madam Speaker, I very much welcome the opportunity to open this afternoon's debate on the Royal Air Force.

It would be inappropriate to open a debate on the RAF without taking the opportunity to pay tribute to the remarkable life and work of Sir Frank Whittle. Throughout his distinguished career in the Royal Air Force and subsequently, Sir Frank's vision and originality were an inspiring example to the service and to the aerospace world. Sir Frank was without doubt one of the giants of aviation. He will be particularly remembered for his invention of the jet engine, which he patented in 1930 when a flying officer of only 23 years of age. It was fitting that the memorial service to honour his life in November was marked by an RAF fly-past of four Tornados from No. 111 squadron, in which Sir Frank served in the 1920s.

On Tuesday, the Government announced that the permanent site for the joint services staff college was to be at Shrivenham. I mention that in this debate because of the importance of staff training to all three services, and especially to the RAF. This decision has rightly been warmly welcomed by all three services. The college will be a centre of military excellence, building on the world renown of its prestigious predecessors to maintain our global reputation for command and staff training.

The Shrivenham site will be ideal for our purposes, and it reflects well on the Government's private finance initiative that such an innovative solution has been put forward. There is, of course, regret at the closure of the existing colleges at Greenwich, Camberley and Bracknell, but I believe that its establishment on a green-field site will allow the new college to develop its own distinctive character and ethos.

Until the permanent college is ready for operation in September 1999, the joint services staff college will operate at interim sites—mainly Bracknell for all three services, where the college came into being on 1 January this year and where the first new course will start in September 1997. Although the facilities there will be temporary, they will be fit for the purpose. Significant efforts are currently being focused on providing the necessary accommodation and the syllabuses are being worked out to reflect the new joint training course.

The House may care to note the strong support that the Government have received from, among others, John Keegan—possibly the most distinguished of our defence commentators. Not known for mincing his words when he thinks we are doing the wrong thing, he has picked out some of the most crucial characteristics of both the JSSC as a concept and the Shrivenham solution. We believe that he is right and that it will transform the concept of general staff training. We believe that it will promise very high standards, much greater tri-service integration and an imaginative and highly relevant syllabus. I can do no better than describe our vision for the new JSSC and its permanent home as, in John Keegan's words, "a sensation."

It is men such as Frank Whittle who have shaped the Royal Air Force into what it is today: a dynamic, thoroughly professional, forward looking, innovative service, capable of projecting air power around the globe. Before turning to the RAF's achievements since our last debate, I would like to say a few words about military power from the air—known to some as air power.

All three of our armed services possess a significant capability to conduct air power operations. Before I go on to talk about that, I should like to remind the House that, as Churchill said,

"Air power is the most difficult of all forms of military force to measure, or even to express in precise terms".

That was true in 1940, and remains so today; it is a reflection of air power's myriad roles.

I should like to mention three aspects that I consider important. The first, and perhaps the most obvious, is the ability, through control of the air, to conduct military operations free from attack by enemy air forces. From D-day to the Gulf, mastery of the air has been a key factor in the success of our armed forces in achieving their objectives, and one that no military planner can afford to ignore.

The second aspect of air power that I should like to touch on is the unique ability to project enormous destructive power swiftly, smashing an enemy's war-fighting capability. Modern air power embodies one of the most potent instruments of military force, capable of exacting unacceptable levels of punishment upon those unfortunate, or unwise, enough to have to experience its consequences.

We need look no further for a graphic example of those qualities than the war in the Gulf. Indeed, on this day six years ago, Royal Air Force Tornados and Buccaneers were engaged on operations as part of the great coalition over Iraq, attacking highway bridges on the Iraqi supply routes to Kuwait using laser-guided bombs. Meanwhile, other Tornado formations attacked airfields, training camps and power plants. Our Jaguars simultaneously sought out and attacked artillery positions. The effect on Saddam Hussein's war-fighting capability, in terms of matériel, communications and, crucially, morale, was totally devastating.

The precision and strength of air power find expression in the new strategic setting in which we exist today through the deterrence of aggressors and the enforcement of United Nations authority. It was air power, through the delivery of limited, precisely targeted force, that helped to bring the warring factions in the former Yugoslavia to the negotiating table in Dayton.

This day in 1933, Squadron Leader Gayford and Flight Lieutenant Nicholetts left RAF Cranwell in a long-range Fairy Aviation monoplane and flew non-stop to Walvis Bay, South West Africa. In so doing, they flew 5,431 miles in 57 hours and 25 minutes, establishing the world distance record. That then fantastic feat illustrates a third key aspect of air power: its reach.

Today, we exploit that capability in our support to peacekeeping, disaster relief, and humanitarian and military operations. The RAF has been to the fore in every recent military operation with which the United Kingdom has been associated. Its speed of deployment, reach and inherent flexibility make it ideally suited to react to the very broadest range of contingencies. In the fast-moving

[Mr. Nicholas Soames]

post-cold war world, the ability rapidly to deploy is essential if we are to remain a significant player on the world stage.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): The Minister has been arguing about the efficacy of air power, which none of us would dispute. Why were the Government so reluctant to use this very impressive weapon in the Bosnian situation? Why were they so reluctant, when others were urging such actions upon us?

Mr. Soames: I saw the hon. Gentleman pregnant with question, and wondered when he would be delivered. It is a difficult question to answer. We were part of a United Nations operation that subsequently became a NATO operation, and there was a profound disagreement between the partners. With the sensitivity of its being a United Nations operation—a peacekeeping operation—the use of air power and bombs would have turned it over what was called the Mogadishu line, from peacekeeping to war fighting. It is a tribute to the timing of the decision that the operation passed off highly successfully and achieved precisely the stated objectives with the very precise, limited use of air power.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): I follow the Minister's argument and support it strongly. Does he agree that a crucial element is surveillance and targeting capability, and that the ASTOR airborne stand-off radar programme will be instrumental in providing that for the Royal Air Force? Does he believe that the time limits set by the Department—I understand that a technical assessment was meant to be completed by the end of January—have been met and that the contract can be awarded by October? It is important to the RAF and is a priority to the Department, but it is also very important for jobs in Belfast and elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Soames: The hon. Gentleman knows that we employ skilled and brilliant engineers to deal with the matter. Their man will be answering such questions later this evening. I am afraid that I cannot help.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Does my hon. Friend agree that the RAF's success also depends on the skills of the men in the cockpit, and that pilot training is of the utmost importance? Will he join me in paying tribute to the work of RAF Linton-on-Ouse in my constituency, which, sadly, will be in a neighbouring constituency after the general election? Can he give an update on progress on the replacement for the Bulldog aircraft for the university air squadron? Does he agree that the deployment of the Firefly aircraft in elementary flight training has already proved successful? Would not it make sense for the same aircraft to be used for all elementary training?

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend was good enough to warn me that he might bowl that ball at me. I am happy to confirm the importance of flying training. If it were not for flying training and the pilots—quite apart from the support services—nothing would happen. I pay warm tribute to the maintenance of the extraordinary quality of flying training, which is regarded all over the world as the best. I hope that he will allow me to write to him in detail about the new aeroplane. I am aware of his great interest, but the situation is one of shifting sands.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): On aircrew training, my hon. Friend knows that Thomson Training and Simulation employs many people in Sussex, including some of my constituents. He also knows that it can provide aircrew training facilities for the RAF's new EH101 and Chinook helicopters. Is he aware that if the contract was awarded to Thomson in Britain, it would create 200 British jobs and provide a firm base for the export by Britain of high technology?

Mr. Soames: I am aware of the contract. Thomson is a company in my constituency, so I must be cautious. My hon. Friend will know what has been said by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, who will be able to deal with the matter more dispassionately than I later this evening. The House will realise that I am well informed on procurement matters and always ready to engage in combat on such difficult questions. It is dark and lonely work, but someone has to do it.

Since I last addressed the House in such a debate, I have visited men and women of the RAF deployed to a number of overseas locations. In October, I visited the Operation Jural detachment at its new home at Prince Sultan air base 80 miles south of Riyadh to see the exceptional work of the RAF in monitoring Iraqi compliance with UN Security Council resolution 688. I was very impressed by what I saw, and the House should know that the Royal Air Force has conducted itself there, in difficult and adverse circumstances, in a thoroughly cheerful and professional way. It moved from a well-established base to a bare one the size of the Isle of Wight in the middle of the desert. The move was done well, without missing an hour's operational flying.

I also visited RAF Mildenhall and RAF Lakenheath, two of our largest bases in the United Kingdom, which Her Majesty's Government make available to the United States' visiting forces. I hope that the House will agree that it is appropriate, on the 50th anniversary of the United States Air Force, that I should pay tribute to the men and women of the United States Third Air Force based in this country. The United Kingdom has enjoyed a special relationship with the United States Air Force throughout its 50 years.

I now turn to current RAF operations. The RAF continues to provide constant and vital support to our operations and commitments throughout the world. It has been supporting peacekeeping operations in former Yugoslavia since the international community first became involved in the region. It played a vital role in the success of the IFOR operation and continues to provide full support to SFOR. Since 20 December last year, the RAF has flown in excess of 1,050 hours on a wide range of tasks in support of those operations.

The support helicopter force flies daily from bases in Bosnia and Croatia in support of our ground forces. The RAF transport fleet continues to make regular flights between the United Kingdom, Germany and theatre, maintaining vital lines of communication with our troops.

Two sentry aircraft, a Tristar and a Hercules, are based in Italy, providing, respectively, a surveillance capability, air-to-air refuelling and tactical transport. I wish to put on

record our extreme gratitude to the Italian Government for giving us such excellent assistance, which permits our forces to operate from their bases much more easily. It is a reminder of the overarching importance of the friendships rooted in NATO.

This week, six Harriers from 3 Squadron, RAF Laarbruch, based at Gioia del Colle in Italy, are handing over to six Jaguar aircraft from 41 Squadron, RAF Coltishall. They will continue to provide offensive air support to SFOR and I have no doubt that they will provide admirable support to our troops on the ground in Bosnia.

As the House will be aware, the RAF has been operating very publicly in the skies over the middle east. The United Nations adopted Security Council Resolution 688 to stop Iraqi repression of its civilian population. Along with our coalition partners, we established no-fly zones over Iraq to monitor Saddam Hussein's compliance with that resolution. RAF Tornado GR1s based in Turkey and Saudi Arabia, supported by VC10 tanker aircraft and some 400 personnel, continue to play a vital part in the no-fly zone operations over northern and southern Iraq.

Our objective remains peace and stability in the region and the well-being of its people. Our participation in those operations have played a notable part in achieving that objective. I take this opportunity to update the House on recent developments relating to the northern no-fly zone. Aircraft patrolling the northern no-fly zone are based at Incirlik in Turkey by agreement with the Turkish Government. Coalition partners reviewed the operation last December against the background of changes caused by Iraq's attack on Irbil in September. It was agreed that air operations over northern Iraq must continue. The French, however, decided to withdraw from the operation on 26 December, but that does not affect the coalition's ability to patrol the no-fly zone and its tasks are now undertaken by the RAF. It was also decided that the operation should be renamed Northern Watch. Like Operation Provide Comfort before it, we believe that Operation Northern Watch continues to perform an essential purpose in deterring Iraqi repression and that it must continue. French participation in no-fly zone operations over southern Iraq continues.

Let me stress that we do not seek confrontation with Saddam Hussein. We believe that it is essential to maintain pressure on him to comply with all relevant Security Council resolutions. We shall continue to do that, both in the Security Council and through the coalition.

Hon. Members have been kept well informed of the Government's efforts to respond to the plight of Rwandan refugees in eastern Zaire. My right hon. Friend dispatched a joint service reconnaissance party to the region by an RAF VC10 on 15 November last year and, five days later, an RAF Canberra PR9 photographic-reconnaissance aircraft from 39 Squadron was dispatched. In addition, some 40 support personnel were flown out by three Hercules aircraft from RAF Lyneham. The photographic material obtained from the deployment was vital in demonstrating that the number and movement of refugees was not as great as anticipated and, on the basis of that information, the dispatch of a multinational force was judged not to be appropriate.

The RAF personnel involved in the deployment—among them air crew, engineers, a photographic processing and interpretation team, members of the RAF police and a medic—are to be commended for conducting a demanding task in extremely exacting and difficult circumstances.

The RAF also contributes to the maintenance of our garrisons overseas. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State emphasised during his recent visit to the Falklands, the security of the islands remains one of the highest priorities of UK defence policy. The RAF element of the garrison plays a major role in ensuring that continued security.

We therefore continue to maintain Tornado F3 fighter aircraft supported by VC10 tankers in an air defence role. C-130 Hercules aircraft patrol the seas around the Falklands and the latest variant of the Rapier surface-to-air missile system operated by the Royal Air Force Regiment provides additional protection to the Mount Pleasant airfield complex. The House will also wish to pay tribute to the sterling work of the bi-weekly Tristar, which provides a critical link back to the UK for both the garrison and the islanders. Chinook helicopters are used to move men and supplies around the island and Sea King search and rescue helicopters provide a 24-hour search service.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Now that the contract for maintaining the Tristar has gone to the United Arab Emirates, does the Minister still feel confident that the maintenance will be carried out as well as it was at Marshall's of Cambridge?

Mr. Soames: That is, if I may say so to a nice person, a singularly foolish question, because if we had not felt confident we would not have let the contract.

In Hong Kong, the RAF has continued to play an important role in demonstrating British sovereignty and supporting the Hong Kong civil authorities. For example, 28 Squadron has provided outstanding operation support for the Hong Kong garrison and, in particular, the anti-smuggling task force. The squadron has also supported the Hong Kong Government flying service in air-sea rescue and fire fighting and it will remain until shortly before the handing over of the territory at the end of June.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): As my hon. Friend will know, British Aerospace operates in my constituency and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State visited Samlesbury only last Friday. Is it not right that, in all the operations mentioned by the Minister, we have not only the best pilots, the best engineers and the best back-up teams, but the best equipment? Does he agree that part of that best equipment will be the European fighter aircraft? Does he also agree that, if the Labour party carried out the threat contained in its 1993 conference decision to cut defence expenditure by £4.5 billion, that could jeopardise the European fighter aircraft—either the whole project could be cancelled, or the number of aircraft could be reduced from 230 to a minimal number?

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend, who is an extraordinarily doughty supporter of British Aerospace and of his constituents' interests, is quite right. There has been no response to the points he raised—indeed, one has to assume that all those major contracts go into the melting pot and are up for grabs, with grave potential

[Mr. Soames]

consequences, not only for my hon. Friend's constituents, but for the Royal Air Force and the other fighting arms, whose security for the future is reflected in the orders that the Government place in summer.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): Lest he inadvertently mislead the nation as well as the House, let me tell the Minister that he is out of date. Last week, there was an immediate response to that question and I responded to it an hour ago on national television.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Michael Portillo): Did the Labour leaders know?

Dr. Reid: From a sedentary position, the Secretary of State is asking whether I speak with the authority of my right hon. Friends the Members for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) and for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair). I assure him that a statement of that nature would not have been made without the full clearance of our Treasury spokesmen and our leader because Labour operates in a less chaotic way when making these decisions than do the Government.

Mr. Soames: All of us realise that the hon. Gentleman is a good man doing his best in a hopeless case and that was an unconvincing affirmation of a policy. As we all know, neither the shadow Chancellor nor the Leader of the Opposition have confirmed any of the contracts. All they and the shadow defence spokesman, the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), whose absence we regret today, have been able to say—we have it in black and white—is that there would be a defence review and that the consequences of that review would be extremely painful. My right hon. and hon. Friends and I know perfectly well what that means and we also know the grave danger that that would pose to the interests of the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) and to the services. It merely confirms what the people of Britain have always known: that, as on many other matters, one cannot trust the Labour party on defence.

I shall now move on to a more elegant subject.

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Soames: No, I will not, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me.

In addition to its operational duties, the RAF participates in a wide range of exercises with our allies throughout the globe. Within Europe, the RAF has participated in two major NATO operations since July. During September and October 1996, we exercised the RAF's capability to deploy at short notice in response to an emerging crisis by participating in Exercise Dynamic Mix. Tornado F3 and Nimrod aircraft deployed using VC10 air-to-air refuelling aircraft, supported by Hercules C130s, which carried the ground crews and support staff to Akinci air base in Turkey. The exercise involved elements of the Ace Mobile Force (Land) with United States, Turkish, Italian, Belgian, Canadian, German and Dutch air forces.

Also in September, this time in the United Kingdom, Exercise Brilliant Invader took place. US F15, F18 and C130 aircraft, with Dutch F16s, participated with RAF Tornado GR1s, Harriers, Jaguars, Hawk, VC10, Tristar, Sea King and Harriers in a joint air defence and offensive air support training exercise. Participation in these exercises demonstrates in as realistic a way as we can our tangible support for the alliance. It affords invaluable practice in combined training, operating alongside air forces of other nations in often unfamiliar environments. That allows the RAF to practise the deployment, sustainment and recovery of our reaction forces declared to NATO.

I mentioned in June 1996 that the Franco-British air group had made excellent progress in improving the capabilities of our respective air forces to carry out combined operations. This process continues. In September 1996, 16 RAF and 23 French Air Force aircraft participated in Exercise Volcano in eastern France. This was the first in a three-year programme under the auspices of the Franco-British air group. The second exercise is due to take place in June in the UK. This participation is a mark, not only of the great warmth of our bilateral relationship with France, but of our increasingly close working relationship in the defence field.

The RAF also participated in five major US exercises: four Red Flag exercises in Nevada from October to December and Cope Thunder, in Alaska, in July. Major exercises such as these provide the opportunity for UK aircrew and weapon systems to train side by side with US forces, using facilities not available on this side of the Atlantic.

Goose bay in Canada continues to provide fantastic flying training opportunities for our crews taking part in Exercise Western Vortex, with four deployments in the past six months.

In addition, our bilateral contacts with the countries of central and eastern Europe continue to expand through NATO's Partnership for Peace initiative and our own outreach programme. Last year, two Partnership for Peace exercises took place, Co-operative Chance in Hungary and Co-operative Bear in the United Kingdom. In addition, the UK/Polish bilateral exercise Uhlan Eagle was held in Poland, when 7th Armoured Brigade deployed, and involved elements of the support helicopter force. These were great successes, and they demonstrate the value of closer co-operation between NATO and the nations of the former Warsaw pact. We hope very much that the RAF will contribute to planned maritime and fast jet exercises later this year.

The Royal Air Force is also active in exercises outside Europe and NATO. Later this month, four RAF Harrier GR7s from No.1 (Fighter) Squadron, the world's oldest military flying unit, will embark on HMS Illustrious, off Muscat, to take part in operations with royal naval Sea Harriers of the Fleet Air Arm. That deployment will mark a significant increase in our nation's ability to project air power from the sea—a golden and vital asset for this country—and make a major contribution to joint operational capability, with the consequent substantial benefits for the joint rapid deployment force and the doctrines that are being developed.

We are also making a significant contribution to the five power defence arrangements Exercise Flying Fish off Malaysia in April—the first such joint air and maritime exercise. I am delighted to tell the House that the United Kingdom is providing the largest contribution to the exercise and our air element, many thousands of miles

from home, will include 12 Tornados, two VC10 tankers, two Nimrod maritime patrol aircraft and a Sentry early warning aircraft. That will provide an excellent opportunity to train with our allies from Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and Malaysia, as well as emphasising our continued commitment to the Asia-Pacific region, even after the handover of Hong Kong in June.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I am sure you know, the Red Arrows have also been active in the region. They had an extraordinarily successful year, displaying in the far east and Australia at the beginning of 1996 and in Indonesia in the summer. I am sure that the House will agree that the Red Arrows represent a wonderful advertisement for the skill of the Royal Air Force and the excellence of the United Kingdom defence industries.

The RAF's responsibilities are of course, not restricted—

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North–East): The Minister will be aware that the Red Arrows fly the Hawk aircraft. There have been recent reports of cracks in that aircraft. Can he say a little about that problem and the steps that have been taken to remedy it?

Mr. Soames: The hon. Gentleman is correct that, in the course of routine servicing, a fault was detected. In the usual way, as these matters are, it was dealt with, and all others with aircraft of the same type and age were informed to check. That is standard procedure. The matter has been dealt with.

As I said, the obligations of the Royal Air Force are not restricted to overseas theatres. In Northern Ireland, the RAF continues to play an invaluable role in the support provided by all three services to the Royal Ulster Constabulary. About 1,100 RAF personnel are deployed in the Province, operating Chinook, Wessex and Puma helicopters, and an RAF field squadron continues to provide security at RAF Aldergrove. I believe that the whole House will wish to pay tribute to the role that the RAF has played over the years in Northern Ireland, where the skill of the pilots and the devotion and hard work of the support crews have created an extraordinarily successful mixture in providing that support. The RAF's contribution of trooping and resupply is vital logistical support to the Army and is undertaken in difficult and demanding circumstances, as anyone who has had the privilege of seeing them do it will know.

Search and rescue helicopters continue to provide emergency assistance to military and civilians alike: in 1996, more than 1,200 people were rescued. Always on stand-by, a Sea King helicopter crew were called out on Christmas day to rescue an injured walker from the Cairngorm mountains. Indeed, the enthusiasm of the search and rescue crews shone through when the flight at RAF Valley was dispatched following reports of a walker overdue on Mount Snowdon. Although the walker was located quickly he declined to be assisted, explaining that, as a Buddhist, he was attempting in vain to find peace and solitude on the mountain. *[Laughter.]* Ridiculous. Appalling suggestion. Wing Commander Walker?

Since the end of the cold war there has been a significant reduction in the number of unidentified aircraft entering our air space, so quick reaction alert scrambles have been required much less frequently. Nevertheless, a constant alert is maintained, and I thought that the House would like to know of an important development. In September, Flight Lieutenant Helen Gardiner of No. 43 Squadron, RAF Leuchars, became the first female crew member to complete a live quick reaction alert mission. With her navigator, Flight Lieutenant Martin Harris, she scrambled and intercepted a pair of Russian Air Force reconnaissance aircraft as they observed NATO shipping. The Russian aircraft were shadowed before they turned away to set a course for their home base.

Royal Air Force Hercules crews, with elements of the Royal Air Force Regiment, participated in an international air mobility competition in June and deserve full praise for winning the best international team, best Hercules wing and best airdrop wing awards.

In November, the Hercules crews of No. 47 Squadron received the Brackley memorial award from the Guild of Air Pilots and Air Navigators. That award is presented annually to service or civilian personnel who have made an outstanding contribution to aviation, and it recognises the critical role that No. 47 Squadron played in the development of air tactics during the humanitarian airlift into Sarajevo.

It is of great regret to me, to the Air Force Board and to everyone who works in the services and the Ministry of Defence, that such extraordinary achievements of great merit are so rarely picked up by the media, whose interest is only to feed on more disagreeable matters.

I know that the House will have shared my grave concern about the spate of aircraft accidents during the early part of last year. In all, 11 RAF aircraft crashed, with two aircrew, tragically, killed. As the Minister who would be one of those responsible for sending our people into operational circumstances, I know, as does everyone else involved, the cardinal importance of flight safety both to operational capability and to morale, and I and my colleagues on the Air Force Board need to know if there is—as some have feverishly suggested—any systemic cause. It is vital to find out why each crash occurred and what can be done to prevent any recurrence. I know that the House knows that the RAF takes such matters very seriously indeed. So do my right hon. Friend, his ministerial colleagues and all the others concerned.

Each accident is investigated in the most minute and scrupulous detail to identify its cause, so that lessons can be learnt to ensure that, if at all possible, the same thing never happens again. The causes of those accidents have proved to be diverse. Inquiries have revealed no common or fundamental problem in the way in which operations are conducted or supported. Similar clusters of accidents have occurred in the past—most recently the six Tornados lost in the summer of 1994—but those have not revealed any new trend.

Many statistics will no doubt be bandied about from time to time by those who have an interest in stirring up trouble, as evidence that there is a sinister organisational weakness behind the crashes. However, although those groupings of accidents cause intense speculation, our perfect statistical analysis over the year, and the RAF's rolling, thorough and meticulous analysis over many years, show that the RAF's overall accident rate continues to decline over time. No one can be complacent, and no one is complacent. I can assure the House that the Government will continue to take whatever steps are necessary to monitor the situation closely.

[Mr. Soames]

Although people do not, as a matter of course, join the RAF in search of a quiet, stable life, there is no doubt that 1996 began with a period of significant but inevitable upheaval. Such turbulence and uncertainty clearly and understandably had an impact on the morale of those who were affected. That is inevitable during a period of change, but the uncertainty has been replaced by renewed confidence in the future. During my visits to RAF units, I have been continually impressed by the morale and forward-looking enthusiasm of all whom I have met.

That must in part be due to the Government's major commitment to invest in the future of the RAF, as characterised in July by my right hon. Friend's widely welcomed announcement of the largest equipment orders that the RAF has ever seen.

The rationalisation and restructuring programme that followed in the wake of the "Front Line First" and "Competing for Quality" initiatives has brought with it many challenges, difficulties and changes, which we do not seek to underestimate or deny. One of the most painful aspects was the need to reduce the RAF's trained uniform strength.

Last year I very much regretted having to report to the House that 8,300 redundancies had been necessary over the past and current financial years, although I am glad to say that fewer than 1,000 had been compulsory. All but some 2,500 of the total have now left the service, and the vast majority of the remainder will leave before April this year.

Although there will inevitably continue to be changes to the structure and organisation of the RAF over the coming year, RAF personnel can and do look forward to a period of greater stability underpinned by a large and expanding equipment programme.

As my hon. Friend will tell the House in greater detail this evening, the orders for Casom, Brimstone and a replacement for the Nimrod, together with the Eurofighter, represent a clear and unambiguous message from the Government to all members of the service: we are committed to providing them with the necessary resources and the best available equipment required to do their job.

The onset of a period of stability and the prospect of an exciting and rewarding future is good news for everyone in the service. Let me make it quite clear that we value the professionalism and expertise of the men and women of the RAF which has always been, and will continue to be, committed to offering excellent, exciting, rewarding, satisfying career opportunities for all those at all levels in the service.

I would like to say something about the important role played by the RAF reserve forces, and in particular, Royal Air Force volunteer reserve members called out in support of operations, supporting their regular colleagues in the UK, the former Yugoslavia, Italy and Turkey. They continue to provide invaluable support in the provision of intelligence, photographic interpretation and meteorological forecasts.

Last year I announced the decision to form a Royal Auxiliary Air Force support helicopter squadron at RAF Benson. Progress since then has been most encouraging. Media coverage created great interest, and the recruitment drive resulted in more than 1,300 applications being received. The squadron is now training to enable it to meet its operational role in supporting the RAF's helicopter support squadrons. The training is going well and an evaluation of the success of the concept will be made in May 1997.

I know of the importance that many hon. Members attach to the issue. I assure them that we greatly look forward to seeing the results of the evaluation, which may allow us to expand the concept to other roles.

It gives me great pleasure to report the success of the trials conducted on the Hercules aircraft and the Wessex helicopter to assess the feasibility of recruiting and training ex-regular volunteer reservist aircrew. Those trials provided valuable information in developing the concept of using reservists in a wider role.

The RAF intends to recruit 30 Hercules reservist aircrew and nine Puma reservist aircrew during 1997–98, and a further 15 Hercules aircrew and six Puma aircrew during 1998–99. Those volunteers will be employed as high-readiness reserves under the provisions of the Reserve Forces Act 1996, and will train and fly alongside regular RAF aircrew. The RAF also continues to examine the scope for increasing the use of reservist aircrew where feasible, including employment on other aircraft types. It is intended that reservist crews will undertake a limited training commitment of between 30 and 40 days a year and, following training, will fly Hercules and Puma aircraft on fully tasked missions alongside their regular colleagues. Those recruited will be former regular RAF aircrew, many of whom are currently employed by civil airlines. I hope that the House will welcome this exciting development.

The House will recall that, during the Third Reading of the Reserve Forces Bill on 20 May last year, I announced that the central staff post of director reserve forces and cadets would in future be filled by a reservist officer. I said then that the appointment would be subject to the availability of candidates of the right calibre.

I am delighted to inform the House that such an individual has been found. He is Brigadier Richard Holmes, at present Brigadier TA at land command headquarters in Salisbury.

Hon. Members will recall that I mentioned Brigadier Holmes during the debate last year. I touched on the excellent advice that we had received from him, as an example of the way in which the views of the reserves are heard in the Ministry of Defence.

Brigadier Holmes has been a member of the TA for more than 30 years. He is one of the many excellent people in the reserves and one of their most distinguished officers. I welcome him to his new post, and am confident that he will do an outstanding job on behalf of the reserve forces of all three services.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): Can my hon. Friend confirm what he has told me in writing: that Brigadier Holmes, whom we warmly welcome to that important role, could eventually be replaced by a Royal Auxiliary Air Force officer or an officer from the Royal Naval Reserve—in other words, that it is a tri-service reservist appointment?

Mr. Soames: I am entirely happy to confirm that to my hon. Friend. Almost without exception, all central staff

jobs in the Ministry of Defence are now tri-service jobs. It would be inappropriate if that were not the case. My hon. Friend may be interested to know that yesterday I visited the Fleet Air Arm at Royal Naval Air Station Yeovilton, where I met a Royal Naval Reserve officer who is flying the Sea Harrier and who is a pilot on commercial aircraft. That works extremely well. We must ensure that those excellent men and women stay in the reserve forces and pull through, so that they continue to play a major role. There are those who undoubtedly have the ability to go on to hold the most senior ranks with great distinction.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): My hon. Friend knows how much I and many others welcome this appointment, not only because of the quality of the individual, but because it will allow the reserve forces to have a strong voice at the centre, and that will be a recognition of the increased contribution that they make to the country's defence in every aspect of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force.

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend has been a tremendous supporter of the reserve forces and I was grateful to him for his support throughout the passage of the Bill that led to the Reserve Forces Act 1996. As a former serving member of the Royal Air Force, he knows the contribution that the reserve forces can make, provided that they are properly equipped and trained and have a clear role. The appointment is an important signal to the reserve forces, and as I have said to my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier), it is important to have such a man in that post. It will let the reserves see that they are truly valued and have a role to play, for example, in the one-army concept. They must have the most efficient and effective equipment for the roles that they will undertake. There is a balance to be struck between ensuring that they have a voice at the centre of decision making and ensuring that they are properly equipped and funded for training days.

The Air Cadet Force has been the subject of a great deal of excited speculation over recent weeks and I know that the Royal Air Force greatly values that successful force. I visited the air cadets in Haywards Heath about 10 days ago, and I was immensely impressed, not just by the spirit of the young people who were taking part, but by their excellent turnout, their good bearing and steadiness on parade and their definite determination to put into it as much as they get out of it. They are an enormous credit to their service and to our country, as are all those who voluntarily give of their time for such work. That voluntary youth organisation provides many young people with a vital, unique opportunity to develop a wide range of personal qualities and skills such as leadership, self-respect, team work, responsibility and good citizenship while promoting a practical interest in aviation and the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): Will the communications that we debated earlier in the context of the Territorial Army, the auxiliaries and the reserves apply to the volunteer officers and instructors in the Air Cadet Force? Does might right hon. Friend agree that they have to have a viable means of communicating their views, and can he assure the House that that is part of what is being studied?

Mr. Soames: There has never been any problem about the cadets or the reserves communicating their views to the Ministry of Defence. There has always been a responsive chain of command and it has always represented with clarity and boldness the views of cadets and reserve forces at the centre of the Ministry's deliberations. The problem is not so much that their views are not heard: it is about priorities. The cadet forces do a great deal of good for the young people who are involved in them, and they contribute greatly to the life of the country. In addition, it is pro bono work and what flows from it is good for the country as a whole. Their remarkable skills are developed through participation in a wide range of activities, including adventure training and training in community skills such as first aid, many of which lead to nationally recognised qualifications. The first-aid classes that I saw at Haywards Heath were outstanding. The young people who were engaged in them will be well equipped to deal with anything that may fall into their laps.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made plain, the Government strongly wish to encourage membership of the cadet forces. We hope that more young people will take the opportunity to participate in such worthwhile activities and we shall strongly encourage that. I do not mean to finish my speech in a disagreeable way, but I will. It is my unfortunate duty to draw to the attention of the House and, I hope, a wider audience the gross inconsistencies in what Labour has been saying about defence. It is plain that Labour is committed to a defence review. I am not surprised that the Opposition's Front-Bench spokesman on defence is not here.

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): I had intended to open my speech by saying that my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), the shadow spokesman on defence, greatly regrets that he cannot be here because he has a serious bout of flu. I am sure that, on reflection, the Minister would not have raised the matter as he did if he had been aware of that.

Mr. Soames: I most certainly would. It is an extraordinary excuse to say that he cannot be here because he has flu. It is absolutely ridiculous. Time after time, my right hon. and hon. Friends come here reeking with flu, falling down with it, and take their places. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that he can be Secretary of State for Defence and not turn up because he has flu, he really has problems. The hon. Gentleman did not dare show his face, flu or no flu. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members chunter away, but they know perfectly well that that is an unacceptable excuse. Anyway, I was not told beforehand.

Labour is committed to a defence review, and the only possible reason for that is to find ways to cut the defence budget. In a careful and well reasoned article last week, *The Economist* got it right when it stated that the result of a Labour defence review would be a smaller defence budget and perhaps withdrawal of the British Army from Germany. That is a significant statement, and the House and the nation need to take it on board. People want to know where the cuts will be made. Last week, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence asked for assurances that a list of defence equipment projects that we have announced and to which we are committed would be exempt from Labour's review. In a fairy tale response in *The Daily Telegraph* of attractive, gilded rhetoric without substance, the Leader of the Opposition gave no assurance that the equipment orders would be safe from Labour's defence review.

[Mr. Soames]

Many of us read with utter disbelief that article by the Leader of the Opposition, a former fully paid-up member of CND. It was almost incredible and while Labour postures and poses with its completely unreal defence policy, it mocks the whole ethos of the armed forces with its left-wing obsessions which we know would come to the fore in the unlikely event of Labour ever being elected. Labour will never be able to understand that the armed forces need to be different. The speech by the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) a few days ago was a fraud and a sham because, as it stands, Labour's defence policy consists of a succession of formulae that are designed to enable people who profoundly disagree to persuade themselves that they are in total agreement. It will not wash and the country will not buy it because ordinary people know, as Conservatives know, that Labour old or new does not care about defence.

Mr. Spellar: That is rubbish.

Mr. Soames: The hon. Gentleman says that that is rubbish, but it is true because to Labour, defence is not a priority. Half the members of the Labour party are members of CND and are completely untrustworthy on defence. The concepts on which defence policy is made, and all the qualities that mark the services as being admirable, are wholly inimical to the politically correct nostrums and entirely contrary socialist left-wing beliefs. They are entirely alien to a socialist Labour party, old or new. Conservatives will never forget the spineless and craven folly of some current Opposition Members and their reckless and grotesque flirtation with CND and its fellow travellers. When it mattered, Labour bottled out and chucked in the sponge. If Labour had been in power in the 1980s, there would have been no cruise missiles and no Trident and there would have been serious consequences for our national security. The hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) may well squirm like a wounded squirrel. The hon. Gentleman's trial by fire is temporarily over until I unleash my hon. Friends upon him, with a judicious use of air power by my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans).

I am glad to report to the House that the Royal Air Force is in good heart. It has carried through the reconstruction necessary to take it to the next century. It is training hard and is very busy with operations intended to preserve international peace and security, provide humanitarian aid, and advance the United Kingdom's legitimate interests. It enjoys the great respect of its peers around the world—I would hazard a guess that the Royal Air Force is the benchmark by which all other air forces are judged. As my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement will describe in his closing speech, under this Government, it has a re-equipment programme that will maintain its position in years to come. We look forward to hearing what the hon. Member for Warley, West, to his shame, will say.

5.9 pm

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): Mr. Deputy Speaker, unashamed and unabashed, I rise to respond to 50 minutes of uncharacteristically reasonable discourse from the Minister of State. I thought that I might have to cut out some of the more offensive parts of my speech, but fortunately he indulged in five minutes of bogus outrage at the end of his speech. One would never suspect that, having claimed in its last election manifesto that the Labour party would cut defence spending by 27 per cent., the Conservatives went on to cut it by 31 per cent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid), who is responsible for personnel matters, informs me that there as been a 38 per cent. reduction in Royal Air Force personnel. The Government spent £500 million in one year on redundancy payments in the forces and another £100 million on recruitment. They still cannot get their figures right, and the service is 5,000 troops under strength. Perhaps the Minister's bogus outrage is good cover, good camouflage and good deception tactics in an attempt to divert attention from the Government's shameful record.

In the more presentable part of his speech, the Minister correctly paid tribute on behalf of the House to the professionalism, dedication and effectiveness of the Royal Air Force. We join him in recognising its contribution to the security of our nation and to peace around the globe. We also join him in paying warm tribute to Sir Frank Whittle, whose career demonstrates the importance of innovation in engineering to the operation of a successful Air Force. I am pleased to see the Minister wearing his demob suit today, in a further tribute to Sir Frank.

In opening for the Opposition in last year's RAF debate on 6 June, I mentioned that it was the third and last of the services debates in that Session. Surprisingly, the batting order has been changed this year. We understand why the Government could not hold the Navy debate, after the comments by the Secretary of State for Defence about the royal yacht and the embarrassment that he caused the Government. We understand also why the Government could not hold the Army debate, because of the shortfall in troops that is particularly serious in that service.

However, that does not explain why this debate was rushed forward—especially since the annual RAF briefing for hon. Members from both Houses is scheduled to take place next Monday. Were Ministers concerned that the RAF would raise questions that they would find difficult to answer? As a result of this early debate, many of the issues that we raised last year remain pertinent and this debate may repeat several elements of the last one.

In some cases, events have moved on. Last July, through all-party pressure—I pay tribute to the efforts of hon. Members on both sides of the House—we managed to force announcements on Nimrod and the missile contracts. However, it was a close-run thing, involving a last-minute debate—which did not turn out exactly as the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) had anticipated—a comprehensive clobbering of the hapless hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) and a flustered eleventh hour appearance by the Leader of the House. The announcements nearly did not happen, and their handling suggests that Ministers have little comprehension of the cost to industry of unnecessary contract delays or the resulting damage to export prospects.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman, and I thank him for giving way. While he is on the subject of damage to industry and the impact of new equipment on the RAF, will he give the House an absolutely straight answer tonight? Would a Labour Government include the future

of Eurofighter in their defence review? Will the hon. Gentleman give the House an undertaking that a Labour Government would not cancel Eurofighter—yes or no?

Mr. Spellar: I shall turn to Eurofighter in a moment. Does the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) believe that he is doing the Eurofighter cause any good by raising that question in Session after Session when Conservative Back Benchers have received comprehensive answers about it? He must understand that there are on-going debates in Germany, that fine decisions are being taken there, that difficulties are being faced, and that we may get a decision in March. In the light of those developments, does he think that it is helpful to try to generate confusion and uncertainty in the minds of our partners overseas?

It is now clear that this debate has been rushed forward for party political reasons. The hon. Gentleman is undermining the Eurofighter project and the national interest. My hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North responded to the Minister, who chose not to believe him—that is his right. My hon. Friend made clear our position on Eurofighter, and I shall clarify it further later. The hon. Gentleman must understand that he is not doing the industry any favours—unfortunately, he was not in the Chamber to hear the earlier exchange—by playing political games with the issue.

Mr. Mans: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we must send the right messages to the Germans about the future of that important European project at this critical time. The Secretary of State for Defence has said that we wish to proceed to the production investment phase. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that he could send a clear message to the Germans tonight by confirming that the Labour party would exclude Eurofighter from its defence review?

Mr. Spellar: The hon. Gentleman must accept that that issue was raised in the last two rounds of defence questions, and my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) and I responded to it. We agree that Eurofighter is vital if we are to meet the future requirements of our armed forces. That is why Labour has consistently backed the project, and why we recognise its importance for the future of our defence and our security needs in the 21st century. It is irresponsible for Conservative Members to try to create uncertainties in the electorate by attempting to undermine our position.

Mr. Nigel Evans: The hon. Gentleman will know that the project is vital to my constituents who are involved in the production of European fighter aircraft. Will he assure them that those aircraft would not be part of any future Labour Government review, and that the 230 aircraft that have been ordered would not be scaled down at any time under a Labour Government?

Mr. Spellar: The hon. Gentleman recognises that the Government have reduced the number of aircraft from 250 to 232. Let me make it clear: we are committed to the programme as it stands currently. We will order Eurofighter, provided that there is continuing agreement about work share and financial arrangements which are acceptable to the British Government and to British industry.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): This is a fudge.

Mr. Spellar: The hon. Lady must recognise that negotiations are currently proceeding with the German Government. That is the position of Ministers, and I have made clear the position of Her Majesty's Opposition who will take those decisions after the election.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. James Arbuthnot): No, the position is not clear. Would the hon. Gentleman exclude Eurofighter from a defence review—yes or no?

Mr. Spellar: The Minister is setting up Aunt Sallies and then being frightened by them. As he is aware, the issue may well arise before the defence review is completed. The question is therefore whether we will order Eurofighter when the decision must be taken, and I have given our response to that question. The Minister, quite wrongly, is creating an issue. The consequences of the position adopted by him and by other Conservative Members will be to encourage those in Germany who want to undermine Eurofighter, and they are playing a very serious game. They are playing that game not only over Eurofighter but over defence exports and British companies.

Some Conservative Back Benchers—to be fair to them—are making sterling efforts to reassure other countries that the scare stories being put around by the more irresponsible elements of the Conservative party are untrue. Those stories are undermining the British national interest, and they are desperate ploys by desperate men.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Does the hon. Gentleman not understand that his proposal for a review is causing instability in British industry? Does he not understand that?

Mr. Spellar: I do not, because it is not true. The matter is self-evidently a political ploy. We should now move on in this debate, because Conservative Members are obviously incapable of understanding our position, although I have expressed it in plain English. I have made our position on the Eurofighter clear in my statement, but that does not suit Conservative Members' party political purposes. It is a game played by those in a party which is so far behind in the opinion polls—*[Interruption.]* They are desperate to cling on to office, by their fingernails—*[Interruption.]* Those who work in the industry will fully understand their game.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I have been very tolerant, especially with the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans). The Minister made a 55-minute speech and was given a reasonable hearing; the shadow Minister must be given the same.

Mr. Spellar: I had to go out of sequence to deal with that issue—which Conservative Members could not wait

[Mr. Spellar]

to raise, so that they could make their party political broadcast. The excitement of following their central office brief was obviously too much to resist.

Last year, the Nimrod orders and missile contracts were a close-run matter, and created problems for industry. This year it has happened again, in the collapse of the Bowman competition—which was important in itself, but also to some of our leading defence contractors. It provides a case study in the limitations of the Government's narrow views of the procurement process. As consolidation inevitably occurs in the industry, that view will increasingly hamper British industry, until there is a change of philosophy. Given this Administration's stubborn resistance to change and Conservative Members' antics in the past few minutes, however, such change will occur only with a change of Government.

This debate also provides us with an opportunity to revisit the sale of the married quarters estate. In his reply, perhaps the Minister will tell us how much rent the Government anticipate they will pay for those properties this financial year, and how much they project will be paid in future years. Perhaps he will also tell us their estimates for movements in the cost of assured shorthold tenancies—an indicator that will set future rent levels—and the impact of those on defence expenditure.

After this week's press reports, will the Minister also tell us how much purchasers will make from the sale of surplus properties, so that we can assess—albeit retrospectively—whether it was a good deal for Britain and for our armed forces. Specifically, was it a good deal for the RAF, which generally had a much better standard of property? It might be instructive if, in his reply, the Minister tells us how much will be spent this year on additional upgrading of the estate, and how much will go to the RAF portion of the estate?

We have touched on the Eurofighter issue, but we should tie it in with the safety issue, which the Minister mentioned earlier in his speech. As he is aware—he alluded to it in his speech—concern has already been expressed in earlier debates and in the Select Committee at the number of fast jet crashes, and at the consequent cost in aircraft and, tragically, in human life. On those occasions, hon. Members spoke of the need for an overall inquiry to assess whether there are systemic problems, rather than simply to continue examinations to determine the cause of individual crashes.

Concern over safety must have been increased by figures in an article published in this weekend's *Scotland on Sunday*, to which I have drawn the Minister's office's attention. The article compared the RAF with the United States air force, and showed that, in the period 1992–96, RAF serious accident rates per flying hour were 80 per cent. higher than the USAF's. I realise that such data must be handled and examined extremely carefully, and I fully accept the need to examine like for like, but I think that we owe it to our air crews and to our taxpayers to examine whether we are sufficiently up to date with modern risk management.

We all recognise the superb skills, professionalism and dedication of those who serve in the RAF, but we need to be assured that they are aware of the best possible techniques and that they are not overstretched. That is especially true, as the Minister said, when we are dealing with the role of air power in power projection.

Mr. Soames: Will the hon. Gentlemen clarify exactly what he means about risk management? How does he think that current risk management should be altered, and what action does he think that he would take?

Mr. Spellar: That question demonstrates precisely why I say that the Minister should examine the subject and consider an inquiry into it. I am not a professional airman, any more than I am a professional engineer, and neither is the Minister. However, if the US air force believes that it has achieved its lower accident rate because of the scope of its risk management, surely we should examine its practice.

Mr. Bill Walker: I trust that the hon. Gentleman is aware that almost every air force in the world comes to the United Kingdom to train and to learn how we deal with accidents. Surely that indicates that we know what we are about?

Mr. Spellar: Equally, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will accept that if we can find ways in which to improve our record, we should do it. The Minister should not merely, in a cavalier fashion, disregard the proposal, which has been made not only by Opposition Members but, after hearing evidence from the RAF, by the Defence Select Committee. It is worth examining.

Mr. McWilliam: The hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) is quite right. People come from all over the world to learn how we deal with accidents—after they have happened. In the Select Committee, we discussed how to stop accidents happening.

Mr. Spellar *rose—*

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Spellar: Yes.

Mr. Colvin: I thank the hon. Gentleman. I should like to make one other point. One has to be careful about knocking copy from countries outside the United Kingdom, especially from the United States. I recall that when the Harrier, or AV8B, first went into service in the United States, there were many comments about a higher rate of crashes. The answer was quite simple: the aircraft was so popular with American pilots that they were flying it two and a half times more than they were flying their own aircraft.

Mr. Spellar: The figures that I quoted were to do with relative flying hours, and were therefore calculated on a ratio. I take the hon. Gentleman's point. As I said, we must be very careful with the data. We must examine the data and ensure that we are comparing like with like, but we should not disregard it. It has been obvious throughout the Minister's ministerial career that he is not interested in data or in evidence, whether it is on BSE or on matters with which he now deals. Evidence is not his strong point, although bluster and bravado certainly are.

The Minister, like the rest of us, will have seen press reports on the options for airborne heavy lift, and we all know that the Defence Select Committee is currently considering the entire matter of heavy lift. The Statement on the Defence Estimates states:

"we continue to work with partner nations and industry to establish a satisfactory basis for the United Kingdom to rejoin the European Future Large Aircraft project."

Only last month, the Defence Secretary reaffirmed that

"all three countries, including ourselves, have expressed great interest in the Future Large Aircraft."

We also understand that the current aim is to encourage Airbus to design and build a suitable military transport aircraft. Indeed, it is widely believed in the industry that the criteria set by the Secretary of State in December 1994 as preconditions for Britain entering the programme have largely been met by the Airbus industrial partners and Alenia.

Will the Minister explain the current thinking on the need for a British and European capability for strategic airlift compared with continuing dependence on the US air force? If not, how does he envisage procuring or leasing the aircraft, and what are the implications for the European aircraft industry and international sales?

While dealing with new projects, will the Minister comment on the ASTOR programme, a matter raised by the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson), which, with the prospect of NATO-wide procurement, has considerable export implications? Will he tell us when he expects a decision, or at least an interim announcement, to be made on that programme?

We all recognise the importance of exports to our defence industry. The Opposition greatly welcome the recently announced success of our defence industry in cornering a quarter of the world's defence market last year. It is a tribute to the innovative capacity of the companies involved and the skills of their work force and, let us be frank, the involvement of the Defence Export Services Organisation—DESO—and, on a number of occasions, of Ministers.

The main concern is how much of that success depends on research and development work that was undertaken 10, 15 or even 20 years ago. We must be concerned about whether a similar programme is being carried out now and backed by the Government to ensure a similar pattern of success in years to come. We must also look to broaden our markets beyond the one very important customer, which is the key to so much of our export achievement. These are exports not only of equipment, which tends to make the headlines, but of many services.

As I visit defence plants around the country, sometimes stalked by the Secretary of State who turns up the week before, I hear endlessly about the difficulties of getting skilled and qualified workers. Those we have are recognised as world class but we must build on that strength, not dissipate it.

We must also realise how the lay-offs and redundancies of the last few years have scarred the work force. We recognise that across the world the aerospace industry and the forces have faced the problems of adjustment to the end of the cold war. However, those affected have to be sure that the people in charge have used their best endeavours to ease the pain. I am not sure that the work force or the management at Marshall's of Cambridge will feel very warmly about the circumstances in which they lost the TriStar repair contract. My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) will, I hope, be able to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to deal with the situation in more depth. In any event, I should like the Minister to say how much he is saving by the change. When did Gulf Air enter the competition? Who will bear the cost of flying the TriStars to the Gulf? What assessment has he made of the effect on surge capability? Suffice to say, we expect, and receive, long-term loyalty, commitment and service from our contractors. The Ministry of Defence should recognise that that needs to be reciprocated—loyalty is a two-way street.

While we are considering matters of confusion, will the Minister update the House on the transfer of air traffic control from West Drayton? How much did the MOD estimate that the transfer would cost, what was the actual potential cost, why was the contract not procured as a whole, and what adjustments will have to be made to military procedures to accommodate the move from West Drayton now that the original proposals cannot be implemented?

The Minister mentioned the Joint Service Command and Staff college at the beginning of his speech, and although his comments about Shrivenham may or may not be true, I was surprised that it took the MOD so long to come to its conclusion. If it is such an excellent and possibly even a self-evident conclusion, why did it take so long to reach it? Perhaps the Select Committee on Defence or the Public Accounts Committee would like to examine the catalogue of events.

In reply to a written question in March 1995, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces said that all the responses to the consultation process had

"received the most careful and sympathetic scrutiny, and I have thoroughly reviewed the costings associated with our proposal"—

Dr. Reid: Was it Shrivenham?

Mr. Spellar: Contrary to what my hon. Friend may believe, it was not Shrivenham. He is anticipating my next point.

The Minister's response continued:

"no significant arguments have emerged, nor have any new suggestions been made which have caused us to alter our original proposals. The costings continue to demonstrate that Camberley is the most cost effective option.

I can therefore confirm that we shall establish the Joint Service Command and Staff college at Camberley, and that we plan to open it and close the colleges at Bracknell and Greenwich in late 1997."—[*Official Report*, 30 March 1995; Vol. 257, c. *744*.]

We now come to February 1996. In reply to a question from a Conservative Back Bencher—one therefore presumes that the Government wanted to give this information—the Minister said:

"We intend to dispose of the Bracknell site by the end of 1999.

The work so far has shown that Camberley is the most cost-effective and appropriate Ministry of Defence site for the college."—[*Official Report*, 6 February 1996; Vol. 271, c. *169*.]

By 12 February, however, there was a slight warning rattle for Camberley. In response to a written question from my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), the Minister said:

"the conclusion that Camberley is the most cost-effective and appropriate of the sites examined remains robust."

[Mr. Spellar]

The word "robust" may enter the political annals as a warning sign, alongside the word "unassailable" when applied to Chancellors—or, since Tuesday, is it now "infallible"? A similar word I found in the defence estimates was the word "challenging" in the context of a completion date of Project Horizon—as in, "We always thought that the date 2002 was challenging." That word is another warning sign to which colleagues should be alert.

The Minister's same answer of 12 February continued:

"We have examined Queen Elizabeth Park barracks at Guildford and the royal military academy Sandhurst as possible options for an interim site for the JSCSC as well as split site options, but work to date indicates that RAF Bracknell is likely to be the most appropriate and cost-effective temporary site."—[*Official Report*, 12 February 1996; Vol. 271, c. *443*.]

That answer was also rather instructive on how much it is all costing. I shall not bore hon. Members with the minor details, but the answer states that detailed work to develop JSCSC proposals at Camberley is costing £328,000. There is no mention of Shrivenham.

On 2 May 1996, the Minister said in reply to a written question that work remained on schedule for the new Joint Service Command and Staff college

"to open at Bracknell in September 1997 and immediate next steps include formal planning consultation with the local authority."—[*Official Report*, 2 May 1996; Vol. 276, c. *579*.]

It refers later to disposal plans.

Then, out of the blue, came an answer to the hon. Member for Ruislip–Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) to the effect that the college will be at Shrivenham. If that is the case, why have we had all the arguments about Greenwich, Camberley and Bracknell and the suggestions, made by hon. Members who know the situation better than I, about a joint site at Bracknell and Camberley? How much have we spent on this whole fiasco?

It has been a saga of incompetence, although one would never have known it from the Minister's introduction to the debate. However, it is clear from the texts that I have read out that no one had a clue. It was clear when my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) was detailing various problems; it was clear during the debates on the Armed Forces Act 1996; and it is even clearer now. Perhaps the Minister who is to reply to the debate can give a better explanation for this sorry string of events.

We have mentioned some of the ploys that are surfacing in the hectic lead-in to the general election. Indeed, the Minister referred to the leak about a massive expansion of the cadet force. I hope that he can give a clearer account of the Government's intentions, but the way the issue has been dealt with is rather unfortunate. The general view in the House is that the cadet force performs a valuable role for the services and for society as a whole. Indeed, I thought that the Minister of State for the Armed Forces spoke movingly about that, but wild-eyed £1 billion schemes tend to detract from proposals for sensible expansion. I must say that some of the claimed merits of the cadet force that were trumpeted in the press seem slightly over-exaggerated to those of us who were in the CCF. It was good fun and good experience—

Mr. Bill Walker: I trust that the hon. Gentleman understands that the CCF is a tiny part of the cadet organisation. The Air Training Corps, for example, has squadrons throughout the community which could be expanded without any of the difficulties that he and others may foresee.

Mr. Spellar: As I rightly indicated, we support a reasonable, sensible and steady expansion, but not the attempt to have a cadet force in every school. As I am sure the hon. Gentleman will realise from his experience, the forces would not be able to handle such an expansion effectively, and nor would they wish to do so. We should not overdo the merits of the cadet forces, but we should recognise the contributions that the cadet forces can make, in their various manifestations, to forces intake and to society.

We should also recognise that the cadet force is not the only way in which young people, especially young men, can gain experience and make the transition into the adult world. Another route is the tradition of apprenticeships which has taken a battering from Government policies, especially in the MOD where so much work has been outsourced. No attempt has been made to maintain the level of apprenticeships or to guarantee the skills of the work force of the future. The result is a country with a shortage of skilled workers and an army of disaffected youth, but they will have their say soon.

Mr. Mans: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the RAF's apprentice scheme was designed to produce apprentices who would become senior, high-quality non-commissioned officers later in their careers. The RAF is not cutting technical training. It is providing technical training for 17 and 18-year-olds and it is also providing leadership training as their careers develop. With that information, will the hon. Gentleman modify slightly his latter comments about trained personnel in the Air Force?

Mr. Spellar: The hon. Gentleman is missing the point. I was talking about the outsourcing of work to other companies which did not have a requirement to maintain apprenticeships. In an apprenticeship, young people learn a skill that enables them to be useful, productive and earning members of society. In some cases, they also have an effective role model—for the first time—in the skilled person with whom they are working. They have to work as part of a team and develop the social skills and discipline that may have been lacking. Apprenticeships provide a framework for young people to mature and move into adulthood, and that should not be disregarded. The cadet force plays a useful role, but it is not the only way to ensure that our young people get the chance to become useful members of society.

The young people who have been disadvantaged and dispossessed by the Government will shortly have a chance to have their say, and I can say with assurance that this is the last RAF debate before the election. The new Government look forward to working with the RAF, the defence manufacturers and the work force to build on past achievements and to develop a working partnership for an even more successful future.

5.43 pm

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): While the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) has been a defence spokesman, he has learned that attack is the best

form of defence. After the battering he got at the end of the speech by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, he was right to come out with his head down. The hon. Gentleman suggested that there might be a sinister reason for having our debate on the Royal Air Force today. I believe that we shall have our debate on the Army soon and I hope that we shall have the opportunity to debate all three services before the general election. The Defence Select Committee is undertaking three inquiries—on defence budget funding, on heavy lift and on defence medical services—all of which merit a debate in the Chamber.

The hon. Member for Warley, West raised the issue of the tri-service staff college. The Liaison Committee is currently reviewing the powers and the role of our Select Committees and we have found that sometimes it is difficult—now that many departmental duties are conducted by agencies or, as in the case of the tri-service staff college, under the private finance initiative—to obtain the figures that would enable us to assess whether a decision is cost-effective. Sometimes the figures are described as commercially confidential and we cannot have them.

The role of Select Committees and their relationship with the Public Accounts Committee is also important. The Select Committees would become defunct if money issues were considered only by the Public Accounts Committee. That is not what was intended, but the Public Accounts Committee has existed for so long that it has adopted that role. The House would benefit if some of its duties were passed to the specific departmental Select Committees, because that would give us more power to scrutinise, for example, the cost-effectiveness of the tri-service staff college.

Mr. McWilliam: As a member of the Defence Select Committee, I know that the problem is not so much the way that the Select Committees were set up but the Armstrong doctrine, which was introduced to hamper Select Committees and which has no basis in any motion passed by the House.

Mr. Colvin: That is a useful conclusion to my remarks on the subject.

On a lighter note, I was intrigued by the throwaway description of Opposition Front Benchers as squirrels by my hon. Friend the Minister of State. I wondered whether they were red squirrels or grey squirrels. As we know, the red squirrel is being driven out by the grey squirrel and that may be what is happening politically. Opposition Members are probably grey squirrels on the outside, but many are still red squirrels on the inside.

Nobody could deny that my hon. Friend the Minister brings a certain style to the Dispatch Box. I congratulate him on the deft and generous way in which he dealt with questions about defence procurement. It would be most uncharacteristic of him to shoot the fox of my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement and he avoided doing so on this occasion.

I endorse the tributes that have been paid by both sides of the House to the late Sir Frank Whittle, the inventor of the jet engine, whose work hastened the end of the second world war. I recall driving up a road in Kent chased by a V1, which was itself being pursued by a jet fighter and, had it not been for the jet fighter, the doodlebug would have got me. The ability of our jet fighters to match and exceed the speed of the V1 was an important factor when it was unleashed on the civilian population by Nazi Germany in the dying gasps of that regime.

Although barely eight months have passed since we debated the Royal Air Force, such debates are important in the run-up to a general election because our deliberations might have some influence on the contents of the parties' manifestos on the key subject of the defence of the realm—the first duty of every Government. I do not mean just the defence of the United Kingdom. This country has interests and investments all over the world. We are a bigger investor in the United States of America than are Japan or Germany and we have influence worldwide. It is important that our defence capabilities have the worldwide reach to which my hon. Friend the Minister referred.

We also have a permanent seat on the Security Council of the United Nations and we were a founder member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. As a background to the debate, it is important to consider the future development of NATO. It could be said to have accomplished its mission—the ending of the cold war. It is undergoing dramatic restructuring and reorganisation. It has 65 headquarters scattered around the world. At the Madrid summit this summer, the important issue of the enlargement of NATO will be discussed.

Since 1989, all NATO member states have cut their armed forces and their defence budgets, both in money terms and as a percentage of gross domestic product. We have had the upheavals of "Options for Change" and "Front Line First" in this country. At the same time, the Ministry of Defence has preserved our ability to mount high-intensity warfare, which is what it is all about.

We cannot win battles without air supremacy. That is why this debate is important. It is logical for the first armed forces debate of the year to be on the Royal Air Force. I endorse what my hon. Friend the Minister said about air supremacy in the Gulf war, in which its importance was displayed.

The collapse of communism and the totalitarian regimes of central and eastern Europe has brought chaos and uncertainty, as well as a certain amount of fear in most of those countries about what will happen in Russia. The Russian people are also frightened about what will happen in the west. They have been indoctrinated for years. They still regard us in the west as the enemy and do not trust us. The central and eastern European countries between the western NATO powers and Russia are in a precarious position.

Nowhere is that more apparent than in the Baltic states—particularly Estonia and Latvia—and Ukraine, in all of which ethnic Russians amount to almost one third of the population. If any countries are vulnerable, it is they. We have already seen Belarus essentially reincorporated into the federation of Russian states. Most attention will now focus on what happens to Ukraine. I well understand the Russian desire for a special treaty with NATO. I am sure that that will be high on the agenda of the NATO heads of state at the Madrid summit.

There could also be a case for a special treaty of a different nature between NATO and Ukraine. Ukraine must never be seen by the Russians as a buffer between it and the western powers. It must be seen as a bridge between the two. The more we trade with the central and

[Mr. Colvin]

eastern European countries, the more trust will be built up, the stronger their economies will become and the better they will be able to defend themselves and reassure their people that the changes resulting from perestroika and glasnost are worth while and not a danger. That is the background for our debate.

A great deal is made of the dangers of the growth of Islamic fundamentalism, but I am not convinced that it is such a great threat as people make out. There seems to be a crescent of crisis from Afghanistan to the western Sahara, but Islamic fundamentalism is probably more of a danger to the countries in which those regimes come to power than to their neighbours. Trouble between one country and another can be found, but fundamentalist countries do not seem to have a desire to invade Europe.

There is a danger in the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction by such countries. The proliferation of those weapons from the former Soviet Union to the countries along the north African coast is of considerable concern, particularly if they are able to put chemical or biological warheads on them. A Scud missile fired from north Africa could reach the heart of most central European cities. That is one good reason why we must never relinquish our nuclear deterrent, which deters people from taking such pot shots at us.

Mr. Wilkinson: My hon. Friend made a most important point about potential threats and referred to the crescent of crisis in the Islamic world. Is it not therefore particularly important that we pursue our studies into ballistic missile defence in depth, assiduously and with some urgency? A ballistic missile attack on Europe could be launched from that crescent of crisis—Iraq and the littoral and Mahgreb countries—if there were a decisive change to an aggressive form of dictatorship in any of those countries.

Mr. Colvin: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Select Committee has addressed that issue and made recommendations. The question is whether the European countries do the development work on anti-ballistic missile defence systems themselves or in concert with our American allies. I believe that transatlantic co-operation on this is a must because of the enormous costs and it is a good way to continue the development of the two-way street in the exchange of technology and manufacture between us and our most important allies, the United States of America.

Another factor to bear in mind in the current overall security situation is the re-election of an American president for a second term. Whatever one may think about President Clinton's politics, the fact is that American presidents in their second term become much more internationalist. They are less concerned with the domestic situation and re-election, because they cannot be elected for a third term. An American president in his second term goes all out to leave behind a record in the history books as an international statesman who did his bit to improve the condition of people worldwide.

President Clinton has already established the Partnership for Peace—a well-conceived proposal that gives countries that want to join NATO an opportunity to get a toe in the door. It has worked effectively and we must pay credit to President Clinton for it. Over the next few years, the United States of America will become more internationalist in outlook and its president will take a more active role in international affairs.

Although the NATO countries will be debating enlargement this year, the enlargement of the European Union is equally important from a security point of view, not because we need a common policy on security, defence or foreign affairs, but simply because, the faster we enlarge, the less danger there is of European institutions becoming too deep—something that we do not want. Enlargement will also allow the economies of central and eastern European countries to develop faster, enabling them to defend themselves as they want.

In 1975, when we were debating the Common Market during the referendum campaign, I recall being told by a history master in a secondary school in Andover that the entire future of the Common Market boiled down to one point. He said, "When you trade, you have peace and when trade breaks down, you have war." That is why the speed with which we need to reform the common agricultural policy is so important. We cannot enlarge the European Union to the east until we have reformed the CAP. The faster that is done the better, because there is an important security component to the enlargement of the European Union. It is against that background that we debate the RAF today.

The report by the Select Committee on Defence on last summer's statement on the defence estimates contained the latest results of the Committee's inquiry into front-line forces. I shall outline the main points that we made in respect of the RAF.

In paragraph 43, we concluded that, last July, the RAF was just about meeting its commitments while going through a considerable period of change and that the "Options for Change" drawdown would cease to be an adequate explanation for uncertainty in the RAF after April 1997. We looked forward to the resumption of tests of operational effectiveness after 1 April 1997. We hoped that after that, the RAF would be able to benefit from a greater measure of stability before the introduction of the Eurofighter in 2001—it will now be 2002—and the withdrawal from Germany in 2002 brought new elements of change. That is now happening.

Perhaps my hon. Friend can tell us when he replies to the debate whether the RAF will resume the TACEVAL—or tactical evaluation—tests of operational effectiveness in March. Moreover, with redundancies being completed by April, there should now be signs of stability and improved morale in the RAF.

In paragraph 51, we concluded that the fact that RAF aircraft were being used for operations was no excuse for the low rates of serviceability—that is what they are for. We said that the fact that average serviceability rates have declined must mean that the higher rates of serviceability for aircraft on operational deployment must be matched by significantly lower rates for aircraft based in Germany and the United Kingdom. We accepted that recent problems with the Tornado engines had affected serviceability, but we concluded that they did not account for the long-term decline. We thought that the experience should be recalled if the RAF ever again considered saving money by cutting spares or further reductions in uniformed manpower. We were also concerned about the number of aircraft losses in 1996—a subject that has been mentioned today.

The House will expect an assurance from my hon. Friend that fast jet serviceability has now improved after the problems with spares and the RB199 engine. I hope that the lesson has been learnt about the effect of cutting spending on spares.

In paragraph 73, we again recommended that the RAF published targets of turbulence that are relevant to the conditions of service and the frequency of absence from home. We referred to the effects on recruitment, morale and retention in the armed forces.

The Government's reply to the Select Committee's report eventually contained published measures of turbulence: personnel should not have to spend more than 140 days away from the home station per year, aggregated over two years. The Committee welcomed the publication of that standard. At first sight, it does not appear too rigorous: there cannot be many RAF personnel who spend more than 20 weeks a year away from their home bases. The Committee will be asking for details of compliance with that new standard.

Only yesterday, the Committee visited one of the smallest, newest and most innovative RAF units—the military district hospital unit at Peterborough—as part of our inquiry into defence medical services. I hope that we shall shortly be able to report to the House on secondary care in the armed forces following the implementation of defence costs study No. 15, which has attracted considerable criticism.

At Peterborough, we saw how the largely RAF-manned MDHU, which was set up only a year ago, is operating within an national health service hospital. We were given an interesting tour of the facilities and were most impressed with the calibre and dedication of the RAF doctors, nurses and technicians. They have set up a new facility in a hospital with no direct military connection and appear to be doing well. We were concerned by the loss of military ethos, however, despite the link with RAF Wittering, which is only 14 miles away. The Committee's report will also contain comments on morale and staff retention at Peterborough and the other three military hospitals.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State referred to the importance of the reserves. The Royal Army Medical Corps units in the Territorial Army provide an important backup to the Army's medical services, some of them organised as field hospitals. The Royal Auxiliary Air Force, which is far smaller than the Territorial Army, has no such ethos, but there could be a case for improving recruitment into the Royal Auxiliary Air Force concentrating not on flying, but on medical services. There must be plenty of people who served in the RAF and may now be working in the national health service who would welcome the opportunity to join the Royal Auxiliary Air Force in a medical capacity. That might provide the reserves that we would require if we had fully to mobilise and provide the number of field hospitals that are required under our establishment figures.

Debates on the RAF are traditionally a series of litanies of arguments why more money should be spent on equipment. That is why I congratulate the Government on finding £9,000 million—nearly half the total defence budget—for purchasing equipment, including £1,500 million to be spent on aircraft systems. We were pleased to see the decisions on the replacement maritime patrol aircraft, the conventionally-armed stand off missile and the anti-armour weapon.

On Eurofighter, we welcomed the United Kingdom's announcement last September about production. Members of the Select Committee have done our best to persuade our opposite numbers in the Germany and Italian Parliaments to persuade their Governments to follow suit. The sooner that happens, the better.

Let me make a quick comment on heavy lift, which the Defence Committee is investigating at the moment. The Government are considering whether to rejoin the European future large aircraft programme. The aircraft represents a considerable increase in capability from the current fleet of Hercules C-130Ks and the C-130Js now coming into service. The ability rapidly to transport into the theatre heavy equipment such as support helicopters, armoured vehicles and engineering equipment has become more important in the light of the formation of the joint rapid deployment force last August.

The FLA will provide that capability, as would the American C-17. No decision on procurement is required yet, but it would be right to demonstrate greater commitment to the project at this stage, partly to influence its development, but also to assist British industry in its efforts to gain a significant proportion of the construction work. The formation of Airbus Military will help the development of that aircraft.

The Select Committee also received an excellent presentation from the Society of British Aerospace Companies on the foresight action technology programme. In his reply to the debate, will my hon. Friend confirm that the MOD is committed to spending £20 million on that programme? The potential applications for the RAF include projects on the powered wing, flight crew environment, advanced fuselage and guided weapons. I understand that the DTI has shown some reluctance to participate and may be holding up the programme. That would be very regrettable.

This spring we see the retirement of Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Graydon as Chief of Air Staff, a post that he has held since 1992, through the very difficult years of reduction in the size of his service. I think that the House would want to pay tribute to his achievements and to extend its best wishes to him in his retirement, and its best wishes to his successor, Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Johns, who will lead the 65,000 men and women who make up the world's best air force: the Royal Air Force.

6.9 pm

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): Although it is some time since I have spoken in a defence debate, sitting on these Benches the years seem to melt away, and very little has changed.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: The arguments have not changed.

Mr. O'Neill: As the hon. and learned Gentleman says, the arguments have not changed. One thing that has changed, though, is that *The Daily Telegraph* is prepared to allow my right hon. Friend the leader of the Labour party space in its columns to write what it said was

"a reasonably intelligent sixth-form essay",

which is perhaps being damned with faint praise. Even such an essay is considerably better than the Minister's Bunteresque GCSE performance today.

[Mr. O'Neill]

It is irresponsible to try to create artificial divides on an issue such as defence. While the Minister of State for the Armed Forces was making a mess of agricultural policy in his former post, some of us were trying to work with the Government and other parties in the House and in Europe in insisting that the Eurofighter was an essential part of the defence—in those days—of western Europe and that it was important to have a proper capability in Europe. It is irresponsible to try to undermine the bipartisan unity that was achieved when people in Germany and Italy are ready to seize on any sign of weakness on the British side.

It is significant that the editorial in *The Daily Telegraph* that accompanied my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition's article made the point that the article made little reference to the Eurofighter; it is important that it also referred to the need for a reconsideration of our defence priorities. When there is a clear understanding, as there is today, that a Labour Government will order 232 Eurofighters, as the Government are intending to do, it is irresponsible to suggest that a party expecting to come to power—we may not, but if we do—is not entitled, as any incoming Government would be, to reconsider its priorities.

The Conservatives had such a review in "Options for Change", when the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) was Secretary of State for Defence. He looked at the threats, the capabilities and the roles that we had to fulfil as a country. Labour Members did not agree with his methodology. Indeed, that is perhaps one of the reasons why the Labour party persists in arguing that there should be a defence review. It would be irresponsible of any party that says that it is necessary to have a review not to take account in that review of capabilities. The capabilities will include 232 Eurofighter aircraft because Labour Members are committed to that. We have been committed to it from the outset because we recognise that it is wrong to put our men into the air in aircraft that are out of date and not the best creation to which British manufacturing can make a major contribution.

Mr. Bill Walker: Let me make it quite clear that I do not doubt the hon. Gentleman's integrity. I remember when he was a member of the shadow defence team. Why did the yardstick that he is describing not apply to the TSR2? He will understand why Conservative Members are apprehensive.

Mr. O'Neill: The TSR2 was a source of disappointment to many in the services—probably when the hon. Gentleman was serving in them. I do not think that what happened then is in any way similar to the Eurofighter or that the instances are in any way parallel. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman has asked me a question. He may not like my answer, but I shall give it to him. I do not think that the example of the TSR2 is necessarily comparable.

Mr. Mans *rose—*

Mr. O'Neill: I want to make progress. My comments so far are not the purpose of my speech. I do not think that we need to talk about the matter in quite such a vein 33 years on. I suppose that we could almost argue that, 33 years before the TSR2, Ramsay MacDonald's Government could have been accused, due to their economic difficulties, of doing things in the defence budget.

Lady Olga Maitland: I am left in complete confusion. I would be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would clarify his remarks, since the matter has not been clarified by his colleagues. Is he or is he not advocating that the Eurofighter will be in the strategic defence review? Does he support the ordering of 232 such aircraft, or is that order now open to being cut?

Mr. O'Neill: I have not participated in a defence debate with the hon. Lady before, although I recall that when I was doing the work in which my hon. Friends on the Front Bench are engaged, she was pushing prams for peace, or something like that. Perhaps she just has difficulty understanding things. I shall explain again very simply. With the exception of the point about the TSR2, the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker), with whom I have crossed swords on many occasions, would have made it clear if he had not understood.

My understanding is straightforward. The Labour party is committed to sustaining the order for 232 Eurofighters, a defence review and the fact that any kind of defence review must take account of what we have, what we are to have, our capabilities and how we deploy it against the threats.

I recognise that the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) does not know any more about defence and strategic thinking than would cover the back of a postage stamp, so think that we should make progress. The point that I was making is that it is important that we do not send our airmen into the air in aircraft that are not properly tested and equipped.

I want to speak primarily about the Chinook helicopter crash in June 1994 on the Mull of Kintyre. On board were 25 of the most senior members of the British intelligence community and a four-man aircrew, all of whom were from the RAF's special forces. The crash was recently the subject of a "Cutting Edge" documentary, which raised a number of questions, some of which have already been raised in another place by Lord Chalfont and others. I think that the families of two of the airmen—and, I would imagine, the families of the pilots and the two other crew members, as well as the other 25 people—would like to try to clear up the matter.

I raise the issue because there seems to be a contradiction. An inquiry was carried out, during which the president of the board of inquiry judged that he was not ready to criticise the pilots for human failings. That view was overturned, yet it was also contrary to the opinion expressed by Sir Stephen Young, the sheriff in charge of the fatal accident inquiry. A fatal accident inquiry is a feature of Scots law. It is not carried out in the English legal system, where such a matter would be the subject of a coroner's court.

The inquiry was rigorous. It was suggested at the beginning that Sir Stephen, as a civilian and, therefore, a layman in such matters, might not understand the intricacies of the technical matters involved, but it is fair to say that, by the end of the inquiry, no one who reported it or was present was in any doubt about the sheriff's mastery of his subject.

When Sir Stephen completed his findings, he made it clear that as far as he was concerned there was no proof that the pilots were to blame. That raises a question in the minds of the public, and especially in the minds of the families.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: If I may say so, the hon. Gentleman is giving a lucid explanation of the role of the fatal accident inquiry in Scots law, particularly of the role of the sheriff, Sir Stephen Young. Is he aware—I think he will be—that in a fatal accident inquiry all interested parties are entitled to be represented, so the evidence upon which the sheriff draws his conclusion has been open to cross-examination by every party, every department and every institution with an interest in the outcome of the inquiry?

Mr. O'Neill: I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman. I should happily step back from his expertise in such matters and give him the Floor, because he is a distinguished member of the Scottish Bar. What I have to say about the evidence will become more apparent in a minute or two.

First, I shall set the scene. The Chinooks had been in service for several years, Boeing had just refitted them to make them into mark 2s, and they were being brought into commission at the time. I have heard on authority from the families that, in telephone conversations with the pilots, the crew were not happy about the flightworthiness of the craft that they were to handle.

The crew had access to manuals containing flight limitation documents. Normally, such documents outline scenarios in which the craft in question could be in trouble, but in this instance the Chinook manual stated only that such details were to be issued. We must ask why the pilots were flying aircraft without that potentially crucial information. How could they be considered grossly incompetent when they had no access to the information?

As I understand it, test pilots had grounded the craft on numerous occasions in the days before the crash, which included the very day before the crash. Five days beforehand, the same aircraft had demonstrated control system problems, including "undemanded engine shutdown" and "spurious engine fail captions".

Given the documented evidence of several serious technical problems with the mark 2, can the RAF really be so sure that there were no problems during the flight in question? I gave the Minister notice of some of the points that I intended to raise, so I hope that he will be able to respond to my questions.

The RAF still ordered the craft to be used, albeit with certain restrictions, such as height restrictions. Flight Lieutenant Tapper had asked for a mark 1 aircraft to be placed on standby because he was worried, and not certain that the craft could do the job. The RAF refused to make such a craft available.

As hon. Members will be aware, this type of aircraft does not carry a black box recorder. The Chinook carried only the TANS navigation equipment—provided by Racal, I believe. The manufacturers do not regard it as equipment that can be used as reliable evidence in such cases, but it appears that, in the absence of anything else, the RAF based at least some of the inquiry's conclusions on the TANS evidence. We need to know whether the Minister regards the information that was used as sufficient to provide what was apparently the sole basis of that extreme decision.

There would be two other crew members on such flights—the loadmasters, whose job it is to monitor the flight and advise if necessary. Those two were also part of the RAF special forces. One would have imagined that they would see a mountain coming up in plenty of time to warn the pilots, but the RAF concluded that they would not have been aware of the situation and that no blame could be placed on them. The television programme implied that the RAF considered them quite unimportant; I do not know whether the loadmasters would have agreed.

New or, rather, refitted aircraft were being brought into service, perhaps in too great a hurry. Perhaps there was an over-anxiety to use what was considered the best possible kit—the best possible equipment available for one of the most important group of passengers that the RAF was ever likely to carry.

We all know that the people in the Chinook were at the very heart of security and intelligence operations in Northern Ireland. Indeed, the immediate reaction to the crash was to ask whether the aircraft had been the subject of hostile action, because so many vital cogs in the Northern Ireland security machine were in one place at one time.

We are entitled to ask why so many vital personnel were concentrated in one aircraft. Given that there was no mark 1 there, as had been requested, was the aircraft in question the only one available? That raises questions about the way in which the business was handled. Certainly there are questions that were raised by the board of inquiry, but were not really resolved.

The board of inquiry report discussed possible technical failures. Paragraph 35d says:

"Nevertheless, an unforeseen technical malfunction of the type being experienced by the Chinook HC2, which would not necessarily have left any physical evidence, remained a possibility, and could not be discounted."

Paragraph 48 discusses the final few seconds of the flight, and there we read such phrases as "most likely track", "estimated final track", and

"It could not be proven that the aircraft flew in a straight line . . . to the point of impact".

Other points could be raised. Indeed, in paragraph 61 of his summary, the president of the board stated:

"The Board based its findings on logical argument derived from the limited evidence . . . There were many potential causes of the accident and . . . the Board was unable to determine a definite cause . . . the Board could not avoid a degree of speculation".

That was the board's decision, but it was subsequently overturned when the matter went further up the chain of command.

Despite the fact that it is suggested that the aircraft was serviceable at the time of the crash, the investigator from the air accidents investigation branch says on page 1 of his report:

"The pre-impact serviceability of the aircraft could not be positively verified".

On subsequent pages the report says:

"the possibility of control system jam could not be positively dismissed . . . most of the attachment inserts on both flight control system pallets had detached . . . with little evidence to eliminate the possibility of pre-impact detachment".

[Mr. O'Neill]

Those are matters that appear in the written evidence. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East has already pointed out that, in the public court hearings, a range of issues were the subject of consideration—indeed, of the kind of nit-picking detailed consideration that is a feature of such inquiries, in which counsel on both sides wish to ensure that their cases are heard to the fullest extent.

I imagine that no expense or effort was spared. Such was the importance and significance of the inquiry—because of the number of people involved and their significance in security terms—it was vital that the truth be reached. As far as the truth could be reached, the sheriff said that these men could not be culpable. That view was held by the board of inquiry, but when the report went to the final stage of consideration, it was overturned. The families are entitled to know the circumstances in which the report was overturned and why greater weight was placed on the internal report than on the proceedings of a Scottish court.

Two young men had great careers in front of them, and their families now have only the memory of what they achieved in their lives. They also have the distressing and worrying thought that their names may never be cleared because a court of inquiry said one thing while the board of inquiry said something else. Richard Cook and Jonathan Tapper deserve better than they have had, and they probably deserved better equipment than they had to fly. No criticism is made of their professionalism, as they raised questions and echoed the doubts shared by an awful lot of their comrades.

This House is entitled to answers to at least some of these questions. I understand that—for a variety of reasons—we will never get to the bottom of the matter. We know that, because of its security significance, people were going over the ground with a fine-toothed comb for 48 hours after the crash. We know that the accident investigators were not allowed in for 48 hours. That is understandable, but again it raises questions about the nature of the certainty that the Ministry of Defence now seems to have. My understanding is that people are not accused of gross negligence if there is a scintilla of doubt. As far as I can see, there was at least a scintilla of doubt in the mind of the sheriff, and more than a scintilla of doubt in the minds of the individuals involved in the preliminary treatment of the inquiry.

This is one of the few opportunities that we get in the House—short of an Adjournment debate—to raise a matter like this. I do so because I happen to be friendly with the father of one of the young men involved. I have no constituency interest in the crash, which did not occur in my part of Scotland. But for the peace of mind of the families, for the young men's comrades, and for the people who continue to fly these aircraft, we are entitled to know if there were lessons to be learnt and, if so, whether they have been put into practice.

Perhaps most important, we need to know why these young men have been singled out—as they appear to have been—for what their families consider to be unjust treatment and consideration that flies in the face of a judicial inquiry which, as has been pointed out, was open to the widest possible scrutiny.

6.32 pm

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): It is a great pleasure to speak in this annual debate on the RAF which, this year, has come a little earlier than on previous occasions. I hope that the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) will not mind if I do not follow him too far down the route that he chose. However, I and others who have served as aircrew in the past sympathise with the families concerned, and know how they must feel. Split-second decisions or losses of concentration—if that is what happened—can have such results. It shows more than anything that when we operate aircraft of that sort, the pilots must be as well trained as possible and their equipment must be as serviceable as possible. I shall return to that subject, as it has some relevance to that tragic Chinook accident. As the hon. Member for Clackmannan said, we shall never know the final facts of the incident.

This past year has been one of great change for the RAF, and I should like to add my comments to those of earlier speakers on the death of Sir Frank Whittle. Like myself, he was a cadet at Cranwell—although he was there long before me. I well remember learning what he achieved in 1929, when he patented the idea of the jet engine. He then saw it fly from Cranwell some 12 years later. I remember looking at the cut sections of the engines in the engineering section at Cranwell and being fascinated by the simplicity of the principle of the jet engine. It must have taken a man of genius to understand the power that could be produced from such a simple proposition.

I agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) said about the present Chief of the Air Staff. Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Graydon has taken the RAF through a difficult period, and has done so with skill and dedication. It was difficult, because the changes were not supported by huge numbers of the forces that he led. The fact that he has achieved that while keeping the Air Force together, and the fact that it is still a superb fighting machine, is of great credit to him, and he can retire knowing that.

We in the House are very good at taking credit for things, and I noticed that the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar), leading for the Opposition, mentioned the defence orders. He was perfectly right to say that Labour supported those orders, as did many of my right hon. and hon. Friends. But the real credit goes to the Chief of the Air Staff and his staff, who constantly made the point which, in the end, was accepted by everybody—that one cannot expect the RAF to go through a reduction process, unless one gives it hope for the future by ensuring that it has the equipment to do the job into the next century. Sir Michael Graydon did that, and he should be proud of his great achievement.

Those equipment orders have given the RAF hope for the future, and I am delighted by them. They will provide work for many people in Lancashire—including some of my constituents—and they will ensure that the RAF remains a formidable fighting force into the next century. However, there are obviously other orders and procurement decisions that must be taken in the future.

We need to ensure that there is a good weapons system on the Eurofighter, and I hope that a decision on the future air-to-air missile will be made this year—the sooner the better, as far as I am concerned. The Meteor proposal from the British Aerospace consortium should be strongly considered.

The other area that is important is heavy lift, and I should like the Government to sign at the earliest possible opportunity the European staff requirement in the future large aircraft consortium. That is not to say at this stage that that is necessarily the aircraft that the RAF should buy—far from it. There are many ways in which we could meet that need, but it is a need that must be met. We need a heavy lift capability on this side of the Atlantic, and we need it as soon as possible.

I am encouraged by the lateral thinking that has taken place about the proposal and by some of the ideas that have been put before the Select Committee on Defence, on which I serve with my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside. Leasing is a possibility, and we could certainly use a more commercial way to procure the aircraft. One of the interesting things about the discussion on the C130J two or three years ago was that it led to the FLA consortium realising that it had to look again at the way in which it was putting its bid together, to ensure that it was done under the commercial auspices of Airbus. We could also use techniques that allow for a shorter time scale.

The A340, probably the most advanced airliner ever built, went from drawing board to airline service in less than four years. That is how we must proceed, channelling people's minds and ensuring that those in Ministry of Defence procurement, for example, do not constantly make changes to the design specification; they must decide what they want and get it built, and there should be penalty clauses that operate if it does not come up to the specification that was clearly made in the first place, so that the companies involved understand that it must be made to work as Airbus so effectively made both the A330 and the A340 work, within the time scale and to the performance specified by the airlines.

We must examine closely the way in which we are to procure heavy lift capability for the Royal Air Force. In the short term, we should at least be involved in the future large aircraft programme through the signing of the European staff requirement. As far as I can see, there is no downside to signing it: it does not commit us to anything, but merely ensures that we still have a seat at the table—I do not intend to take that analogy any further.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) intervened on the subject of the Bulldog replacement. Clearly, value for money—not necessarily the cheapest price, I hasten to add—must drive that project forward. There are considerable advantages in that respect in having one basic trainer for all pilots coming into the Air Force, whether they come through university cadetship or arrive direct from school and go to the flying school at present operated by the Hunting Company at Barkston Heath.

I am sure that when instructors move on to the Tucano, they can understand the slight differences in ability, but I have a gut feeling that there will be a slight advantage, when it comes to the next stage in assessing abilities, if everyone is started off on the same aircraft. There should also be some saving, which may not be as tangible as it should be, in terms of back-up, standardisation of spares and other matters associated with supporting aircraft.

Most people would expect me to mention the Eurofighter. It is important, not only because the Air Force needs it in the next century to be able to stay at the top table with the American and other air forces, but because it will provide the platform, or at least the technology, for further developments. The French, sadly, are not in the project, but I wonder whether developments from Eurofighter will not find themselves in service with the French air force as well as ours in five or 10 years' time. I shall leave it at that. We need that aircraft.

There were some boisterous exchanges earlier this afternoon about the different parties' views. All I can say to the hon. Member for Warley, West is that, if I were sitting on the Opposition Benches, I should be saying precisely the same things to my Front-Bench colleagues as I said to him earlier tonight. The only way of ensuring that the aircraft goes ahead and that our allies have confidence that we back it fully is by saying that it is fine to have a defence review, but that the Eurofighter must not be in it.

Once we have that guarantee, I shall be extremely happy, not because an Opposition politician has agreed with the Government, but because the Air Force can then have confidence that that programme at least will not be affected by anything that happens at the general election.

Ballistic missile defence has been mentioned. It is highly commendable that I first heard about ballistic missile defence, about eight years ago, not through the media or from the Ministry of Defence, but in the Chamber. I well remember the response from the Front Bench: it was almost as if one or two eccentric Back Benchers had mentioned something out of "Star Wars". That illustrates the fact that there is still knowledge in the Chamber that is often ahead of what is going on in government or in the media. It is most encouraging that the subject is being taken so much more seriously today than it was all those years ago.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside mentioned the technology foresight programme. When we consider new technologies in the future, we must not regard them purely in a defence or commercial sense. We must form partnerships of the kind that have been so useful in America recently and have driven technology forward.

We must understand that the majority of the technologies that we use in our defensive systems will in future probably come from commercial rather than military research. Commercial time scales are shorter. Indeed, one could argue that, because of the stretched-out time scale, some of the Eurofighter and EJ200 technology is behind the latest technology in the Rolls-Royce Trent engine.

I believe that in future military technology will be driven much more by commercial technology. That must be recognised by the Department of Trade and Industry as well as by the Ministry of Defence. I hope that a better partnership can be developed between those Departments, so that we can drive sufficient resources into programmes such as the powered wing, which have both commercial and military benefits, but which will not go ahead in this country unless the Departments get closer together. They must think more clearly about projects that can bring such benefits in terms of jobs and wealth creation.

[Mr. Keith Mans]

Many hon. Members have mentioned the number of redundancies in the Royal Air Force and the fact that the process has gone smoothly. One should also remember that some of the people remaining in the Air Force wanted to leave and that those who remain have to deal with the problems that exist as a result of the others going. Gaps are created and people have to work harder to fill those gaps. Those who remain have in many ways the harder job.

What I say next may not be very popular. When considering redundancies, I think that it might be a good idea if one or two more senior RAF officers left sooner rather than later, to avoid creating a steep pyramid or church steeple at the top of the Royal Air Force and running the risk of losing tomorrow's leaders because we are hanging on for too long to today's. The problem is that the numbers of air vice-marshals and air marshals are almost equal. That poses a problem for people immediately below that rank.

We also need to ensure that we keep a pool of skilled technicians and engineers. Contractorisation is fine, provided that we recognise that the figures that are coming out of the programme are one-off figures. They rely on a supply of highly skilled manpower leaving the Royal Air Force which can be picked up easily by the companies that do the jobs previously done by uniformed airmen. That cannot go on for ever. We must develop partnerships between those companies and the Royal Air Force to ensure that when contracts come up for renewal, the cost does not go up by 15 per cent. or even double. There must be a clear guarantee that we have not simply pushed into the future the costs of the savings that we are making now. I think that that can be achieved. The companies to which I have spoken recognise that and are keen to produce a solution.

While I support contractorisation and novel methods, I am a gradualist. Things should be done slowly, especially in the armed forces, which have an important role. It can be matter of life and death. Where we can, we must avoid rapid changes of emphasis or policy that can affect the ability of the services to do their jobs. That is especially relevant to the RAF. I urge the Minister to consider carefully any novel ways of, for example, servicing and supporting the Eurofighter. Let us get right the contractual arrangements in respect of the things for which they are at present employed. In future, we might examine the innovative and creative ideas that sometimes come from people outside the Royal Air Force.

I recommend that my hon. Friend the Minister look closely at the problems that have occurred in the defence medical services, and especially the Royal Air Force section, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside, the Chairman of the Defence Committee. The Committee is considering that and it would be wrong of me to pre-empt our conclusions. However, it is already clear that something must be done quickly to stop the defence medical services becoming a shadow of its former self. We must examine whether some of the problems with things that have not gone as well as had been anticipated can be read across to other matters, so that we approach such ideas a little more slowly.

That approach applies equally to the dramatic changes in pilot training. My hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces rightly replied to an inquiry about the effects of contractorisation on pilot training at places such as RAF Valley that there were no signs that anything was wrong and that things were going very well. I should have directed my concern at the number of changes that have taken place in the flying training system and the fact that all advanced and weapon training for fast jet pilots has been squashed into RAF Valley. There is no flexibility and it would not take much to go wrong for there to be dire results. We must monitor closely what happens, to ensure that we do not have to spend more money further downstream, when pilots and aircrew arrive at their squadrons, to make up for any shortfall in their ability. We should avoid further changes until we have decided whether any corrections need to be made to present arrangements.

On keeping a pool of skilled technicians and experienced aircrew, the Royal Air Force seems to have little trouble recruiting and can retain, generally, the number of aircrew that it needs. However, the latest figure for the trained strength of the Royal Air Force is slightly below the required figure. That leads me to believe that matters will not get easier. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider carefully what the Royal Navy has had to do to retain its Sea Harrier pilots. I believe that they are being paid £10,000 to stay on. He should recognise that there is a huge imbalance between the relatively small Royal Air Force and the large civilian airline community. It would take only a small increase in the requirements of the latter to have a dramatic effect on the number of pilots in the former. We must tackle that problem before it happens rather than waiting for it to happen and having to use crisis solutions, which may not be as effective and which are certainly much more expensive.

I should like to mention the reserves. Like many hon. Members, I welcome the appointment at the Ministry of Defence of Brigadier Richard Holmes to look after the reserve forces. It is an excellent move. We are at least moving in the right direction on that, by recognising the increased importance of the reserve forces in the overall defence environment. Sometimes I feel that many who have spent their careers as Regular service men do not fully comprehend the differences between what they do and what happens in the reserves. I should declare an interest as an RAF reservist and a pilot. I am pleased also, because I remember that my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) made the point decades ago. It long fell on deaf ears and I am delighted for him that it is finally happening. I am certain that it will be a dramatic success.

The Air Cadet Force is part of the reserve movement, and I am slightly worried about it. During the defence cost studies, the air cadet movement felt that it was reviewed. The money spent on it was reduced; youngsters got fewer air experience flights; responsibility for it was split; the Air Officer Commanding disappeared; its aircraft joined another part of the command structure. I understand that there is to be a further review, largely because of the changes that have occurred in the Royal Air Force. I realise that it is important to look at who is responsible for cadet squadrons when there are fewer stations. Having said that, I hope that there is no hidden agenda. I hope that the review is aimed at increasing the

size and effectiveness of the air cadet movement and not designed to reduce costs, so that some RAF officers can spend the money elsewhere. I go no further than that.

The House is unanimous about the importance of the air cadet movement and agrees that it should be expanded. I agree with the hon. Member for Warley, West: the air cadet movement should be expanded on the basis of what already exists. We are not talking about an air cadet unit in every school—far from it. Such units already exist in the community and they should have the maximum number of cadets that they can recruit, increased at a sustainable rate. If a review is to take place, what is required more than anything else is that the staff who give of their spare time to look after those youngsters should be given confidence that there will be a vibrant air cadet—and Army and sea cadet, for that matter—organisation in the future, so that they can see a future in their participation. Too much change and disruption often results in volunteers deciding to call it a day and going to help with some other voluntary organisation.

I therefore hope that the Regular officers who are tasked with looking at the air cadet movement fully take into account the views of reservists and understand the special nature of that movement, which, in many parts of the country, often provides the only link with the rest of the community. For instance, in the north-west, where I come from, just one RAF unit remains, so virtually the only contact that 6.3 million people have with the RAF is through the cadets, who can be seen in uniform on Remembrance Sunday and who help in the community.

One of the themes running through my speech is the fact that changes should be relatively gradual, to ensure that they do not damage operational effectiveness. It is inevitable that, because of the Labour party's decision to have a defence review, a shadow hangs over the RAF. I hope that that shadow will be temporary and light, and I suspect that Labour Members in the Chamber tonight also hope that it will be light. In a spirit of companionship with Opposition Members, I should like to say that if, through some mistake that the electorate might make, the Labour party became the next Government, we would be right behind Labour Members who fought the Treasury and others, to ensure that our armed forces were reduced no further.

As I have said to colleagues, I find it impossible to talk about stability in the armed forces when cuts are being made. Equally, it is impossible to talk about stability in the armed forces if they are being offered a defence review at the same time.

7.2 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North–East): The hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) speaks with a great deal of common sense in these debates, not least because he has direct experience. His contribution to debates on the Royal Air Force and to the work of the Defence Select Committee is invaluable. It is therefore a great pleasure to follow him on this occasion.

If the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) had a sense of déjà vu in returning to a defence debate, having been absent for several years, I share that experience to the extent that my recollection of the period immediately before the 1992 general election is that the subject of defence seemed to appear on the Order Paper once a week. For reasons that I could never quite understand, we debated nuclear weapons almost weekly. The then Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King), delivered the same speech; the hon. Member for Clackmannan delivered the same speech; the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) delivered the same speech; and I delivered the same speech—

Dr. Reid: We all delivered the same speeches.

Mr. Campbell: As the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) points out, most of us are still delivering the same speeches.

I suspect that there was some attempt to try to embarrass the Opposition and it seems that we may be subject to that again in the period between now and the general election, which may make you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, anxious that the date of the general election should be sooner rather than later.

Mr. McWilliam: If the hon. Gentleman extends his mind forward a little, he may find that Conservative Members are less keen to try to embarrass the Opposition because they cut defence expenditure in the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1995" by 36 per cent. over the past three years, not 31 per cent.—there is £80 million tucked away in the budget. Conservatives may not be quite so keen to expose themselves to the fact that they have slashed expenditure by more than a third in the past three years.

Mr. Campbell: I do not want to comment on the propensity of Conservative Members to expose themselves in one way or another. However, the idea that the Opposition will be embarrassed by constant debates on defence is misconceived.

The debate has ranged far and wide. The hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) intervened on the hon. Member for Clackmannan about the cancellation of the TSR2. If one is to go back that far, one must remember that the right honourable Duncan Sandys, who was then Minister of Aviation, suggested that we should abandon manned aircraft altogether and rest the air defence of the United Kingdom on missiles. That just goes to show that going so far back in history is not always productive.

Since the important and much-welcomed procurement decisions of last summer, the intervening months have been comparatively quiet for the RAF. As the Minister for the Armed Forces eloquently demonstrated in his opening speech, that does not mean that the RAF has not been busy. That comparative period of quiet has been warmly welcomed by the RAF, particularly by Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Graydon, who, both publicly and privately, has called for a period of stability. Indeed, he did so just two days ago when he attended a function in the Palace of Westminster. I wish to be associated with the tributes that have been paid to Sir Michael, both for his personal kindness to me but also to recognise his sustained professional leadership during a period that is generally accepted as having been one of great difficulty for the RAF. If the RAF needs stability, all the other services need it too. However, those who keep a close eye on the RAF have observed that it may have suffered more than the others, having been subject to what is sometimes described as "turbulence" and it therefore needs a period in which it can consolidate.

[Mr. Campbell]

You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are no doubt familiar with the old Chinese curse that one should be condemned to live in interesting times. We must live in interesting times now, given that *The Daily Telegraph* becomes the forum in which the leader of the Labour party confirms the maintenance of the independent nuclear deterrent as a cornerstone of British defence policy and calls for that same stability to which I referred.

How can stability be assured in terms that would satisfy Sir Michael Graydon and other senior commanders, as well as all those who serve in the armed forces? I do not believe that stability of the kind that most hon. Members would want will be sustained by further reductions in the defence budget, whether by frontal attack or covert action. It is impossible to have stability other than at present expenditure levels.

The reason why the hon. Member for Clackmannan felt that nothing had changed was that this evening we have had some rather unproductive and arid exchanges about a defence review. In reality, the words are meaningless until one sees what is done under that heading.

If the approach was to say that we must match our commitments to our existing resources, the inference would be that if there was an imbalance between resources and commitments, commitments would be cut. One cannot escape history and the words "defence review" have historically meant cutting expenditure and then being driven to reducing commitments. I say tonight, as I have said on several previous occasions when this topic has been debated in the House, if a defence review means anything, it must include a willingness to increase expenditure if that is shown to be necessary.

If there is one thing that we lack in these debates, it is any proper analysis of future defence funding. If we assume acceptance of the Government forecast—indeed, any Government's forecast—for inflation, we are entitled to expect that the defence budget will rise in line with that figure, whatever it may be. However, we know that defence inflation is historically higher than what one might describe as ordinary inflation. Therefore, if we seek to maintain real spending in our defence budget, we have to increase spending beyond the inflation rate. If we do not do that, we are, effectively, presiding over a real-terms cut.

Why do I place such emphasis on expenditure? It is self-evidently important for all the services, but I believe that it is particularly important for the RAF, because it has so many expensive procurement projects that are likely to come to fruition over the next few years. There are many besides me who believe that by the end of the decade the RAF will have exhausted the potential for savings from rationalisation and structural reorganisation and, shortly after the end of the century, major procurement projects such as Eurofighter and the replacement of the maritime patrol aircraft will reach their peak, so placing substantial demands on the RAF budget. There are some who believe that, if there were to be any effort to cut RAF expenditure at that time, it could be met only by cuts in the front line. I suspect that that issue will have to be faced by whichever party is in government at that time.

Let us take the matter further and consider the cost of the procurement of the new generation of fast jet aircraft. If we are to participate in the joint strike fighter or be part of the future offensive air system, there is every reason to believe that the cost of participation in those programmes will be very high. How will we be able to meet those costs? Some say, only by ordering a reduced number of aircraft; but if that were to happen, the result would be a fall in the front-line combat strength of the RAF and might well lead to the conclusion that it was no longer possible to maintain an air fleet in all areas of present activity.

I am convinced that one way in which we might meet those gaps is to consider closer co-operation and integration with other European air forces. The Minister properly pointed to the conceptual and now the implementation success of the Franco-British air group. That is likely to be the way of the future and it will not be only the United Kingdom looking for such arrangements: we know that the Belgian and Netherlands air forces have pooled their air transport resources and that there is a joint Dutch-Belgian squadron supporting NATO operations in Bosnia from an air field in Italy. If we consider for a moment the issue of ballistic missile defence—which I accept is an issue of great urgency and on which, I understand, as recently as last month the Ministry of Defence said no decision had been taken—we cam see that any useful programme of ballistic missile defence will have to involve our European neighbours and, almost certainly, the United States. The pressure for integration and co-operation will be driven by financial considerations. I say again, to maintain a full range of capability in Europe, in air forces as well as on land and at sea, three principles have to be embraced: common procurement, interoperability and force specialisation.

Like others, I wish to pay tribute to the men and women of the RAF. I do so, not only from an informed position as a member of the Select Committee on Defence and as someone who has taken an interest in defence matters for some time, but from my constituency interests. I regularly have the opportunity to see in practice the skill and professionalism of those who serve at RAF Leuchars, which is in my constituency. In July 1995, I had the opportunity, not afforded to many, to sit in the back seat of a Tornado F3 aircraft and, in the words of the station commander, to be shown a full range of its ability—a somewhat delphic promise, given that, just before the hatch came down, he handed in half a dozen sick bags. Happily none was required. My point is that that extraordinary opportunity, for which I am extremely grateful, allowed me to see at first hand what is involved in driving—if I may use the colloquialism—a fast jet. It allowed me to see, hear and experience the extraordinary skill and professionalism that is required. That skill and professionalism is being demonstrated from Gioia del Colle, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the Falklands.

In recent times, there has been an increase in postings to service abroad and we cannot escape the conclusion—it comes from talking to RAF personnel of all ranks—that more time abroad for air crew and front-line mechanical support has brought its own strains and stresses. On an occasion like this, it is right to acknowledge that RAF morale is fragile; there is no point in denying that, but we would do better to recognise it and to take steps to remedy any problems.

It is also right that we recognise—as the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), who is the Chairman of the Select Committee, pointed out—that there have been occasions when operational effectiveness

has been below what could legitimately be expected. As the Select Committee noted in one of its reports, on one day in September 1995, only six of the 30 Tornado GR1s stationed at RAF Bruggen in Germany were serviceable. We know also that we are still in the period of 12 months' suspension of NATO inspections, which was introduced by the RAF because of the pressure on personnel. There is a real question whether that period of suspension will be renewed in April, when the first 12-month period elapses. On the other side, it is clear that the new equipment orders of last summer have had a positive and beneficial effect on morale and that is entirely understandable.

Much of the debate has centred on Eurofighter, so let me make my position as clear as I can. I doubt that I have to make it clear to the hon. Member for Wyre, because I was part of a distinguished group of Members of Parliament who, under his leadership, were put in an RAF aircraft and sent to Germany in order to lobby our political equivalents in the German Parliament. There were members of all parties on that trip and it was clear that there was all-party support for the project. I am wholly convinced of the case for Eurofighter, but those of us who are convinced have an obligation to make that case, because outside the House and outside the circle of people who follow the issue closely there is a substantial volume of doubt. I do not mean only in the Bundestag or the Bundesrat, but here in the United Kingdom.

Given that the in-service date has slipped from 1998 to 2002 or 2003 and that there have been cost overruns, those who are sceptical have ready ammunition with which to assail the project. Why do I believe that the project is necessary?

First, the Royal Air Force needs Eurofighter; that is a fundamental principle of my support. Secondly, the proliferation of SU27s and Mig 29s and their derivatives, made freely available from Russia, suggests that if we are to be engaged—as we might be—in actions on behalf of the United Nations or otherwise, it is necessary to have an aircraft that will be able to meet and match them. Thirdly, if we lose this technology now we shall never get it back, and it has not only military but civilian application. Fourthly, many jobs are involved in the production of Eurofighter. British Aerospace is a cornerstone of the United Kingdom economy.

Those four factors make an overwhelming case for the Eurofighter project, but those who support it must continue to argue for it.

Reference was made to the fact that 232 Eurofighters are to be ordered. However, the evidence given to the Select Committee states that it is not inconceivable that 70 more might be ordered if the decision is taken to replace the Harrier GR7s with the Eurofighter. Three hundred aircraft may be ordered, not 232. That emphasises yet again the importance of the project.

I hope that the general election campaign will not be based on the question, "Will they order the Eurofighter or not?" Some of us remember that, for reasons that we could not understand, there was unfathomable enthusiasm in the Ministry of Defence for the idea of leasing in F16s and not proceeding with the mid-life update of the Tornado. Many people believed that, had that proposal been implemented, it would have had the effect of substantially undermining the Eurofighter project. If we are to argue about the relative commitment of each party to Eurofighter, I am not convinced—I am trying to be as fair and objective as possible—that the position of the Ministry of Defence under the direction of the present Government has remained entirely consistent.

Assessing German participation in Eurofighter is a bit like trying to read the entrails in classical Rome, but I believe that the latest signs are slightly more favourable. Two elements—one political, one military—justify increased optimism.

First, as Germany throws aside the necessary constitutional shackles which followed the second world war and as the inhibition is removed against operations abroad by German forces, opinion regarding Eurofighter may become more sympathetic. If one is to fight abroad or make oneself available to fight abroad, one justifiably hopes to be as well equipped as possible.

Secondly, there have been reports in the past week or so that Germany is set to order 40 Eurofighters in the multi-role version, capable of striking against ground targets, using stand-off precision guided missiles. If those reports are correct—if that is a genuine strain of opinion in Germany—I hope that that suggests, as it appears to, a confirmation of the German position, which in some respects we have been told may be made clear at least by the end of the month.

Dr. Reid: The hon. and learned Gentleman is making a perceptive contribution. To complement what he is saying, I remind him that the reading of entrails is also done by the Germans and that I can think of nothing that is more calculated to give succour, in the run-up to the Bundestag's decision, to those who would seek to scrap German support for Eurofighter than the dishonest rumours and stories put about that an incoming British Government would ditch the programme. That is the point about the juvenile irresponsibility of those who would seek to make short-term party political points about Eurofighter.

Mr. Campbell: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not intervene in what seems to be a private fight.

Dr. Reid *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Campbell: I do not mean to deprecate what the hon. Gentleman says. I understand his point about the national interest. He must speak for his party. I speak for mine, and I point to my record of commitment for the Eurofighter project over several years as a justification for the view that the project must proceed, for the reasons that I have outlined.

It would be ludicrous to say that the future of the Royal Air Force would be threatened by any failure in the Eurofighter programme, but if the programme did not proceed it would substantially influence the shape and capability of the Royal Air Force.

I shall quickly mention one or two more procurement matters. I hope that the Minister may—if not today, then by letter—be able to say something to those of us with an interest in the matter about where the Government stand on the issue of the EH101. The Royal Air Force has an order for 22 in the utility version. That is a very large investment. The Minister of State for Defence Procurement knows that the Wessex, the Puma and the

[Mr. Campbell]

Sea Kings, in various roles, must all be replaced by 2010. There is now a head of steam behind the suggestion that variants of the EH101 would be suitable for their replacement. It would be useful if the Minister would share as much as possible the thinking of the Ministry of Defence on that important procurement issue.

It would also be useful if the Minister would—if not today, another time—give some hint of the Government's thinking regarding the offer by Lockheed in relation to the C17s. As the hon. Member for Wyre said, there is an important issue as between C17s and the future large aircraft.

Mr. Wilkinson: McDonnell Douglas.

Mr. Campbell: Indeed. I beg the hon. Gentleman's pardon.

ASTOR has already been mentioned. A decision must now be made on the platform for the equipment, and I understand that a choice must be made between Gulf-Stream and Dassault. Can the Minister help the House with that—if not tonight, then later?

I am not persuaded in any sense by the siren voices that argue that the Royal Air Force should evolve into a support service. I remain convinced that it should remain a strategic force. I understood the Minister of State for the Armed Forces to confirm that as the present Government's policy; he has my support in that regard.

There is little doubt that, in United Nations or other peacekeeping or peacemaking operations, the Royal Air Force will be called on to provide air support for essentially ground-dominated operations, but the need for strategic use of air power on behalf of and in the interests of the United Kingdom may well arise in future. For that we need a Royal Air Force capable of that role.

7.27 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): I feel like an aging Lothario: I need more and more inspiration to perform, and in parliamentary terms we have had that inspiration from my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces. There is nothing as exciting as a convert, and he certainly has the fervour of a convert. There is no one as fervent as an ebullient ex-hussar speaking up for air power, and he did so most effectively.

However, we need, not just parliamentary inspiration, but a bit of service inspiration. It is relatively easy for me; I need not go far—13 miles in fact, to the Polish war memorial at the corner of my constituency, by Royal Air Force Northolt. I look up and see the squadrons. For example, 303 Polish Squadron was the highest-scoring squadron in the battle of Britain. It only came in halfway through, declaring itself operational before it officially was.

Then I go further along the road, deeper into my constituency—I am always deep into my constituency, as we all are, especially with an election approaching—and I look at the main gate of the station. There I see a motto—my grandfathers were clergymen; they would have had to have a text—for my speech. It is relevant, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as you, a former Air Force man, will recognise. The words are:

"Aut portare aut pugnare prompti",

meaning ready either to carry or to fight. We do both in this place. We carry the burdens of the long speeches to which we must listen, and we are always ready to fight when an election approaches.

Air power is the decisive instrument in modern war. The versatility that the service possesses is so relevant to our contemporary world, to carry the logistics for operations or, if necessary, to fight. The Royal Air Force must be capable of war winning or conflict prevention. An example of war winning was our contribution in the Gulf war. In the Falklands war, our air power was perhaps more naval air than RAF, but without British air superiority over the islands, they could never have been regained.

In Bosnia, as my hon. Friend the Minister pointed out, the decisive intervention of offensive air power, so long called for by Conservative Members, and at last unleashed, brought the belligerents to their senses and restored a semblance of peace, which ultimately was ratified in the Dayton accords.

The obverse of the Gulf war is the operation of the no-fly zones over north and south Iraq, which persists to this day.

A final example was mentioned by my hon. Friend. I remind him of his early military days—I, too, was an ADC once—when I say:

"Time spent in reconnaissance is never wasted."

How wise it was to send a Canberra down to Zaire, rather than sending 10,000 men to beat around in the jungle.

To express it in language that our American friends would understand, General Patton said that armed forces must have the decisive capability of being able

"to get there fastest with the mostest".

That is important for a country whose military resources are so small. It is essential to be able to deploy decisive fire power at the critical point or, even better, by rapid deployment of force, to be able to deter. There was recently a classic example of such deterrence. When Kuwait fell, we rapidly sent our squadrons out to Saudi Arabia, and Saddam Hussein was checked.

I move on from such combative themes to speak about the shouldering of a burden, which the RAF does well. I have always been rather Gaullist in my attitude to logistics. The general always used to speak deprecatingly of "commissariat". Then I went to RAF Brampton and RAF Wytton, full of pessimism. I remembered Wytton, as ex-Pathfinder Force station, Canberras, reconnaissance establishment—all sorts of exciting things—and now headquarters of Logistic Command. I expected it to be bone-shakingly boring, but far from it—it was fascinating and thrilling. I saw some innovative and exciting work in husbanding and deploying resources, using, to me, unintelligible information systems which transform modern logistics.

If I may weary the House, I shall speak about the air transport aspects and the major improvements in the RAF's logistic and air transport capability which the Government have put in place. I start where I began, close to home, at RAF Northolt. How exciting it is that No. 32 squadron, the resident communications squadron, having been merged with the Queen's Flight, should be the Royal squadron. Everyone appreciates locally that it should be stationed at RAF Northolt. It is a sensible sharing of the

resources of the Queen's Flight, although I am not suggesting that the new royal yacht should necessarily be used in the same way.

I must, however, add a note of caution. The operations of RAF Northolt are crucial for the Government and the armed forces—the headquarters at High Wycombe, Northwood and Bentley Priory, for example, as well as the Ministry of Defence and the diplomatic and other services. It is used also for communications purposes by civil aircraft. I urge the Government not to allow the civil limits to be increased. There are currently 28 civil movements per day, Monday to Friday, and the hours are 8 am to 8 pm. If the limits were changed, the tremendous support that the station has from the local community might be put at risk, which would be a great shame.

At times of tension—for example, during the Gulf war—there can be military movements at all hours of the day and night, seven days a week. The area is heavily built up and entirely residential. My constituents, and people in neighbouring constituencies, do not object to military movements, but they would object to a serious increase in civil movements. An experiment started in October and will continue until the end of March to begin civil flying operations from 0700 rather than from 0800. I hope that, at the conclusion of the experimental period, Ministers will think long and hard, and that they will not make the extra hour a perpetual feature of operations at the station. I hope that they will stick to the original hours of 0800 to 2000, and no movements by civilian aircraft at weekends.

The helicopter force is a crucial element of our air transport capability. In the service, it used to be regarded as the poor relation, but not now, thanks to the ordering of the EH101s and the Chinook 2s to augment the medium support helicopter force. I hope that the Government will soon be able to make the orders necessary to put in place the simulation facilities at RAF Benson, to get the show on the road and the training programme initiated.

The C-130Js were entirely the right decision, militarily and industrially. It is all to the good that the RAF is the launch customer. The Government need have no doubts that they did the right thing in ordering the aeroplane. However, there is still a gap in our capabilities—the heavy lift element about which we spoke previously.

I urge the Government preferably to procure, or to lease, the C-17. It is clearly the right aeroplane. It has been in service for many years with the United States air force. While I was at the Farnborough airshow, I had the great privilege of talking to the RAF exchange officer who had come across from Charleston on the aircraft. It still has important development potential. It could have an extra 10,000 gallons in the centre wing section for further range. It could have air-to-air refuelling capability. It can already receive fuel, of course, but as a tanker there is provision for Flight Refuelling Ltd.'s pods on the wings, the hard points are already there.

I shall quote some figures from a press release that was issued by the manufacturers McDonnell Douglas.

"The aircraft has a payload of 157,000 lbs."

That is about three times the weight that a future large aircraft could carry.

"It can take off from a 7,600 foot airfield, fly 2,400 nautical miles and land on a small, austere airfield in 3,000 ft. It can be refuelled in flight and its ferry range is 4,300 nautical miles."

The feature of the C-17 aircraft is its volume. As my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) said, it can take a main battle tank, armoured fighting vehicles, helicopters that have not been dismantled, missile batteries and associated radar systems, Bailey bridges, vehicle recovery equipment and tank transporters. We are in the business of power projection, whether in peace or in war, and that is the kind of instrument that we need to have at our disposition. At present, we rely on the United States Air Force and on chartering civilian aeroplanes. I have nothing against such charters, but the C-17 is the right way forward.

I join those who have spoken in paying tribute to Sir Michael Graydon who has been an outstanding Chief of the Air Staff. By his patience, courtesy and reliance on rational argument eventually to win the day, he has set an excellent example. We shall be sad to see him go, but we are glad that Sir Richard Johns is to succeed him because we know that he is experienced and well qualified for the job.

It is exciting that the Government and Sir Michael Graydon have put in place the total-force concept. I shall not refer to speeches that were made a long time ago, but my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) was exceedingly generous in referring to my consistent report for flying members of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force. When I made my maiden speech on the subject twenty-six and a half years ago, I little knew that it was an idea whose day had almost come. Anyone who can get an idea across in a generation is doing well in this place. However, one also knows that it could take only another generation for it to be undone because that is the way of human affairs.

The total-force concept with a core of highly trained regulars is exciting. The process of reducing numbers has been painful but it is sorting itself out. The force is backed by a range of auxiliary capabilities with a merged RAFVR and auxiliary air force, and will come into operation as a reserve force from April. There will be auxiliary and medical, maritime and helicopter support, operational missile system, anti-aircraft gun and the Royal Air Force regiment units. As my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside said, there could be medical, provost or motor transport too. Of course, the raison d'être of the service itself is being addressed—flying. It was always an anomaly that the Territorial Army had flying squadrons and the Royal Naval Reserve operated Sea Harriers capably in a reservist capacity but somehow the flying service could not manage to get its reservists into the air.

The services are backed by contractors and for the party that believes in business, that must be right. The companies that are involved in supporting the RAF, such as Marshall, Shorts and Huntings, to name but three, do the job very well. Their personnel should be members of the sponsored reserve so that they can be subject to the Air Force Acts and appropriately mobilised in time of emergency or war. At the end of five years, in spite of all the alarms and excursions, the traumas, excitements and sadnesses of rapid change, the service now has a total-force concept that will stand the test of time. It is well equipped and I confidently expect that, before long, the only big remaining gap in its inventory, apart from ballistic missile defence—heavy lift equipment—will be addressed through either the lease or the purchase of the C-17.

7.44 pm

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I do not normally participate in debates on the Royal Air Force but I have an important constituency case about which I intend to speak.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement wrote to me on 23 January with news that dealt a severe blow to me and my constituents. He told me that a contract for the maintenance of the TriStar RAF aircraft would be placed with the Gulf Aircraft Maintenance Company in the United Arab Emirates. I suppose as a means of softening the blow, he told me that a contract for the repair of TriStar components would be placed with Marshall of Cambridge. I expect that the Minister will refer to that contract in his winding-up speech.

The letter from the Minister stated that he had mixed news for Marshall. It is not mixed news: it is a disaster. The Marshall work force has carried out the work loyally and successfully for the past 13 years. The part of the contract that Marshall has retained will employ only about five people. With the loss of the main contract it is reckoned that, under the worst scenario, 300 jobs are now at risk. They are not ordinary jobs: they are skilled engineering jobs in a firm that has a high reputation for excellence and quality.

The hon. Member for Ruislip–Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) said that Marshall was one of the excellent businesses undertaking defence contracts. Therefore, he and many hon. Members will be aware of Marshall's reputation for excellence and quality. Some hon. Members may feel that the loss of skilled engineering jobs in Cambridge is not a disaster as unemployment in the area is low, but the constituency of Cambridge does not have a good employment record. According to the Library, current unemployment in my constituency is 6.1 per cent. which is only just below the national average of 6.6 per cent.

Those who think that they can sacrifice jobs in Cambridge without a fuss are wrong and anyone who thinks that he can deliberately erode the country's skilled engineering base without a fuss is equally wrong. According to Radio Cambridgeshire this morning, the Under–Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for South–East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), has told the workers at Marshall to forget about protesting because Gulf Aircraft put in a better bid. Does he think that workers whose jobs and livelihoods are threatened will lie down quietly and forget that this has happened? Does he think that workers will not continue to feel angry and betrayed because they have been sold out by their own Government? Does the Minister feel so supremely confident that he will hang on to his seat at the general election that he can be so cavalier with people's jobs and livelihoods?

More serious even than the loss of skilled jobs is the message that is being sent to the rest of the world. It is, "Do not come to the UK for your aircraft maintenance." The challenge for Marshall is to hang on to the rest of its commercial contracts. It has to convince the rest of the world that the quality of its work has not deteriorated, that it still offers good value for money, reliability and continuity which its competitor, Gulf Aircraft, cannot match. That is made much more difficult by the Government's perverse decision.

The decision has given the Gulf Aircraft Company a new status which may enable it to take work away from the Cambridge work force. Is the new confidence that has been generated by the order fully justified? I have seen information that suggests that GAMCO does not have a sound financial base. The firm employs cut-price Filipino and Pakistani labour—which is cheap and unreliable—and, as a result, has been able to undercut Marshall's bid. Will the new contractor have to comply with the same standards of quality, security, and health and safety as we require of United Kingdom bidders? I thank that the answer is no, as that is a matter for its Government. Marshall is being penalised for treating its workers well—for the training it provides, the quality standards that it espouses, and for the health and safety measures that are mandatory in this country. Worker health and safety will not meet the same high standards when the work is done abroad.

Mr. Michael Marshall, the chairman and chief executive of the company, has written to me to say:

"our campaign to retain the contract was doomed from the outset. It is simply not possible for any company in the EU or the USA to compete with GAMCO, and their employment of low paid Far Eastern transient labour on a predominantly price consideration basis."

That message will chill the blood of Marshall workers, but it should also send a serious warning to other skilled workers in the United Kingdom. The message is that the Government do not care about skilled jobs: they care only about capitalising on low-cost labour abroad in order to reduce expenditure in public departments. The Government do not care about the consequent impact on employment in the United Kingdom—no wonder the social security bill continues to rise inexorably year after year.

I am sure that the Minister will argue that the contract offers a better deal for taxpayers. However, if 300 skilled engineers in Cambridge are forced on to the dole and must draw unemployment and other benefits paid for by the taxpayer, what kind of good deal is that? It is not a good deal for my constituents who want to feel that their skills are being utilised—as they have been for the past 13 years—in working for the national interest. It is not a good deal for the taxpayer, as the Exchequer loses about £9,000 a year for every unemployed worker. Not only has this country lost a deal that could represent as much as £40 million in exports every year, but we are worse off by a potential £2.7 million a year in increased social security benefits and lost tax revenue. What kind of crazy economics is that?

When Marshall took on the contract 13 years ago, it had to commit itself for 25 years. A local newspaper, "Cambridgeshire Today", reported:

"This is a firm which has distinguished itself through generations of a family. In wartime it has played a major role in Britain's effort and in peace-time it has often shored up Cambridgeshire's economy, creating jobs for local people and enhancing the city's reputation in the local arena."

I heartily endorse those comments, and I feel sure that Baroness Thatcher would do so as well. She visited Marshall as Prime Minister on 27 May 1988. During her visit, she asked Sir Arthur Marshall how the company had built up such a versatile and sophisticated design team. He said that the company was fortunate to have been involved, in some form or another, in every British military and civil aircraft designed since the war—what an achievement.

Baroness Thatcher was particularly interested in the RAF TriStar tanker work, which was then in progress. Following her visit, she wrote a letter of appreciation, in which she added:

"And of course, your work for the Falklands campaign will never be forgotten".

It is now clear that it has been forgotten. Marshall's loyalty to the British effort in war and in peace has not been reciprocated.

Marshall's expertise has also been recognised worldwide. In 1991, an employee visiting Canada noticed that the Air Transat house journal in Toronto contained an article, which said:

"Marshall's proven track record with Royal Air Force tankers and transports has gained them the reputation as one of the world leaders in Tri-Star heavy maintenance."

Marshall has been mentioned on numerous other occasions when its outstanding record has been acknowledged. Much of Marshall's history is well documented in Sir Arthur Marshall's book, "The Marshall Story", which I highly recommend. It describes the marvellous history of the firm, its relationship with the RAF, and the unswerving loyalty and readiness to respond to national need that has characterised the company throughout its history.

The loss of the contract will not affect only Marshall. I received a letter today from Mr. Iain Sturrock of A. J. Walter Aviation, a firm based in Partridge Green in Sussex, which will have to consider laying off staff as a result of the loss of the contract. Mr. Sturrock says that the company is in favour of competition, but not at the expense of British workers' jobs and our international reputation. He highlights the fact that Marshall holds the design authority for converting the TriStar to freighter tankers and is best qualified to carry out the maintenance. He also makes the point—which is particularly pertinent to this debate—that sending our aircraft, with sensitive military systems, to a known politically volatile region of the world seems incomprehensible from a security standpoint. Many of my constituents will agree: this deal seems totally incomprehensible.

I have tried to discover through parliamentary questions whether any back-room deals have been done between our Government and the United Arab Emirates. I understand that the Secretary of State visited the UAE on 28 November last year and signed a defence co-operation accord between the two countries. Will the Minister explain what that means? If it means that we have agreed to defend the UAE in the event of future hostilities against that country, why on earth are we sending our jobs there as well? Was GAMCO awarded the contract as part of that defence co-operation accord?

Another suspicion is circulating that a deal has been done regarding orders for Hawk aircraft. My questions have managed to elicit information that the Indonesian Government have two outstanding contracts of 24 and 16 Hawk aircraft. There is a further outstanding contract with another country, but the Secretary of State declines to tell me which country. I understand that the conditions for keeping the information confidential are listed in the code of practice on access to government information, so I know that the Minister will decline to provide an answer tonight. However, the suspicions will not go away. My constituents believe it to be a shoddy deal, which does not benefit the RAF, the taxpayers or Cambridge. I hope that the Minister will come clean and tell us why the deal has been done.

7.57 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): I assure the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) that Conservative Members also have a longstanding affection for Marshall of Cambridge. My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) said that he was worried about his grey hairs. I first came into contact with Marshall of Cambridge when I was a young flying officer—I will not tell the House when that was, but it was a long time ago. Later in life, I had the good fortune to meet and to work with Sir Arthur Marshall in a voluntary capacity. I have also worked with his son Michael, who is regional chairman of the Air Cadet Council. I doubt whether anyone will ever fully appreciate the time and the effort that he devotes to the air cadets. All that work—and all the work done before him by his father, Sir Arthur—cannot be measured financially. They gave very valuable trophies, which were awarded to the cadets, and they undertook many other interesting sponsorships. Marshall's has a very soft spot for the air cadets, and we love them very dearly.

I congratulate my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench on their determination to proceed with Eurofighter. We need to realise that that project is about much more than merely providing jobs—important as those are. The Eurofighter is the aircraft that the Royal Air Force will need if it is to meet the type of demands that will be placed on it in the near future, over the next 30 to 40 years. Therefore, there should be no question about that aircraft's future. I will return to the issue of Eurofighter later in my speech.

I also congratulate my hon. Friends on placing orders for the anti-armour weapon, the conventional air-to-ground missile, the maritime patrol aircraft, the Nimrod 2000, the C130J aircraft, the EH101 helicopter, and the extra Chinook helicopters. Those orders have given the RAF the encouragement that it desperately needed. Now, more than anything else, it needs a long period of stability, so that it can bring into service the new equipment and deal with the problems caused by the recent dramatic and fundamental changes. The last thing that the RAF needs is the threat or the probability of a defence review.

If the Opposition are serious about supporting our military, they should realise that, if there was once a need for a review, the need has long since passed. We do not need a defence review but a period of stability. A defence review would produce a further lengthy period of instability. It is unnecessary, and it can be motivated only by a desire to reduce defence expenditure.

In an earlier intervention in this debate, I mentioned an aircraft that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will remember: the TSR2. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell) seemed to think that I should not have made an historical reference, although he himself drew attention to the very factors that killed off the TSR2—cost overruns and delays. Let us not forget that the media friends of the Labour party publicly attacked those overruns and delays, and said that the aircraft was too expensive. In case any Labour Members have forgotten, I remind them that a lady by the name of Mary Goldring was a leading light in killing off that aircraft.

The point that I am trying to make to the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid)—whose integrity I do not doubt; and I have no qualms about saying that—

[Mr. Bill Walker]

is that he should tell his colleagues that the danger to the TSR2, if there is any, originates among people who will harp away at cost overruns and delays. Their argument will be that the aircraft is too expensive and that we cannot afford it. If £60 million for the royal yacht is too expensive, just think what they will say about the £300 million figure that may or may not be the right figure for the Royal Air Force.

Opposition Front Benchers should constantly remind their Back Benchers of the facts, because they are not as sound on defence as the hon. Member for Motherwell, North. He is sound on defence, and I am not afraid to say so. He should realise that the danger will not originate in his integrity and determination but in pressure from those who will want the money spent elsewhere. We do not have that problem on the Conservative Benches, because Conservative Members do not try to spend defence money on other items.

Mr. Spellar: Conservative Front Benchers do.

Mr. Walker: No; we have now reached a period in which we will try to maintain current levels of defence spending in real terms. If we are to maintain our commitments and the military capability that we think is necessary, it would not be viable to spend below that level.

I believe that the TSR2 would have accomplished for the RAF and British exports what the Eurofighter certainly will, because they are the same type of agile combat aircraft. It was sad that it suffered at the hands of the Labour party's media friends.

What about the future? Like my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip–Northwood and my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans)—who is not in the Chamber; he has probably gone to eat—I believe that the heavy lift problems cannot simply be put up on the shelf and forgotten. We need a heavy lift capability. One option is the future large aircraft—which I would call a "paper aeroplane". It may turn out to be a very good paper aeroplane, but, at this point, it is only an idea. The other option is the C17, which is a reality.

I want my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench to consider those two options carefully. Although I believe that the need is urgent, and that we should deal with it soon to meet the RAF's requirements, I do not care which of the two aircraft we end up with. I admit that I should like to see the C17 in service, and as soon as possible, but I will not complain if we get the future large aircraft, because the RAF will have received what it needs: a heavy lift capability.

We must consider future offensive air systems, and long-range air-to-ground missiles capable of being launched from transport aircraft. We need systems for the Tornado GR4, such as the future medium-range air-to-air missile SR(A)1239. I should also draw attention to the FMRAAM Meteor. It is a compliant, cost-effective programme, embracing contributions from GEC Marconi, Alenia of Italy, Dasa of Germany, Matra Defence of France and Saab Dynamics of Sweden. That should satisfy the Europhobes in the House. I must, of course, put in a plug for Scotland. So I shall say that Hughes—which has a large, very modern plant in Glenrothes, Fife—also has an interest in the programme, which I hope will progress.

I should also like to mention the airborne stand-off radar, which is Ministry of Defence staff requirement (land/air) 925. I understand that Loral, which is now part of the Lockheed Martin group, has demonstrated its candidate—a Boeing 707 equipped with dual-mode radar linked to ground stations, which is transported to areas of disaster or combat in the C130J aircraft. They are the matters that we have to consider, now and in the future.

I join the many other hon. Members who have complimented the Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Michael Graydon. He is soon to retire but has served longer in that job than is usual. He has seen the RAF through a very difficult period. I believe that he has provided leadership of a highest order in a period of change and of what, in modern terminology, is called downsizing. Enlargement is difficult but it provides opportunity and stimulus; to manage downsizing is an entirely different challenge. Sir Michael Graydon and the Air Force Board are to be congratulated on what they have achieved in a period of instability and downsizing. I am delighted that Sir Richard Johns is to be the next Chief of the Air Staff and am confident that he will provide the professional leadership necessary to build on that laid down by Sir Michael Graydon.

It will not surprise the Minister if I deal now with the auxiliaries, reserves and air cadets. I must declare an interest because I am involved. I welcome the news that the cadets, reserves and auxiliaries are to be expanded. The auxiliaries and reserves will become progressively more important and will contribute in many ways to the modern RAF's ability to meet the demands placed on it in this troubled and dangerous world.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip–Northwood, I remember when we were promised a helicopter squadron. It seems a long time ago, but it is now with us. We can only say to Ministers, "Thank you, you will never regret it."

Given that we have a much reduced Air Force and the need to build more into the reserves, politicians will face an even greater demand to create an environment in which employers appreciate their employees' need to have time off to meet their reserve commitments. I can say that with some feeling.

Many years ago I was offered a job as a managing director which, at that time, would have been a very important position and a superb opportunity for me. However, the offer came with a condition that I could not accept—I would have been required to resign my command of a volunteer unit. I could not do that even though I desperately wanted the job. The Reserve Forces Act 1996 will help, but much more still needs to be done. The Act alone will not create the right environment.

If we are to have an increasing civilian citizen component in our personnel, we need to widen the sponsored reserve element, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip–Northwood said. I think that any company tendering for RAF work must in future accept that its employees must be sponsored reserves, just as in the early 1950s all the employees of Airwork had to be members of the reserves. All future maintenance contracts must embrace—I use the word "must" deliberately—sponsored reserves. Only in that way will we begin to create an environment in which employers understand the importance of the reserves. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre said, the only light blue uniforms that

will be seen in public in many parts of the country will, sadly, be those of the auxiliaries, the reserves and the cadets. It is important to bear that in mind.

I deal now with the expansion of the cadets, which I welcome. I was surprised to read about it in the press. I and others have been working on expansion ideas, and the challenge was to work out how it could be achieved. What would it call for? We realised that it would call for new money.

I had been chatting to various Departments to see whether they would be prepared to fork out the money, but my fishing did not produce many big fish. That did not deter me. Those of us who are keen to increase the cadet organisation know that the investment per cadet brings such a massive return—that is especially true of the air cadets—that I am surprised we even contemplated reducing cadet expenditure when the world has so many problems, including drugs.

We knew that, as well as new money, we needed innovative thinking and leadership action by people who understand the ethos and motivation of the adults who run the air training corps squadrons and who man the volunteer gliding schools, the air experience flights, Wings and the outdoor activity centres.

The recent changes brought about by defence cost studies and "Front Line First" have created pain and uncertainty among the volunteers. Many began to believe that the RAF and Ministers no longer fully supported the air cadets. I know from personal experience that that is not true—Ministers and the Air Force Board fully support the cadets.

In an intervention, I tried to bring to the Minister's attention the review of the Air Cadet Council. Obviously, I did it very badly because he did not understand what I was getting at—I take responsibility for not putting across my message sufficiently clearly. The review of the Air Cadet Council is an essential element in improving communications between the MOD and the people who man the squadrons, volunteer gliding schools and air experience flights. It works, as my right hon. Friend told me. I know that it works, but, like all things that work, it can be improved, which is the aim of the review.

The review was welcomed by the volunteers, but they were then told of a second review—the review of the cadet organisation itself, which is now under way. I thank the Chief of the Air Staff and the Air Member for Personnel for accepting the necessary element in that review, namely that we have someone in the team with first-hand experience of being a volunteer. I congratulate retired Wing Commander Jimmy Farrell, who was a wing commander of an air training corps wing and who has also commanded a volunteer gliding school in his time. I cannot think of anyone better to be part of the review team because he understands what is required. I therefore thank the Chief of the Air Staff, the Air Member for Personnel and Ministers for listening to us.

The review that is presently under way follows the substantial changes caused by the reduction in the air cadet budget. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre said, the air cadets may not have been reviewed, but the adult volunteers thought that they had been reviewed. After all, the air cadets have lost a region and a hands-on air officer commanding—I opposed that at the time and I still believe it was wrong. It was a great advantage for the air cadets to have an AOC to whom everyone had access and it meant a lot to the volunteers—the fellows in the blue uniforms. The loss of a hands-on AOC did as much as anything to make the volunteers think that the RAF and Ministers had lost interest in them. Such issues affect motivation.

Other problems include the move of the headquarters from Newton to Cranwell; the loss of a substantial element of air-experience flying; the loss of day-to-day command and control of the air-experience flights, which my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre mentioned; and the reduction in places available at summer camps. The volunteers saw all those actions as part of a substantial review of air cadet policy and activity. Consequently, it came as no surprise to me and others that the volunteers initially reacted adversely to the new review.

I place those facts on record not to moan, but to draw attention to the challenge that has to be faced if we are to turn hopes of expansion into reality. How can we make expansion a reality? We must first acknowledge the lessons of history. In the 1950s, conscription encouraged young boys to join the ATC and to remain members between the ages of 16 and 18 so that their period of service would be in the Royal Air Force. That experience has a message for us—that environment and attitudes are important. How can we, without conscription, create a climate of opinion about a citizens' military that would encourage boys and girls to join and to remain members of their local ATC squadron or Air Force section of the CCF? That is one of the challenges that we must face.

We should first examine how we can retain more boys and girls past the age of 16. If we keep more of them in the cadets when they reach 16, we will expand without having to add to the headquarters staff, the facilities or the instructors. If we can do that successfully, we could increase the present strength of the air cadets by some 30 to 40 per cent. without substantially increasing the overheads of the present air cadet units.

The reason why most youngsters join the cadets is the air element of their activities. Gliding and flying encourage them to stay. We must examine the availability of air-experience flying in gliders and aircraft and the opportunities for cadets to go solo, after training. First, we should consider the location of air-experience flights and the command and control of those flights. I suggest that that is included in the present review. We should also examine the success of the flying scholarship scheme—it is very successful—to see whether any lessons from that success can be applied to air-experience activity.

We should also ask the review team to examine the problems caused by the lack of suitable airfields for the volunteer gliding schools. Boys and girls who go solo in an air cadet glider are unlikely ever to steal cars for thrills. They have already overcome fear and have been risk-challenged. They get a pair of wings to wear on their uniforms and that makes them different. They do not have to prove anything to anybody else. Public money is well invested in such activities and the public get a massive return on their investment.

We must also ask the review team to examine the way that the ATC trains its future instructors and officers. The majority are ex-cadets, so we usually grow our own. With the reduction of the Regular Air Force, there may be opportunities for the older cadets, the auxiliaries and the reserves to become an integral part of every RAF station or unit. There is scope—just as was done with the

[Mr. Walker]

Home Guard in the 1940s—for local air stations to build up more direct contact with volunteer reserve training branch officers, who have volunteered and completed the volunteer reserve Cranwell course. They could be used as guard commanders and for other tasks on the station. They could be assisted in their tasks by the 18 to 20-year-old cadets. Just as during the second world war, the cadets could be given colour flashes to wear on their uniforms—air crew cadets wore white flashes during the war. The flashes would show that the wearer was different, which is important for motivation and gives youngsters something to aim for.

Such cadets would remain active in their cadet squadrons and would be the source of future officers for the squadrons and RAF base units. Over time—it could not be done immediately—the RAF could insist that all future recruits to the service must have been either cadets or members of the university air squadrons, the volunteer reserve or the auxiliaries. That would create an incentive that would keep the youngsters involved. Such a policy would help to create the citizens' Air Force that we need.

Other aspects that should be examined are the outdoor activity centres and the summer camp facilities. Expansion of those will be essential if we are to enlarge the cadets and keep them. The tragedy is that not every cadet can go to camp. In fact, every year fewer go to camp and that issue must be addressed.

In the reports in the press about cadet enlargement, the connection between cadets and schools caught public attention. I do not wish to comment on the possibility of a cadet unit in every secondary school. It would be more realistic to ensure that cadet squadrons have access to school facilities. Too many local education authorities refuse the cadets access because they wear a uniform. Playgrounds can be used for drill practice. For many years, I ran a cadet squadron in Dundee and we used school facilities for drill practice. We won the Scottish drill championship nine years out of 10. In later years, we could not get access to the school playground and the squadron's performance worsened because it had no drill facilities. We need practical ways to address the problems and central Government could insist that those public facilities were made available. That would contribute massively to any expansion of the air cadets.

In conclusion, those in the Front-Bench team have the right ideas and are doing the right things. We on the Back Benches will continue to give them our support. I accept that sometimes we may sound critical of them. That is not because we think that they are doing a bad job—we know that they are not—but because we care so deeply about the issues that we are promoting that sometimes we feel that it takes too long to get what we want. I am not alone in having spent a long time trying to persuade the Government about flying reserves. It would be churlish of us to complain, because we have now got what we wanted and we are delighted. The Front-Bench team has brought that about.

The Royal Air Force recognises the support given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friends on the Front Bench. I am told that by all those in the Royal Air Force and the air cadets with whom I work. They should at least feel that they, like Sir Michael Graydon, have come through this extremely difficult period well. The future looks much better.

8.30 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I welcome the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) and support his comments about the Air Cadet Force and the concept of Army cadets and sea cadets. I hope that his enthusiasm is deeply infectious and that my hon. Friends on the Front Bench will take note. I know that they have already set in motion a plan to support the expansion of this admirable scheme.

I regret the recent decline of the cadets. There are several reasons for that—not just the lack of sufficient input and investment, but the lack of support for defence initiatives in schools, where I would like the scheme to expand. An anti-militaristic mood went through the teaching movement. That is not true of all teachers, but, regrettably, many dismissed the cadet movement as unnecessary to young people's lives. I am sorry about that, because many children were denied tremendous opportunities to learn about friendship, discipline, loyalty and the possibilities for a fine career in any one of the three forces.

I know the effects that being in the cadet forces had on some young people I know. I remember how much my son got out of the sea cadets. He joined as a boy and came out of it a man. He found himself pushed to do things that he never believed possible. Would it not be marvellous if young people, particularly those from inner cities who come from families that are stressed and riven by strife, had an opportunity to achieve things and go beyond what they thought possible? It would give them confidence that would help them to do better at school, and it might lead them to consider a career that they would otherwise never have thought of. In the long term, it would make up for our shortfall, particularly in the Army. I therefore welcome the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside and the comments that have been made about the expansion of the air reserves. There is a wider debate to be had on that, which includes the naval and Army reserves.

I find it exciting to hear, as I did earlier from the Front Bench, that the skills of those who have had expensive pilot training in the Royal Air Force, come to the end of their careers and joined commercial airlines will still be available to us. We have seen the benefits of people coming back to the Territorial Army and regular service. They are accepted on equal terms with those who serve full time. I was recently in Bosnia with the parliamentary armed forces scheme, where I saw how well the Territorial Army has worked and has given a vibrancy to those who are regularly there and to those who join.

I turn now to ballistic missile defence—an important innovation. I remember going to the Pentagon some years ago, where I was given a tour by General James Abrahamson, head of the strategic defence initiative organisation. I learnt at first hand how science and technology could one day make it possible to intercept incoming missiles, even though it seems futuristic. Even 10 years ago, British companies were lending their research skills to that.

I would welcome our grasping the nettle and going one stage further. I accept that ballistic missile defence is a vastly expensive project with many unknowns, and that it will have to be organised internationally, but we should put research and development effort into it. The rewards

will undoubtedly come in the next century. That investment could save the free world from the ultimate disaster. I think that it is worth while.

During my year with the parliamentary armed forces scheme, although I was attached to the Army, I had considerable contact with the Royal Air Force. My last abiding memory of that experience is of flying in the belly of a Hercules aircraft to Split. Inside, it was a dark, noisy and hardly comfortable experience, as I propped myself up against some packaging. All I could do was follow the example of a service man, and doze off.

The record of Hercules aircraft flying to Bosnia is magnificent. They have transported more than 7,000 troops, more than 2,000 tonnes of freight and well over 500 vehicles. With hours and hours of flying in and out of Split, reliable and trusty, they were an essential part of our service. I was proud at the way in which everything worked so efficiently.

In Bosnia, I had the opportunity to fly over the mountains in a Sea King helicopter. I observed the Serbian trenches and the skeletal remains of towns and villages. In this country, I have flown in Hercules aircraft on various exercises. I remember slinking up and down the Welsh mountains and valleys, barely 250 ft above the ground, and swooping off to East Anglia on a four-hour journey to drop off paras for an exercise.

The hours of air force personnel may be long—sometimes intolerably so on long-haul flights—but the men and women never complained. They took pride in their work. I pay particular tribute to the women who have joined the air crews. They never draw attention to themselves and there are no gender differences in the cockpit. They are professionals who get on with their work. It is marvellous to hear of the success of Flight Lieutenant Helen Gardner, who has been performing at the sharp end of flying aircraft.

Mr. Soames: Good man.

Lady Olga Maitland: Quite right. She is a good man because a good woman is equal to a man and better.

The Royal Air Force has delivered excellence all over the world. It is respected for the quality of its work and its ability to be there—wherever it may be. As we approach the general election, it would be fair to ask just how certain we can be in future of continuing to deliver such a magnificent force at the same strength and properly equipped. As long as the Conservative party remains in charge, the country need have no fears. The defence of the nation is secure in our hands. Our armed forces are a vital part of Britain's standing in the world. They enforce our foreign policy initiatives and are respected for being world class—a class of their own.

I also have to issue a warning. The country should be alerted to Labour's plans for a strategic defence review, otherwise we would be failing ourselves. It would be wrong to allow an important idea to be floated and then submerged by the accusation, "You are just politicising the issue and taking us back to the nuclear election of 1983."

We have to examine Labour's plans and their consequences carefully. It could be a watershed. Nowadays, Labour tries to give the impression that it is the party of sound defence. Many of us read the article in *The Daily Telegraph* on Monday by the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair). *[Interruption.]* I took a rather cynical view of it. I could not believe that he promised a review of our armed forces to

"reflect Britain's international interests and commitments."

He boldly announced that the armed forces were

"a precious national asset to be treasured"

and proceeded to offer the armed forces a period of stability. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

Frankly, I do not believe the right hon. Gentleman, and nor will anyone else, because of his track record of twisting and turning his views to suit every political occasion. *[Interruption.]*

During the nuclear debate, I recall going up north and debating against the right hon. Gentleman in Sedgefield. He argued vibrantly and enthusiastically for one-sided nuclear disarmament.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I do not expect a running commentary from the Labour Front Bench.

Lady Olga Maitland: The right hon. Gentleman wore his Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament badge with pride. I recall vividly that he pounded the table and punched the air with that messianic passion that we now see in respect of all sorts of other views. Today, the right hon. Gentleman has abandoned those ideas. He has seen the light. How can I believe that, when he has chopped and changed on every topic under the sun?

Once, the right hon. Gentleman had anti-European views; now, he is pro-European and does not want Britain to be isolated in Europe. He displays a new-found commitment to law and order, despite having opposed or abstained on every measure aimed at bringing order to our streets. The right hon. Gentleman twists and turns on education. He is in favour of grant-maintained status when it suits his family, but against it for the party.

How can anyone trust the right hon. Gentleman on defence? I would not trust him for a minute. Curiously, I cannot remember hearing any Labour Member calling for more money to be spent on defence. If Labour Members really meant what they said, they would go for it, but they have not.

Mr. Spellar: Is that a spending pledge?

Lady Olga Maitland: We are already committed to sound spending on defence.

In *The Daily Telegraph* on Monday, the leader of the Labour party raged about our policies to rationalise our modern armed forces in keeping with current demand, but what ideas did he offer? None. His views were negative. His only answer was to promise our armed forces a defence review and the clear threat of deep cuts to our funding, sacrificing among other sectors great swathes of the RAF by stating

"we must stick to the tough spending limits Gordon Brown has proposed."

So that is how the right hon. Gentleman plans to get away with it.

We should bear it in mind that the Leader of the Opposition has a long list of IOUs to pay off. No doubt the public sector will be first in the queue. In one way or another, the right hon. Gentleman has promised or pledged £30 billion.

[Lady Olga Maitland]

It is not surprising that the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) confirmed our worst fears on the "Today" programme recently. When he was asked directly to deny that Labour would obviously cut defence, he ignored the question and hurried on. We can draw our own conclusions from that. There was no denial, so presumably Labour would cut defence.

I would like to hear more from the Opposition what they would do for defence. Let us go a little further, if the House has any doubts, and recall the comments of the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) in an interview in *The New Statesman* in November 1993. He said:

"we do not need to spend as much on defence."

Only a few weeks ago, in the debate on the Loyal Address, he said:

"It is only by having a strategic defence review, with the painful consequences, that that problem can be addressed."—[*Official Report*, 24 October 1996; Vol. 284, c. 215.]

In truth, defence is a soft touch for the Labour party, which has never had any taste for being robust. Many Labour Members want an easy option. They would like our armed forces to be reduced to a peacekeeping gendarmerie, zipping across the globe on the many missions much favoured by smaller and less significant nations. Labour is racked with bitter disputes about demands to cut spending, scrap nuclear weapons and ban defence exports. It is a rare Labour soul who will be positive and say, "Let's go for it."

Let us look at the lessons of history. The fact that Labour Governments usually cut defence has been mentioned. I remember the fiasco of Labour cancelling the TSR2 at a cost of hundreds of jobs. If Labour Members think that we will forget that and that it will go way, they are wrong. It will haunt them because we will not allow the country to forget that Labour cannot be reliable.

Let us consider the effects of a defence review on jobs. The immediate result would be a freeze on new procurement, defence orders or equipment until the review was concluded. Bearing in mind the long lead-in time from decision-making to handing over a weapons system, the armed forces would be operating in an antiquated vacuum. To put it metaphorically, it would be a matter of going back to pitchforks.

What would Labour be likely to axe? How many jobs would be put at stake by its proposed review? We should be told now, before the election, so that sober judgments can be made. Labour Members claim that they are still committed to the Eurofighter. The hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) said passionately earlier in the debate that he had made that commitment on television. Although I am sure that the hon. Gentleman was sincere, I also believe that he operates alone and will not be able to convince his colleagues, let alone the sisters, who will have quite different ideas.

I find it strange that Labour has promised to keep the Eurofighter. That promise sits uneasily with Labour's queasiness about spending £60 million on the replacement for the Britannia. When we press Labour Members, they always fudge. We have never received a clear message about whether the Eurofighter would be included in the review or whether Labour would stick to 232—the number to which we have committed ourselves. The truth is that the Eurofighter order will wither away and die under Labour.

We have to consider other issues. I believe that there will be redundancy notices at Rolls-Royce with the cuts in the replacement of maritime patrol aircraft. I can see a threat to the Apache attack helicopter, and the EH101 at Westland, and restrictions on the sale of the Hawk overseas. No sales; no production; no jobs; the dole. It is a very bleak picture. Is the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East really going to savage the workers of British Aerospace by cutting the Nimrod 2000 at Prestwick?

Throughout the land, 360,000 jobs depend on defence sales. They are found not only in the big name contractors, but in hundreds of small companies that make thousands of basic components such as valves, fuel systems and microchips. The Labour party is of course against defence sales.

Mr. Spellar: Rubbish.

Lady Olga Maitland: I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to early-day motion 422, on the

"Sale of Armoured Vehicles to Indonesia"

which condemns such sales, and has been signed by 59 Opposition Members. It declares:

"That this House condemns the decision by Her Majesty's Government to issue export licences for the export to Indonesia of 50 Alvis armoured vehicles, as well as a variety of police vehicles".

That is negative and will kill jobs.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Do I understand from the approach that the hon. Lady has adopted in the past moment or two that, so far as she is concerned, the United Kingdom should sell arms to anyone who is willing to buy them? Should we not have some regard to the history of human rights in some of the countries to which we sell arms, and not bear in mind our experience of selling arms to Saddam Hussein?

Lady Olga Maitland: We have a very clear policy on arms sales abroad: they are for defence and for friendly nations. We will not sell to a country that will use arms for an improper purpose. It is suggested that it is somehow improper to sell police vehicles to Indonesia. Such a policy would kill jobs—and that would be on the Labour party's conscience.

In the south-east, almost 40,000 people are employed in jobs that depend on Government defence programmes. How will Labour explain its policy to the 380 people who work for United Electronics in Greenford which makes anti-submarine warfare electronic systems, among other projects? Will it say that it is sorry, but it is going to have to ransack their jobs for false ideology? What about Racal Electronics, which employs 750 workers in defence-related jobs? They will not be too happy about the cuts. It would be a cruel trick to hit West-Air, which employs 45 people.

All those companies are naturally concerned about long-term commitment, as they put much of their resources into research and development as well as manufacturing. More important, the export orders that they receive are an extremely good earner for Britain. The development of leading edge technology reinforces

Britain's position as a world leader, which in turn secures our position on the world stage and, indeed, the UN Security Council. The Labour party will have to face the fact that its defence policies will be a minefield of problems that will blow up in its face. We scrap an aircraft carrier at our peril. It would take 15 years or more to replace it, and I doubt that the world outside would be benign enough to wait.

I can imagine, for example, during the strategic defence review, the Labour party calling for its defence academics who, from the comfort of their armchairs, will advise it to trim this and cut that, with the result that resources for training will be virtually non-existent. Without training, we cannot perform. The mantra would be that our armed forces were no longer large enough to fight a serious war alone—so why should so many capabilities be kept; why should we not share more roles with our allies, leaving spare cash for pet projects in the social services?

I can see a Labour argument developing into, "Why not make tanks redundant, like battleships, since a major land war in Europe is less likely to be fought? And while you are about it, why not bring the Army home from Germany?" The result would be a drastic pruning of regiments, a slashed Air Force, which would have less to protect, and a decimated Navy. Many Labour defence analysts believe that 35 frigates and destroyers is overkill, and prefer to cut the number by 25 per cent.

Labour could conclude that nuclear-powered attack submarines, whose task is to protect Trident, could be phased out and not replaced. Some argue that there is no merit in maintaining an ability to wage amphibious warfare—in other words, mounting an opposed landing from the sea—so out would go the two new amphibious landing platforms that have just been ordered. There are many who see no military purpose in the Territorial Army, so out that would go. The debate will rage. Backed by one of its gurus, Bradford university's Malcolm Chalmers, who says that Britain could and should spend substantially less on defence, Labour will plough on suggesting that we are exaggerating our role in the world.

As it is, 20 Labour Members of Parliament tabled an amendment to the defence estimates, calling on the Government to cut spending on defence to the European average—totally ignoring our responsibilities. At the Labour party conference, seven resolutions or amendments were tabled for the scrapping of Trident. About £4 billion at least is at stake—but it could be much more. That figure alone would wipe out the entire RAF or the Navy. The generals, air marshals and admirals would all be up in arms; the soldiers, sailors and airmen would be in despair; there would be deep demoralisation; and workers in the defence industry would become desperate as their numbers piled up on the dole.

Above all, the great British public will tear with unprecedented ferocity into Labour as they see our great traditions in defending ourselves honourably and playing a key role in the world disappear. The Labour leadership, preoccupied with spin doctors and many spending pledges to fulfil—and the desire to win the general election—does not regard defence as a high priority. It certainly does not recognise what a minefield the proposed review will be. We have a duty to unmask that review, because it will certainly mean less for defence and less security for our country. I for one would never trust Labour with defence, and I do not believe that the electorate will either.

8.57 pm

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): I am struggling for a word to describe that speech—breathtaking, I think, especially the biblical Götterdämmerung that was conjured up in the event of a Labour Government. I suppose that it was, however, an indication that "Care in the Community" sometimes can work. "Wired to the moon" is probably the only expression that comes to mind.

I would not mind so much about the people who roar like lions about defence from those green Benches, had they not sat meek as lambs over the past 10 years while we have seen a 27 per cent. cut from the defence budget in real terms. I would not mind the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) and her hon. Friends referring to the distant prospect of a decimated Air Force, a slashing of the number of regiments, and reductions in the Navy, if that were not precisely the definition of what the Government have done for the past 10 years.

I would not mind lectures on the need to retain stability in the armed forces, were it not for the fact that over the past 10 years under the Conservative Government, there has been a desert of chaos, after which the prospect of two or three years when the defence budget remained as planned—that is what we have pledged—would be an oasis of stability.

I have been provoked into responding to an individual speech, but now I shall return to my original text and join in a brief moment of consensus with the tributes paid to Sir Frank Whittle, welcome Brigadier Richard Holmes to his new post and pay a formal, if early, farewell to Sir Michael Graydon, who has served the Royal Air Force well, and often proved a perceptive observer of political personalities and events. We wish him well in the future.

At the opening of the debate, we were treated to the normal stentorian delivery of the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, who, as usual, appeared before us as a family-size Richard Todd, taking us through the tributes to the armed forces. As has been said, he managed to avoid subjects that could have arisen during the Navy debate had it taken place in the normal way—subjects such as the royal yacht, which I shall not pursue now—or in the Army debate, such as its dramatic under-strength, and the failure to bring the Army up to establishment levels.

However, I fully endorse the Minister's initial comments about air power. The speed, flexibility and reach that he described were amply illustrated during the opening session of the Gulf war. There we saw the utility of air power—the destruction of Saddam's command, control and communications, the prevention of Iraqi control of the air, the damage inflicted on the Iraqi troops through bombing attrition, and the destruction of the morale of the enemy, which is one of the elementary aspects of any impending victory.

I shall refer briefly as I go along to the contributions by other hon. Members. I have listened to many speeches by the hon. Member for Ruislip–Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), but today his speech was witty, moving in parts, informed and incisive. If I single him out, it is because tonight he has something to celebrate. I congratulate him on the fact that after 26 and a half years' campaigning, he has secured the flying reserves.

[Dr. John Reid]

That reminds me of the old story about the militant Liberal activists who go on to the street screaming, "What do we want?"—"Gradual change." "When do we want it?"—"In due course." The hon. Gentleman has certainly achieved that. In this case, Ministers have fully observed the strictures of the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) to the effect that we do not want anything to happen too suddenly, and that gradual change is always better.

While we are talking about air power, which both the hon. Member for Ruislip–Northwood and the Minister mentioned, I shall mention in passing the report by the General Accounting Office of the United States into the comparative utility of modern technology as opposed to traditional methods of bombing and air power.

I know that the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, who takes an interest in such matters, will be aware of that report which, although it may be only a superficial, initial report, seems to illustrate the fact that in difficult conditions, such as those affected by weather, and when it is hard to assess battle damage and so on, some of the more traditional platforms are every bit as effective as extremely expensive new technology. That idea is worth examining more closely.

I pay tribute, as other hon. Members have done, to the professionalism of our Royal Air Force. That was exhibited during the Gulf war, and the testimony of that exercise was to the value of air power. The Minister, of course, mentioned the Balkans, where with both fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters, the Royal Air Force has been assisting IFOR and SFOR; the middle east, where it acts as the eyes, and if necessary the claws, of the United Nations over Iraq; and the Falklands garrison, which operates mainly out of Mount Pleasant.

That service is performed not only in defence of our country. The Minister and several other hon. Members have mentioned the utility of our armed forces to the civilian population in times of emergency, especially, although not exclusively, through search and rescue. We identify ourselves with those comments.

We very much support the progress of co-operation and co-ordinated activity with our allies—particularly the French—to which the Minister and the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell) referred. We identify with the hon. and learned Gentleman's comments on the progress that he would like to see in common procurement and interoperability. We would welcome that, but there should be no question of political decisions being taken during such co-operation on any other basis than an intergovernmental one, and there must be no question of acceding to those who would seek to place our troops, or those of the Western European Union, under the control of a European Commissioner or a European majority voting system.

The hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence, is learned on military matters, and he made an extremely wide-ranging speech on global geo-politics, which I shall not attempt to encapsulate in my brief summing up. He asked about the shortage of spares following the Government cuts, and sought assurances on that matter. I hope that the Minister of State for Defence Procurement will respond to him, either tonight or in writing. The hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside also pointed out the detrimental effect that overstretch can have on morale—a point that hon. Members have been making in the House for a decade.

The hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside also mentioned the effect of cuts in the defence medical services, and referred in particular to the danger to the service men and women who are isolated in national health service wards and who may be in an environment that does not encourage the ethos of the armed services as the medical services previously did—a point raised also by the hon. Member for Wyre.

The dangers of undermining the ethos of the armed services need to be pointed out. Most hon. Members would agree that the ethos of the armed forces is sometimes misunderstood outside the House, and is almost always underestimated. It is one of those items that is difficult to quantify in the ledgers of cost accountancy or to measure in terms of operational effectiveness. However, I have never spoken to anyone in our armed forces who does not believe that in an emergency—when the armed forces are asked to kill the enemy or to defeat its will—the ethos of the British armed forces takes an almost concrete form. We must look at the long-term effect that contractorisation, privatisation and cuts could have on the martial ethos of the British armed forces. If we undermine that ethos, we may find that we pay a heavy price in operational effectiveness for short-term savings.

A number of hon. Members referred to the defence industry. The hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside commented that if we are to remain a major player in the world market and provide back-up for the skills of the RAF, we need to encourage innovation and development. That is why we welcome the technology foresight programme, and we are enormously encouraged by the active campaign mounted in support of it by the Society of British Aerospace Companies.

A number of rather nervous Conservative Members raised what they insist on calling a defence review, but what we have always referred to as a strategic security review—which I know is a more complex subject, and is therefore more difficult for the Conservatives to grasp. The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam went half way by calling it a strategic defence review, so progress is being made. We have made it plain that the review is not a cover for cuts.

The shadow Chancellor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), was attacked by the Conservative party last week for saying that departmental budgets will stay the same under the next Labour Government for at least two years. I do not think that Conservative Members can attack him last week for saying that we shall have stability, and then attack him again tonight for saying—supposedly—that we shall change the budgets. I make this simple point to some of the Tory lions who have been roaring tonight, but who have been as quiet as mice while their Front-Bench colleagues have slashed defence expenditure: two years of maintaining the plans as currently set out for defence expenditure would be an oasis of stability in the desert of financial chaos created by the Government.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam said that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition had said in his article in *The Daily Telegraph* that the security review was to give stability. She will forgive me if I say that she only half-quoted. I know the phrase by heart:

"a period of stability and reflection".

The stability comes from two years' maintenance of finance and budgets; the reflection comes from forward planning and the need to have a long-term strategic assessment of our aims five, 10 or 15 years down the road, exactly as we would have for any individual item of expenditure in the defence budget; and from interleaving foreign affairs with defence—after all, defence is the daughter of foreign affairs—and with the industrial dimension.

That is important because, as several hon. Members have said, if we do not have an industrial strategic dimension to our defence planning, we shall end up merely transferring costs to the welfare budget or losing out in science, technology, unemployment and so on. In other words, we hope that we have the capacity to institutionalise strategic thought at the centre of the Ministry of Defence, as that has not been too evident to date.

The question of Eurofighter has been raised repeatedly. I understand that an election campaign is under way and that it may seem convenient to try to gain a few votes in seats that are considered strategic, by bringing the debate down to a party political level and attempting dishonestly to portray the Labour party as being opposed to Eurofighter.

I merely ask every Conservative Member to consider whether it is in the national interest, when there has been a united front on the issue for six years, to allow the untrue story to go abroad in the next two months, in the immediate run-up to the decision in the Bundestag, that the United Kingdom parties are divided on Eurofighter. If the German Opposition can put about a credible story that the next Labour Government oppose Eurofighter, Conservative Members will have done their country no service.

We are committed to the programme as it stands. We shall order Eurofighter, provided always—these provisos apply to the Government as well; there is no blank cheque for the Germans—that there is a continuing agreement on work share, numbers and financial arrangements that is acceptable to the British Government and British industry.

On numbers, we are committed to the programme as it stands. I cannot be clearer than that. If any Conservative Member thinks that, lowly though my position is, I would be stupid enough to repeat the words that I have said tonight and to say what I have said today and last week, without discussing the matter with my Treasury team and my leader, they are either naive or believe that I have a death wish as regards my future career. I cannot make the position any clearer. I hope that from now on the issue will not be used as a party political tool to the detriment of our country.

We have long expressed our support for the staff college and for the moves towards more joint service activity and operations, which were mentioned by various hon. Members. I was able, courtesy of the Minister, to visit the joint permanent headquarters at Northwood, and was greatly impressed by the progress being made in that direction. That is the context in which we have supported, and continue to support, the concept of a joint staff college.

However, even his best friends would agree that the Minister, or whoever is dealing with the matter, has not handled it in the most coherent fashion, to say the least. In some ways, it has been spectacularly mishandled; the college has had more venues at different stages than the Scottish Grand Committee. I do not know the full details of the latest proposal, but assuming that they remain the same until the general election, we shall continue to support the concept of the joint staff college. However, obviously, we shall want to look closely at the details. Anyone seeking power would be expected to say that, because there would have to be a good argument to throw aside the inherited traditions not only of Greenwich but of Camberley and Bracknell, particularly as the latter two are only five or six miles apart. It is possible, as many universities have shown, to run a joint course on a split site. We shall consider such arguments if the electorate entrust us with power.

The hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) mentioned the cadet forces, as did the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam, whom I congratulate, because last year she did a bit of flying herself. At any rate, she flew downwards with the Parachute Regiment with the armed forces parliamentary scheme. We value the work of the cadet forces. The hon. Member for North Tayside has continually advocated their value. I have been fortunate to spend some time with them and I in no way underestimate the value for young people of all social backgrounds of experience with the cadets. I agree with the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam that such experience could help kids from deprived backgrounds, not people who have committed offences, but people at risk, who have perhaps never had the chance to see outside the inner cities. Kids who have never had confidence instilled in them may be able to show their leadership potential and so on. There is vast room and potential utility for cadet forces to contribute to the social well-being of many such kids.

Mr. Bill Walker: The hon. Gentleman probably does not know that the Air Training Corps is carrying out pilot schemes with youngsters at risk. It is not taking people who have committed offences but is taking youngsters whom social work departments deem to be at risk.

Dr. Reid: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, but I was aware of that. The Army has also done it. I have spent two weekends on such schemes and I was deeply impressed.

I was surprised by the peremptory nature of the story that appeared in various newspapers. I know that this was nothing to do with the Ministry of Defence. It certainly was not a leak. It was merely a coincidence that when the story appeared, the Secretary of State for Defence happened to be out with the cadets, and press photographers were there. No costings were attached. The story did not distinguish between the sea cadets and the other two cadet forces. The sea cadets are funded by local government, not the MOD; their funding has been slashed for the past 10 years. There was a hint of compulsion and it was all to be done through schools. None of those factors is helpful to those who want to operate through an extension of the existing cadet scheme. I hope that the manner in which the story was put out and the flaws in the argument do not kill off expansion for the Government who will take over after the general election.

I must deal briefly deal with the aberration of the last five minutes of the Minister's speech. I cannot believe that it was his own work. It was out of character for him

[Dr. Reid]

to launch a vicious attack on the Opposition. I can suppose only that he was instructed to read it by some central office spin doctor. Does he honestly think that anyone will believe his promise of stability in finance and manpower this time round? Does he think that everyone has already forgotten that the Government have cut defence expenditure by 31 per cent. in real terms, or that RAF personnel have been cut by 38 per cent. since the Prime Minister came to power?

When the Minister says that the Labour party in government cannot be trusted with the ethos of the armed forces, does he think that people have forgotten that service men and women's houses have been sold off to the Japanese or that the Royal Naval college was to be sold to the highest bidder? When he talks about the administration of the future of our armed forces being in danger, can he not recall—as even his colleagues would politely admit—that the past 10 years have in large part consisted of incoherence in strategy, instability in structures and, in some ways, incompetence in finance? Certainly, on occasion, there has been indifference to some personnel matters such as morale and overstretch.

The Labour party does not claim that it would get everything right, but the Conservative party's persistent claim that it is the only patriotic party and the only party capable of defending this country has a rather hollow ring in the country, because no one believes that the defence budget, for instance, is any safer in the Conservative Government's hands than the national health service budget. The resonance of the comments that have been made tonight will be regarded as neither effective politically nor useful for the future of our forces.

The people who have to suffer from instability and incoherence are those in the RAF. The 1990s have not been an easy period for any of our forces. The Government have struggled with the great changes—they have been difficult changes—of the previous decade and, all too often, the armed forces have been asked to bear the burden of the Government's inadequacies, or perhaps the inadequacies of the House, in coming to terms with those great changes. The forces have, as ever, borne that burden with a fortitude bordering on the miraculous. They have displayed the professionalism and dedication that everyone in the House has come to expect of them. They have borne the burdens that they have been asked to bear, as well as the increasing commitments and diminishing resources, with determination and commitment. They have stood sentinel in the defence of their country, but they have also served in the interests of the wider world through NATO and the United Nations.

Whatever our differences in the House, we are united in our respect, gratitude and admiration for the men and women who so selflessly serve our country. They deserve the respect and thanks of all of us, and I am sure that they have it from all of us.

9.21 pm

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. James Arbuthnot): First, I echo the words of the Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), in thanking Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Graydon for a long and extremely distinguished contribution to the Royal Air Force and to the defence of his country. I am sure that the whole House will wish his successor well when he takes up his post.

A number of important points have been made during this debate on both sides of the House. I cannot answer all of them, but my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces or I shall write to those hon. Members whose points we cannot cover.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside, in a thoughtful and wide-ranging speech, and the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell), asked about TACEVALs. To reduce the burden on units until April 1997, the Chief of Air Staff directed that tactical and operational evaluations were to be postponed and formal inspections and staff visits scaled down. However, I can reassure my hon. Friend and the hon. and learned Gentleman that temporarily postponing those evaluations will not prejudice the RAF's NATO role, nor its operational capability. NATO is currently undertaking a complete review of the TACEVAL-OPEVAL system and it is intended to resume evaluation of RAF units in line with the new NATO guidelines later this year.

My hon. Friend the Chairman of the Select Committee asked about spares and fleet serviceability figures. Again, I reassure him that corrective measures are in hand and some have already begun to feed through to the serviceability of aircraft, although it must be said that some have not yet fed through. We expect the figures over the next six months to show a marked improvement.

The hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) made a moving speech about the Mull of Kintyre Chinook accident, a tragedy that saddens us all. I cannot deal in this speech with the details that he raised. The RAF's investigation was scrupulous. It found no evidence of structural or technical malfunction, nor of hostile action. Nevertheless, the hon. Gentleman asked some important questions and my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces will write to him to answer those questions.

The hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) spoke about her constituency—

Mr. O'Neill: Before the Minister goes on, I have to tell him that that was a most disappointing response. I got in touch with his office yesterday and sent him a fax detailing the points I was going to raise today; I did so with the express purpose of getting the Minister to respond to those points today. I think that 16 to 24 hours' notice of points to be raised is more than enough to allow any Government Department to deal with them. I took the trouble to do that because I did not want to be palmed off in the way that I have been this evening. That is not a fair way to treat the House or to deal with a matter of such gravity in a debate of this kind, which represents one of the few opportunities that Back Benchers have to raise issues of this nature.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has reacted in that way. The reason why I am treating his important comments in the way that I am is that, while it has been possible to produce a complete and detailed answer to the points that he raises, it would not provide a balanced winding-up speech for this debate to spend the 20 minutes or more that would be needed to cover the whole of the Chinook accident. I have details about which

my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Gentleman, who will be able to make those details public in whatever way he wishes. It was important that the hon. Gentleman should have made his speech, because I know that he felt strongly that the families of those who were held to blame for that crash had not had their points put on the record and he has had the opportunity to do that. It is, however, right to deal with the details in the way that I have suggested.

Mr. O'Neill: I do not want to take up the Minister's time and I understand his point, but he will understand my frustration. All I would say is that I take his point and I would hope that, at the appropriate time and after I have received his response, I shall be able to bring the relatives to meet the Minister for the Armed Forces to discuss the matter. I should like to think that will be possible and that the Minister's response to me will be put in the Library and be available for anyone else to read.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I see no reason why the response should not be put in the Library. As for a meeting with my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces, that is a matter that the hon. Gentleman will wish to raise with my hon. Friend.

The hon. Member for Cambridge spoke about her constituency interest in the Tristar maintenance contract. As she knows, the Government are committed to a policy of international competitive bidding. That has two effects: first, it provides value for money for the taxpayer; and, secondly, it prompts British industry to become very competitive. As a result of that competitiveness, British industry is doing very well, not only by taking over 90 per cent. of British defence orders by putting in the best bids, but by taking 25 per cent. of the entire world's defence trade last year—up from 19 per cent. in 1995, which figure was up from 16 per cent. in 1994. That is a remarkable achievement. It is obvious that our defence sector is extremely healthy—second only to that of the United States and supporting 360,000 jobs.

On the occasion that we are talking about, Marshall put in one bid that was competitive and one bid that was not. The hon. Lady does her constituents no service by suggesting that Marshall is going to collapse as a result of GAMCO putting in a better bid. Marshall will continue to act as the conversion design authority for RAF Tristars, unless the hon. Lady insists on talking the company out of the job.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Does the Minister agree, however, that in putting Marshall of Cambridge in direct competition with a firm such as GAMCO he is driving down quality and wages in a way that we would find totally unacceptable in this country?

Mr. Arbuthnot: No, I do not agree with that. We expect to get very high quality out of the bid that we have accepted.

The Government's commitment to air power and its importance to the defence of the United Kingdom's interests at home and abroad is clear. The Royal Air Force is better equipped now than at any time in its history. It has experienced, and will continue to experience, no less than a technological revolution, which affects the whole spectrum of Air Force capabilities. That is not merely a re-equipment exercise; it is a step change in equipment capabilities, which reflects the needs of the RAF in the 21st century.

That step change has required us to create a highly efficient, streamlined support structure, and to bear down on headquarters costs. It has entailed challenging the ways in which we previously worked and has meant being open to ideas from inside and outside the traditional defence organisation.

We must never forget that the RAF's most valuable asset is its personnel. This has been a period of dramatic change for the RAF and we recognise the challenges that have had to be confronted during the manpower drawdown—a matter which was mentioned by hon. Members on both sides of the House. The measures that we have taken to reorganise the RAF personnel management and training structure mean that our air men and women are the best trained and motivated Air Force in the world. My hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces announced last week the formation of the RAF personnel management agency, which will ensure that we invest properly in the careers of our officers and non-commissioned personnel.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) for his constant support for the reserves, the auxiliaries and the cadets—a support based on his long knowledge of, and involvement in, the RAF. His contribution tonight was especially constructive.

Maintaining morale involves, not only good career management, but ensuring that personnel are fully supported and able to perform their vital tasks. In the RAF, especially, investment in equipment is vital if our military capabilities are to be effective in future. Such investment also has a large positive impact on morale, as the welcome given by the RAF and other services to recent orders has demonstrated. That point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) in a telling speech, as the House would expect from someone with his experience.

To review the operational activities of the Air Force since the last debate is to realise the importance of such investment. Since June 1996, the Air Force has continued to be involved in operations world wide. In the former Yugoslavia, the RAF has provided air support to the NATO stability force with the Harrier and, as we heard tonight, has even flown my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), who has taken such a close and effective interest in our armed forces for a considerable time. In former Yugoslavia, the Jaguar fleet, aircraft from which are taking over the SFOR support role this week, is part of the way through an extensive upgrade programme to improve mission avionics and to provide a laser designation capability to deliver precision guided munitions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) mentioned the valuable contribution of the support helicopter force to operations in the region and elsewhere. When the RAF's additional Chinooks and new EH101s enter service from this year and 1999 respectively, the lift capabilities of the helicopter fleet will be greatly enhanced.

In the middle east, our support to UN operations is demonstrated by our Tornado GR1s based at Incirlik and Al Kharj. The capabilities of the Tornado ground attack force are being massively upgraded by the mid-life update

[Mr. Arbuthnot]

programme. That will entail 142 aircraft being provided with improved avionics, navigation and other systems which will enable the aircraft to seek out its targets more effectively, as well as improving the Tornado's self-defence capabilities. The first squadrons of GR4s will start to form next year.

Investment in equipment will also enhance our forces stationed in the permanent garrisons. In the Falklands, airborne air defence is performed by Tornado F3s. I announced last March that the F3s are to be upgraded to enable them to carry advanced short and medium-range air-to-air missiles. A contract for that work was signed in November with British Aerospace Warton. That is one of the enhancements that we have introduced, which would presumably be put at risk by the strategic defence review—for the first time this evening, I heard it referred to as a strategic security review—proposed by the Opposition. Or are the Opposition prepared to say that that enhancement would not be included in such a review? The recently introduced field standard C variant of the Rapier surface-to-air missiles are manned by the RAF Regiment from Mount Pleasant airfield.

Our support to the Falklands, and our other garrisons and other operations around the globe, will also be enhanced when the 25 C-130J Hercules II transport aircraft enter service next year. I am grateful for what my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip–Northwood said about the C-130J. As regards his point about the C-17, clearly we must listen carefully to what he says. We are closely examining our future requirements for strategic and tactical airlift to support our deployments.

Mr. Wilkinson: There will still be immense pressures on the defence budget and a critical need for new equipment, such as a future medium-range air-to-air missile, the ASTOR, and ultimately ballistic missile defence. In those circumstances, is it not much more cost-effective to buy a proven aircraft, the C-17, which has shown itself to fulfil the role admirably, probably two or three times better than a future large aircraft ever could, than to invest development and production money in a new aircraft that is only marginally better than the C-130J? Airbus can build a new aircraft—a Jumbo equivalent, the 3XX, for example—but we should not put money in a multinational programme when a proven aircraft already exists and is in service with the US air force.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I hear what my hon. Friend says. He makes an extremely important point, but several of my hon. Friends and other hon. Members are interested in the future large aircraft programme. My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre raised the matter, as he has done on several occasions. I know that he takes a close interest in it.

We continue to work with partner nations on the future large aircraft with a view to rejoining the programme, ensuring first that a number of conditions are met. Broadly, those are that the programme should be commercially managed under the Airbus umbrella; that our price and productions requirements are met; and that resources are available for the programme. Into that calculation must go the point that my hon. Friend tellingly makes.

Mr. Mans: Does my hon. Friend agree that, to provide our heavy lift requirements, we must analyse the different options open to us, and decide on the basis of value for money which is the best aircraft, and that at this stage, without that analysis first being carried out, we should not prefer any specific aircraft?

Mr. Arbuthnot: We must, of course, make our decisions very carefully indeed. We must make such calculations. We are making good progress in evaluating the options available to us, but there is more work to be done before all the conditions are satisfied. We will make an announcement once a decision has been taken. The mini-debate that there has just been among my hon. Friends shows how difficult that decision will be.

Equipment programmes are in place across the spectrum of RAF capabilities. Many of them are collaborative, and in that context I wholly agree with the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell). I have mentioned the Harrier, which is built by British Aerospace and McDonnell Douglas, and the EH101 from GKN Westland and Agusta of Italy. Such collaboration offers the chance to transfer technological skills and to share the risk and costs of development. We shall continue to seek opportunities for collaboration where it is practicable to do that, both within Europe and across the Atlantic.

Shortly after the previous RAF debate we announced the outcome of three major equipment programmes. The RAF's maritime fleet plays a vital role in seeking out enemy submarines and surface vessels. Therefore, it plays a key role in support of the nuclear deterrent. It also contributes significantly to our ability safely to deploy and sustain our contingency forces, including the joint rapid deployment force, as well as carrying out routine maritime surveillance and search and rescue tasks.

In addition to their operations in the north Atlantic, Nimrod aircraft played vital roles in the Gulf conflict and more recently in the Adriatic in support of operations in Bosnia. The existing maritime patrol fleet of Nimrod MR2 aircraft has been in service for a quarter of a century and the aircraft are nearing the end of their life. Therefore we decided, following competition, to buy 21 Nimrod 2000 aircraft from British Aerospace.

Lest there be any misunderstanding, I should say that the Nimrod 2000 will, in effect, be a new aircraft with the most modern mission systems of their type in the world. It is a British solution, and it was selected because it was the most cost-effective way to meet our forces' requirements. A contract was signed in December. As prime contractor, British Aerospace is wholly responsible for systems integration and for the airframe. Rolls-Royce will supply the engines and Racal will supply the radar. Key elements of the mission system, which is crucial to the effectiveness of maritime patrol operations, will be provided through a strategic partnership between GEC and Boeing. In all, more than 200 companies throughout the UK will benefit from the decision, sustaining some 2,600 jobs.

The RAF is rightly keen to take delivery of the new aircraft as soon as possible and delivery will start in 2001. The Nimrod 2000 will be in service for at least 25 years, but it too would be at risk from a Labour strategic security review, or would Labour exempt it from the review?

Dr. Reid: We are not joining in the game of exempting from reviews. The Army will be in the review, but we do

not propose to close down the Army. If the contract has been signed we shall honour it, as any responsible Government would do.

Mr. Arbuthnot: At least that is a helpful start.

At the time of our announcement on Nimrod 2000, we announced two major decisions on air-to-surface weapon systems which will greatly enhance the RAF's counter-air and offensive support capabilities. Matra-British Aerospace's air-launched cruise missile, Storm Shadow, was selected to meet our requirement for a stand-off weapon for the precision attack of high-value infrastructure targets. The Gulf conflict demonstrated the value of that capability, which will be of the utmost importance in future operations, including high-intensity conflict.

Storm Shadow will enter service in 2001, and will be carried by Tornado GR4, Harrier and Eurofighter aircraft. The total procurement cost of this order is about £800 million, and at its peak it will sustain about 1,600 jobs in the United Kingdom. We also announced that we would buy Brimstone anti-armour weapons from GEC-Marconi. A contract was signed in November. Brimstone will replace the RAF's current stock of BL755 cluster bombs, which are becoming less effective against modern armoured threats and which require overflight of the target, putting the launch aircraft at risk. When it enters service in 2001, Brimstone, which will be carried by Tornado, Harrier and Eurofighter aircraft, will provide a vital capability, complementing the Army's attack helicopter force. At its peak about 700 British jobs will be sustained by this order, the total procurement cost of which is about £700 million.

Those two highly sophisticated systems will also be key air-to-ground weapons for Eurofighter, which remains our No. 1 procurement priority. In September, we announced that we were ready, in principle, to proceed with the production investment, production, and support phases of the Eurofighter programme. We hope to be able to sign the appropriate contracts in the next couple of months. In terms of employment, the some 6,000 jobs sustained by the development programme are expected to increase to 14,000 when Eurofighter production is at its peak.

Meanwhile, the aircraft's flight test programme is going well, and five development aircraft are now flying. The first twin-seat aircraft, DA6, made its maiden flight on 31 August and its public debut on 23 September. The DA7 made its debut flight on 27 January this year. The sixth aircraft, DA5, is scheduled to fly tomorrow, fitted with the ECR90 radar that will be so crucial to the Eurofighter's effectiveness. The seventh should fly by the end of this month. The EJ200 engine will power the last two aircraft, and is already flying in three aircraft.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have paid tribute to Eurofighter many times in the past. I agree entirely with the comments of the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East, who said that we must continue to emphasise that Eurofighter is an incredible aircraft. It is simply the most capable multi-role combat aircraft ever built. I am happy to take this opportunity to agree with the hon. and learned Gentleman, particularly as yesterday I was able to sit in the cockpit of DA4 during a visit to British Aerospace at Warton. It will not only be a potent air superiority fighter, replacing the RAF's current fleet of Tornado F3s, but will be extremely capable in the air-to-ground role that is currently filled by Jaguar.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way, and for his felicitous remarks. He may recall that during the debate I mentioned reports that Germany was considering acquiring 40 Eurofighters in the multi-role form. Has the Ministry of Defence considered that option?

Mr. Arbuthnot: Yes. The hon. and learned Gentleman is correct to suggest that we could buy a further 70 aircraft to fulfil that role. However, that decision does not need to be taken yet, and we have decided to take the 232, which will be the keystone of the RAF's future capability.

The aircraft represents the latest advances in aerospace and avionic technology, and the industries of the United Kingdom and of the other partners can take great pride in their achievements. Through Eurofighter, we have maintained our great history of ground-breaking aerospace programmes. In the air superiority role, a key armament for Eurofighter will be the future medium-range air-to-air missile. We are presently evaluating responses to the invitation to tender, and I hope to take a decision on the way ahead in the near future.

In December, I announced that we had decided to undertake a feasibility study into a future offensive air system. The Tornado GR1 force—which is being upgraded to GR4 standard—will, in combination with the new weapons systems being procured, continue to provide a long-range power projection and air interdiction capability well into the next century. The study will examine a range of options for maintaining this capability beyond the planned withdrawal date of the GR4 in the second decade of the new millennium.

A future offensive air system would be in RAF service until the second half of the next century. By taking a long-term view, we can ensure that the RAF has the capabilities it requires to undertake its vital tasks. The RAF is better equipped than ever before, and it is continuing to benefit from massive investment in new systems.

I was heartened by the recent comments of the hon. Member for Motherwell, North about being prepared to honour contracts. I was also heartened, to an extent, by his comment on Eurofighter. However, we have not yet placed a contract with Eurofighter, and I was disappointed that he did not say that he would exempt it from the security review. Many of my hon. Friends have raised the review issue in this debate, but the hon. Gentleman has made no commitment to exempt the Eurofighter—that hugely important aircraft—from such a review. Unless the

[Mr. Arbuthnot]

Labour party can come clean about that review and about where the "painful consequences" described by the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark)—

Mr. O'Neill: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Arbuthnot: No, I am winding up.

Mr. O'Neill: That is no excuse; will he give way?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is very clear that if the Minister or any other hon. Member who has the Floor does not give way, the other hon. Member must resume his seat.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The hon. Member for South Shields has himself stated that there would be "painful consequences" from a defence review, and we need to know where those "painful consequences" would cut most deep.

Dr. Reid: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, now that he has been fed his lines by the hon. Member for Clackmannan.

Dr. Reid: I do not want to confuse the situation, because I have already made a pretty clear statement, which the Secretary of State can read tomorrow in *Hansard*. I shall merely ask the Minister a question, to which I know the answer. Will he tell us whether Eurofighter was excluded from the Government's review, "Options for Change"?

Mr. Arbuthnot: We had not made any decision to buy 232. However, now that we have, we are promising a period of stability. We can promise a period of stability, whereas the Labour party promises a strategic defence review. Labour's defence review is a policy that dare not speak its name, because it is the political skulk of the century. It is a policy mask, behind which Labour Front Benchers try to hide from Labour Back Benchers, who are desperate to cut defence, and who would like to cut defence spending to the bone. We know that that is why the Labour party is promising a defence review.

Dr. Reid *rose—*

Mr. Arbuthnot: No; I am winding up.

Dr. Reid: Will the Minister give way? We have plenty of time.

Mr. Arbuthnot: We have had plenty of time for the hon. Gentleman to speak. I will give way to him one last time, but he must tell us what he proposes to leave in his defence review and what he proposes to leave out.

Dr. Reid: Will the Minister give a cast-iron guarantee that the Conservatives will not cut the defence budget outlined for the next two years? Will he give a cast-iron guarantee, as the shadow Chancellor has?

Mr. Arbuthnot: It is perfectly clear that, next year and the year after, we plan to keep the defence budget exactly the same as it is, and that, the year after that, we plan to increase it a little. The hon. Gentleman could not say that, because he has promised the instability which would be caused by a defence review. He knows that the instability that the Labour party would offer the RAF is precisely the opposite of what it wants.

The RAF is better equipped now than it has ever been, and it is continuing to benefit from massive investment in new systems. We have a world class Air Force, with world class personnel and equipment, and we are already taking the action necessary to ensure that it remains so in the next millennium.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

St. Margaret's Hospital, Great Barr

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mrs. Lait.]*

9.53 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): I suppose I should apologise to my Front-Bench colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid), for not participating in the debate on the Royal Air Force but, for the moment, the defence of the realm takes second place to the defence of the green belt in my constituency.

It is with considerable pleasure, and relief, that the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford), is responding to this short debate. Books are prefaced by acknowledgements and dedications; speeches in this place are unfortunately not. If they were, I would like *Hansard* to record a subtitle to this debate: "St. Margaret's hospital: the continuing fight to preserve our heritage and the green belt". If it were possible further to dedicate a speech, I would dedicate it to those fighting for that just cause.

I am pleased that the Under-Secretary is responding for two, or perhaps three, reasons. First, he responded very sympathetically to an Adjournment debate on the same subject two years and one week ago, so I have a sense of deja vu. Secondly, I do not want to damage his political reputation, but he is a decent guy. Thirdly, he speaks with knowledge not only of planning law in relation to the green belt, but of the site in question.

I did not take umbrage when, during our previous debate on the subject, the Under-Secretary said:

"It is no exaggeration to say that Walsall is not over-endowed with properties and parklands of great historical and architectural interest."—*[Official Report,* 26 January 1995; Vol. 253, c. 586.]

He was right. This may be a military analogy but what you have, you hold, and I do not want to see the six grade II* listed buildings in the borough of Walsall reduced to five, which is a real possibility—indeed, a probability unless something is done quickly.

Unfortunately, despite the Minister's and my best efforts in early 1995, no one appears to have paid a blind bit of notice. Great Barr hall continues to deteriorate, and that predatory body—the former West Midlands regional health authority—slapped in a planning application for the so-called Male Homes site. When it has kicked out the last patients from St. Margaret's hospital in a few weeks' time, no doubt another planning application will be made, perhaps for high-class housing, on what is called the "horseshoe" site.

I desperately hope that the Department of the Environment will try again to protect the estate, which encompasses almost 313 acres and Great Barr hall, the jewel in the crown. The hall and the estate are far too valuable in terms of heritage and potential suitable uses to be seen as mere plots of land for the building of houses and the making of big bucks.

I will not describe the site or Great Barr hall nor eulogise them because that was done in a previous debate, but I visited the site as recently as last Friday. Having seen the photograph that I gave him, I am sure that the Minister will understand why I am so concerned. He will have seen a security wire about as defensively secure as the England batsmen on tour—I was going to say even against such weak opposition but, given the Minister's antipodean background, I thought that might offend him.

The Minister will have seen from the photograph the dilapidated state of Great Barr hall. Despite some remedial patchwork, it is still vulnerable to the elements and the vandals, but the biggest threat to the future—such as it is—of this grade II* listed building comes from those who would see it deteriorate to such an extent that the bulldozers roll in—and there would go the building and perhaps the beautiful surrounding parkland and lake, whose construction and design involved some of the great men of the past such as Sir Gilbert Scott, Humphrey Repton, Shenstone and Nash.

I can never forgive those responsible in the regional health authority for selling the hall and surrounding land to a man like David Worth whose name mockingly adorns the vandalised temporary building in the photograph which I have given the Minister. The land and property that he bought for speculative purposes—he is now bankrupt—is now owned by Midland bank and the receivers are Coopers and Lybrand. The bank lost a lot of money, as did many of my constituents. Not only did the bank lose money, but it cannot sell the property. Indeed, it may cost the bank more money to repair the buildings. Nobody is interested in buying the deteriorating building as it is seen as a financial liability.

I look to the Minister and the Department of the Environment to protect the public interest against the goths at the gate who pose a continuing threat to the hall and estate. Some might ask why the estate needs further ministerial protection. Why am I asking the Minister for help again? Why did I request an Adjournment debate? Is not there enough protection for Great Barr hall and the estate? People might suggest that the property is protected as a green-belt site. Is it not in the Beacon regional park? Is it not part of the Great Barr conservation area? Is it not in the Forest of Mercia forest plan?

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mrs. Lait.]*

Mr. George: I had forgotten that procedure, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I was temporarily embarrassed at the prospect of having to finish half-way through my speech.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): It does seem somewhat excessive, but it is the present rule.

Mr. George: I cannot duck history.

Are not the duckery and the lakes a site of importance for nature conservation? Are not three areas of the estate protected as ancient woodland? Is not the hall a grade II* listed building that occupies land included on English Heritage's "Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest"?

People might also ask whether the Great Barr hall and estate have the protection of Walsall council's urban development plan, which was approved by the Secretary of State. Did not English Heritage, in a recent "Building at Risk" survey, conclude that the building was derelict and at risk? The building also falls into English Heritage's category 1—the highest risk—because it is empty, with temporary roofing, is subject to vandalism, theft, dry rot and rain, and has zero security. Is not the site protected as a site of importance for nature conservation? Is there not a Great Barr Hall action group founded to give public support to the future of the hall?

[Mr. George]

Some might even ask, "Did not that nice Sir Paul Beresford give his support to the property in a parliamentary debate?" He said to me during the previous debate:

"I assure the hon. Gentleman that, while he is watching closely over one shoulder of those responsible, the Government, conscious of their responsibilities for the green belt, for historic buildings and the historic parkland and for the overall situation, are looking closely over the other."—[*Official Report*, 26 January 1995; Vol. 253, c. 588.]

Do not the recent planning policy guidance documents—PPG 2 annex C, "Future of major developed sites in the Green Belt" and PPG 15—warn off potential developers and destroyers of the green belt? Did not the West Midlands regional forum of local authorities say that there was no need to build houses in the green belt to meet housing requirements for the next century, confirming the joint housing land study for Walsall, which identified sufficient land for building houses for nearly 15 years? Does not section 54A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 lay down specific protection? Have not inspectors visited Walsall and confirmed the need to retain the area as a green belt site?

With all that protection in place, some might ask why I want to raise the subject in an Adjournment debate this evening. Regrettably, as I said in the previous debate

"Walsall council's record with regard to defending the green belt is far from scintillating, but it is not one of total indifference."—[*Official Report*, 26 January 1995; Vol. 253, c. 585.]

I am afraid that that relative optimism was misplaced. The local appeals committee of the main planning committee met last week and gave the green light to a developer, E. and K. Hill, to build houses on green belt land off Skip lane. I do not expect the Minister to respond to this point, but that decision was bizarre, contrary to professional advice, in direct contradiction of the council's unitary development plan and strategic policy statement. It is against all opposition and against the interests of the green belt.

The solicitors representing the builders argued that the green belt land was needed to build on. As I said earlier, that is not true. I hope that eventually the Department of the Environment will knock on the head those who argue that the green belt land is needed for housing. I refer the Minister to a letter that I received a few years ago from the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry), when he was at the Department of the Environment. He gave me an unequivocal assurance that the Government are committed to a strong green belt policy that allows development only in special circumstances. These are not special circumstances.

I am worried that the green light given to development on the land off Skip lane could be used as a precedent for developing land at Great Barr hall and the surrounding area. I have little faith in the planning committee. How can I be sure that it will not succumb to pressure from the former regional health authority, which has applied to build on the Male Homes site? No doubt another application will be submitted in the not too distant future to make use of the redundant hospital buildings on the so-called "horseshoe" site.

The Skip lane decision is so contrary to what the Department of the Environment stands for that at the end of the debate I shall hand formally to the Minister a letter to the Secretary of State asking him to use his legal power to review the decision, which contravenes the urban development plan. The Department of the Environment must be informed. I am informing the Department, perhaps before Walsall council does. I am telling the Minister publicly about the outrageous decision that I hope will be reversed.

I desperately hope that there is still a majority on the planning committee prepared to undo the potential damage to the environment. If the proposals to build on the green belt go through, E. and K. Hill will no doubt put in a further planning application for building work on a similar site that it has. A precedent will have been established. Those who live in the green belt and have put up unauthorised buildings will seek to have that act legitimised, and may put up more buildings. No doubt the NHS executive will pick up the tarnished mantle of the regional health authority and resume the charge on the St. Margaret's hospital site in a few years. Our predecessors, in their wisdom, divided the urban sprawl that is Birmingham, Walsall and Sandwell with a green belt. That protection could be destroyed and the area could be swamped by houses, leaving no discernible boundary between the three authorities.

What is to be done? Great Barr hall, the apex of the site, must be made secure and the decline stabilised. The owners should be billed for the appropriate remedial work. I am told that the building is deteriorating. It is restorable, but for how long? Current estimates set the cost of minimal essential works at £20,000. Those works would make the shell sound, keep out the elements and make it more attractive to a potential buyer. As I said earlier, some work has been done, but it has not been done to a sufficiently high standard. The council should get much tougher. If the Midland bank does not agree to make the necessary repairs, I shall ask the Secretary of State to intervene and serve a repairs notice under section 48 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Failing that, I shall call on the Secretary of State to acquire the building and land compulsorily under section 47 of that Act.

Walsall council has tried to bring about a comprehensive approach to the estate so that it can be treated as a single entity. The NHS executive owns two large sections and the Midland bank owns the historic buildings and 156 acres. Could not the Department of the Environment act as honest broker, inviting all the interested parties to a meeting? That would include the Government, Walsall council, the NHS executive, the Midland bank—the listening bank; I hope that it listens—Coopers and Lybrand, working on behalf of the bank, local, regional and national environmental groups, such as the Great Barr action group, which I founded, and English Heritage. They should bring all those people together for a brainstorming session under the auspices of the Minister or his representative. That could well lead to progress. As part of the process, an intermediary—perhaps someone in authority who is familiar with all the documentation and feasibility studies—could provide some guidance as to what would be feasible in respect of such a large site and what is in the public interest.

Thirdly, I urge Walsall council to consider investing a little money in conducting its own feasibility study on how the site might best be developed. Having done that, perhaps the council should approach the heritage fund. I can think of few more worthy recipients of such funding.

I am not inflexible—there has to be some give and take—but I cannot acquiesce to a series of buildings on a green-belt site. Let us put this treasure to an appropriate use. I trust that the Department of the Environment will reassure the public that the Government have the best interests of the site at heart.

Before I conclude, I wish to place on record my unhappiness with the treatment of one patient, John Mayes, a convicted child offender, who absconded on 25 September 1996. The police caught him and returned him to his previous accommodation. He has not done a runner subsequently, nor has the community health trust been able to find him suitable secure accommodation. There must therefore be a shortage of such accommodation in the west midlands. As the hospital is closing fairly soon, I hope that he will be found somewhere suitable. I have discussed my remarks with my hon. Friends the Members for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) and for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) who are in agreement.

Finally, I appeal again to the Department of the Environment to facilitate the reconciliation of all affected parties to bring about the necessary change to achieve the best solution for the public, for Great Barr hall and for the estate.

10.11 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): First, I thank the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) for his kind remarks at the beginning of his speech. I was intrigued by his reference to cricket. As hon. Members may know, a cricket match is currently being played in the Antipodes. I understand that the score is 87 for seven, which looks quite good for the English team. The last man is not in yet, however, and as those who follow cricket know, that could be significant. I have always felt that New Zealand sports teams were charitable and this could be a charitable show.

It is usual to congratulate hon. Members on raising an Adjournment debate, but today's subject is very sad. The hon. Member and I would have preferred not to have had the debate and for the problem to have been sorted out.

As the hon. Gentleman said, the whole estate under discussion is designated green belt. Planning policy guidance 2—the relevant guidance—has been tightened up and emphasises its special characteristics and its need for protection. That is recognised in the unitary development plan for Walsall, which provides considerable protection. However, as the hon. Gentleman is aware, I must be cautious.

There has been some progress. Development plan policies require only that the site of St. Margaret's hospital building should have a planning brief of the proposed variety. However—this needs careful consideration—there is nothing to stop the local authority carrying out a full-scale study on the protection of the building.

Great Barr hall is a grade II* listed building. It is situated very close to the parts of the hospital that are subject to redevelopment proposals. It is important that the proposals protect the building from harm. Likewise, the effect on the very fine parkland has to be taken into careful account.

Progress depends on having the right sort of developer, with the right sort of backing to develop that which should be developed, sympathetically, with some give and take, as the hon. Gentleman has said. It is sad that, so far, no buyer has come forward for the hall and the park. However, I understand that considerable interest is still being shown by developers and others. We must hope, anticipate, and try to ensure, that a sympathetic application for offices, leisure facilities and a golf course is submitted. Such a proposal was looked at before but has unfortunately been withdrawn without any further progress. As the hon. Gentleman has said, no proposal has at the moment reached the planning application stage.

The Government's advisers have been trying to work closely with the owner, the official receiver and the local authority to resolve some of the problems. The photograph of the protection—or lack of protection—of Great Barr hall calls into question the local authority's behaviour. The hon. Gentleman's description is an under-estimate of the lack of protection. Looking at the photograph, one can see that the protection consists of one high barbed wire, which would not stop anything progressing under it. I cannot think of anything at all that would be stopped by it.

Since the last debate, there has been some progress, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned. I am advised that, in conjunction with the local authority and English Heritage, the present owner, through the official receiver, has arranged for some work to be carried out that has arrested the rate of structural decline. "Arrested the rate"—the speed—at which the structure of the building is declining is a sad way of putting it. I have clearly carefully chosen those words, and I hope that the local authority recognises that. We ought to consider it carefully.

In addition, the problems of the deterioration of the interior remain. I think that the hon. Gentleman and I agree that a long-term solution needs not only to be found, but to be found fairly promptly. A number of potential buyers have been in discussion with the local authority and English Heritage, and I understand that further meetings are arranged for the near future.

Reference was made to the quaintly named Male Homes site to the north of the hall. As the hon. Gentleman knows, it is the subject of a detailed planning application for housing development. I am surprised that it has taken Walsall borough council quite so long to determine the application. Discussions seem to be extremely protracted, which could be a reflection on either the sensitivity of the location or the local authority. I shall leave the hon. Gentleman to put quietly his point on that, but I rather suspect that he and I are in agreement.

The Government's adviser, English Heritage, has been consulted and I understand that it has some remaining concerns about the proposal, which means that I cannot progress with further discussion on it, as the hon. Gentleman will be aware. The decision on the application is for the local planning authority. The applicant has the right of appeal to my right hon. Friend

[Sir Paul Beresford]

the Secretary of State for the Environment should the permission be refused. I therefore need to be mindful of any further comments on the application.

The national health service executive, the owners of the St. Margaret's site—the so-called "Horseshoe"—has commissioned a consultants' report for development of the whole site. It has been submitted to the local authority, which is considering it. Hopefully, it will consider it constructively and move promptly. I hope that that is not a vain hope and that we can get some action. The hospital is of course closing this year, the Great Barr hall is deteriorating and the interior needs protection. We are looking forward to the consultants' report to the NHS, which is expected to lead to a planning application.

At this stage, I cannot say more except that I am attracted to the hon. Gentleman's suggestion that we should look towards progressing, with the Department acting as an honest broker, as he put it. I shall ensure through the Department that the Government, through the regional office in Birmingham, along with English Heritage, do what they can to bring the parties together and get a move on.

I half-facetiously made a comment about the number of listed buildings, grade II or otherwise, in the Walsall area. We must accept the idea that the site is an oasis—an area that needs to be kept and looked after. It is certainly not being looked after at present.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at nineteen minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 7 February 1997

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. MICHAEL MORRIS *in the Chair*]

Orders of the Day

Horserace Totalisator Board Bill [Lords]

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Clause 1

NEW CORPORATE POWERS FOR THE HORSERACE TOTALISATOR BOARD

9.35 am

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 9, leave out from 'betting' to end of line 12.

If we have to be in the House on a Friday, as our duties occasionally require, I cannot think of many better subjects for debate than the great sport of racing. We can think about what you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are hoping to do tomorrow—that is, attend a race meeting—even though we might have preferred to be at one today or on some other Friday, perhaps during the recess.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) asked as she came in, "Why are you amending your own Bill?" That is a good question and the explanation is equally succinct: it is that the amendment would, to all intents and purposes, put the Bill back in the same form as it was when it first entered another place. I want to persuade my right hon. Friend the Minister that the Government were wrong to insist upon an amendment being made in another place and that reversing it would make a great deal of sense.

There is one slight difference in that, as well as deleting the words,

"except bets on the outcome of any lottery forming part of the National Lottery for the purposes of Part I of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993",

the amendment would leave in clause 1 the words, "on any event", which were not included when the Bill was originally introduced in another place by my noble Friend Lord Kimball. I pay tribute to my noble Friend for successfully piloting the Bill through another place, with the support of several other Members of that House who are keen supporters of the racing industry. Many are active and loyal members of the all-party racing and bloodstock industries committee, of which it gives me great pleasure to be chairman.

Despite their not being there originally, it makes sense to keep the words "on any event" in the clause because those three words go to the heart of what we are seeking to do in this measure. The legislation that established the Horserace Totalisator Board permitted the Tote to accept bets only on sporting events. In March last year, other high street bookmakers began to accept bets on the outcome of the Irish lottery. Over the years, they have also constantly accepted bets on the outcome of other events, of which two come to mind. One, which clearly occupies the thoughts of most hon. Members, is the outcome of the general election, but there is also that famous annual bet on whether there will be snow on the roof of the Meteorological Office in London on Christmas day.

It is ironic that, had the Bill completed all its stages on 13 December—instead of being considered in Committee on Wednesday and proceeding to Report and Third Reading in the House today—we might well have got the Bill on to the statute book before Christmas, which was the first time for many years that there was snow on the roof of the Meteorological Office on Christmas day, and it would have cost the Tote a few shillings had it accepted bets on it. Notwithstanding that little difficulty, it is ridiculous that the Tote should be in the disadvantaged position in its 200 or so betting shops—as opposed to the 9,000 betting shops operated by the main bookmakers, especially the big three, William Hill, Ladbroke and Coral—of not being allowed to receive bets on the outcome of any event, sporting or otherwise.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I am sorry that I missed my hon. Friend's first sentence. I congratulate him on his consistently good work as chairman of the Racing and Bloodstock Industries Committee, which is a powerful, important body of which I am glad to be a member. However, bearing in mind the benefits that result from the fact that the takings of the totalisator board pass directly into racing, which is crucial to the survival of that great sport—we had Desert Orchid this week at the Palace to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the British Horse Society, which brings it to mind—would a percentage of takings from other than racing bets go into racing if they were allowed? The answer to that question would be crucial in forming my view. We need that in the racing industry, as my hon. Friend well knows, for the benefit of all punters, jockeys, horses, owners and so on.

Mr. Greenway: My hon. Friend is a valued member of the committee and I am grateful for what he said about my chairmanship. I suspect that he knows more about horses than anyone in the House—the horse's friend indeed. We share, not only a love of horses, but a surname—not that we are related, at least in the recent past; we may have been, centuries ago.

My hon. Friend has put his finger on the point of the measure, which is to remedy the loss to the totalisator board's profits that has arisen as a result of its inability to take bets on events other than sporting events. From March to 20 December 1996, the Tote estimates that the profit lost as a result was between £1.5 million and £1.75 million. All that money would have gone directly to racing, and everyone who follows the racing industry knows how important it would have been.

A statutory instrument approved by Parliament on 20 December made it possible for the Tote to take bets on the Irish lottery, as all the other High Street betting shops had been doing. It is important to understand, however, that the loss of bets is not the only problem. Punters—the people who go into betting shops—want to

[Mr. Greenway]

have a pound or two on the outcome of the Irish lottery or other events, and if they cannot have that bet in a Tote betting shop, surprise surprise, they go elsewhere.

There has been a haemorrhage of regular Tote betting shop punters into other high street betting shops. That is why the figure of £1.5 million to £1.75 million is such a substantial proportion of the Tote's total profit of about £11 million a year. It has been deeply damaging. I was told by totalisator board officials yesterday that, since 20 December, the profit from taking bets on the outcome of the Irish lottery has been about £100,000 every four weeks, and that money goes directly to racing.

9.45 am

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Will my hon. Friend spell out exactly how the profits are used to further racing? Are they spent on management of courses? Are they used to support the widows and orphans of jockeys who have been killed, unfortunately, in accidents? Exactly how is the money spent?

Mr. Greenway: It is slightly outside the scope of the amendment but, with your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am more than happy—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. It is not for me to prejudge whether the hon. Gentleman responds to any intervention. However, I am listening attentively.

Mr. John Greenway: The simple answer is that the money from the Tote supports racing in several ways, especially by redeveloping race courses by creating new stands and facilities, but also by sponsoring races. I shall discuss that subject later during the debate on amendment No. 1 or, if I catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on Third Reading.

The Tote is one of two funding bodies under the auspices of the Home Office which support racing. The Tote provides money direct because all its profits go to racing. The Horse Race Betting Levy Board takes money from the bets placed in betting shops other than Tote betting shops. That money amounts to about £56 million a year, and it is also used to develop new race courses but is primarily used to support racing through prize money. There are, however, many racing charities, which my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) rightly mentions, especially charities relating to horses, and those are also supported by both funding bodies. Racing is keen to ensure that the welfare of horses, and the interests of injured jockeys and so on, are strongly supported.

I shall now outline the key point about amendment No. 1. At present the Bill seeks to deny totalisator board betting shops the opportunity to take bets on the outcome of the United Kingdom national lottery. Rightly or wrongly, Ministers, especially those in the Department of National Heritage who have responsibility for the lottery, have convinced themselves that if bets were allowed to be placed on the outcome of the lottery, the lottery's turnover, and therefore the amount of money available for good causes, would be damaged.

The betting industry does not accept that argument. The evidence from Ireland, where bets are permitted on the outcome of the Irish lottery, is that such betting has not undermined the success of the Irish lottery. The people who buy lottery tickets from among the many thousands of high street UK national lottery outlets are not the type of people who usually go into a betting shop. I do not believe that there is any significant evidence that allowing bets on the outcome of the national lottery would seriously damage the lottery.

The lottery provides the opportunity to win several million pounds. This week, the mid-week draw gave £10 million worth of prizes to the person with the six numbers. A person would not get that sort of return from a betting shop, but he might get slightly better odds if he had three or four of the correct numbers. That is why betting on the outcome of the Irish lottery is so attractive.

I am grateful to the Minister of State, Home Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), for being present today. I make it clear that my support for the national lottery is unequivocal. It has been a tremendous success, and throughout the country many organisations—especially sporting bodies and charities, as well as the arts—have benefited enormously from it. Had we not had the national lottery, that money would not have been available. The fact that that money has come at a time when money for capital expenditure is tight is all to the good. I am grateful for what the lottery has done and is doing for organisations in Ryedale.

The lottery's impact on book makers and the football pools has been severe. I am pleased that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy) is in the Chamber because, as a Liverpool Member of Parliament, she knows how devastating the effect of the lottery has been on football pools' income, as many of us in the House predicted.

We are not here today to talk about football pools, but the turnover in betting shops has been equally adversely affected. When people ask me whether—now that there is a second draw and talk of future draws—I think that the lottery is being a touch greedy, I find it difficult to answer in the negative.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): I apologise to my hon. Friend for missing his opening comments. Both the racing and football industries can apply for lottery funds for various purposes. The fact that the betting industry is structured as it is and the national lottery is protected as it is does not necessarily mean that there is a bias against football or racing.

Mr. Greenway: I hear what my hon. Friend says, but I am not sure that he is right. I am not convinced that the Sports Council—which would be the funding body—would be enamoured if commercial organisations were to start knocking on its door for funding for capital projects. But, to pick up on my hon. Friend's point, we need to ensure that the regime is fair and equitable, which is certainly what concerns the high street bookmakers, including Tote bookmakers. They are concerned that the lottery has too great an advantage and that it is time for us to come to terms with the fact that something needs to be done to redress the balance.

I should like to think that if the House accepted the amendment, bets on the outcome of the national lottery could be taken in Tote bookmakers. But even if we accept

the amendment, that will not happen because the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 prohibits bookmakers from taking bets on the outcome of the lottery. That is why the Bill refers to part 1 of the 1993 Act—that legislation already prohibits any bookmaker from taking bets on the outcome of the United Kingdom's national lottery. If that prohibition already exists in primary legislation, which is binding on all bookmaking shops, including Tote bookmaking shops, why does it need to be included in the Bill? That is an important question because sooner or later the Government will make a move.

Sooner or later, the pressure will tell and the Government will accept that betting on the outcome of the UK national lottery should be permitted. When that happens, and if the Bill is approved by the House in the form in which it came from another place, we shall have to amend the totalisator board legislation again so that the Tote is in precisely the same position as other betting shops. We do not need a belt and braces; the braces are already in place through the National Lottery etc. Act. Only if that Act were changed would the Tote be able to take bets on the outcome of the UK national lottery.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): If the provisions of the amendment, which were inserted in another place on the recommendation of the Government, are unnecessary, what is the answer to my hon. Friend's question? Why was the provision inserted?

Mr. Greenway: My hon. Friend asks the right question. The provision was inserted owing to the concern of Ministers at the Department of National Heritage that, if the Tote legislation did not make specific reference to the national lottery, it might send a signal that it was all right to have bets on the Tote. I do not accept that argument, but it is the only reason that I can suggest. It must have been known that the Act already prohibits the taking of bets on the outcome of the lottery.

Mr. Tim Smith: If that is so, can my hon. Friend confirm that the legislation enabling bookmakers generally to take bets on any event—legislation that was introduced when the sector was liberalised in the 1960s—has been amended in the same way as the Bill has been amended?

Mr. Greenway: I am sure that that is right. I cannot give my hon. Friend a definitive answer to his question, but I understand that when legislation was introduced allowing the totalisator board to have betting shops, it was not envisaged that there would be a market for bets on events other than horse racing, greyhound racing and possibly football matches. The market has developed substantially.

I do not see why the Bill needs to contain the same provision as already exists elsewhere—unless and until the main lottery legislation is amended, it will not make a difference either way. But if we allow the Bill to stay in the form in which it came to us from another place, whenever the other legislation changes, the Bill will also have to be changed. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will address that issue.

Following the prohibition on betting on the outcome of the national lottery, bookmakers—who are not noted for their lack of imagination in devising possibilities for betting—have introduced their own lucky numbers game. Shortly before Christmas they introduced a game called the 49ers, with 49 numbers. A person can bet on the outcome of the 49ers in betting shops. Legal action is pending which seeks to rule that the 49ers game is illegal and infringes the National Lottery etc. Act. It is not for us to decide, but that game has led to an increase in betting shop turnover of about 3 per cent. Tote bookmakers will be able to take bets on the 49ers game as soon as the legislation receives Royal Assent and comes into effect. Surely it would be better not to have the argument about whether there should be a separate 49ers game in betting shops—and instead allow betting shops to take bets on the outcome of the national lottery. That must be the sensible answer. Better odds can be offered for a few numbers, but the tens of millions of pounds in prize money which the lottery offers will not be available. People will not become multimillionaires. The prizes will be much smaller across the board, but people obviously feel that they would like the chance to get three or four numbers and perhaps a slightly better return, even if they will not have the chance of becoming a multimillionaire. That is a matter for them. As a government, we should be about giving people choice. They are being denied that choice because of a concern which is misplaced.

I believe that one day Parliament will agree that betting on the outcome of the national lottery is the only sensible way forward. If and when that is permitted, Tote bookmakers should be in the same position as all the others. The only way in which we can guarantee that they are in the same position from day one is to accept the amendment. Either way, for the moment bets on the lottery are off. But it will not be like that for ever.

10 am

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the chance to speak comparatively early in the debate. I must apologise to the House because it seems unlikely that I shall be able to stay until the end of the debate, as I understand that it is expected to continue for at least another hour and I have another appointment.

I am pleased to have a chance to support the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) both in the Bill and in this welcome amendment to it. I suppose that some hon. Members feel that the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring) has the greatest racing interest in the House. I see the hon. Member for Ryedale shaking his head. Even if some hon. Members think that the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds has the prime racing interest, with Newbury race course, Lambourn valley—the so-called valley of the race horse—and all the Berkshire downs area in my constituency, I have a fair claim to be among those hon. Members whose constituency racing interests are greatest. I am delighted to inform the House that Newbury races are on this weekend. Any hon. Members who wish to travel down to my constituency are welcome to do so, even if they do not give me prior warning of their arrival.

I am not normally a betting man. I like to bet only on absolute certainties and sadly there are few absolute certainties when one is betting on what happens on the race course. For that reason, one of my most recent bets—I am not sure that it was not the last bet that I have ever

[Mr. David Rendel]

placed—was on the outcome of the Newbury by-election, which was an absolute certainty. I am happy to say that I had a bet at four to one and won quite a lot of money.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): What about the next election?

Mr. Rendel: I am happy to tell the hon. Gentleman that I have every intention of laying an equally certain bet on the outcome of the next election in Newbury. I intend to make a certain amount of money on that, too. Unfortunately, the odds against a Liberal Democrat win there at the next election are much smaller than when I made the previous bet, so I will probably not make quite so much money this time. Never mind.

The Bill allows the Tote a much greater chance to take bets on any event. That is welcome. The hon. Member for Ryedale has made a number of important points, which I will not repeat. He said that it was unfair that if all bets on the lottery were made legal in the future, the Tote and in particular Tote betting shops would be handicapped. It is wrong that we should restrict one particular part of the betting industry. It is right that the Tote betting shops should be given freedom which may well be available elsewhere in the near future. So we should accept the amendment. I welcome the amendment and the Bill on behalf of the Tote and the racing industry, which is so important and provides so much employment, particularly in my constituency.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me to refer to the amendment. I use the verb "refer" rather than "support" because, although I have enormous sympathy with the very reasonable arguments of my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), I make no apology for saying, I hope with characteristic modesty, that I am waiting for my right hon. Friend the Minister to give the official response to the amendment. As often happens with these matters, the likely situation vis a vis the national lottery is not so simple as Conservative Members would like in view of the implications of the expansion of freedom of choice, to which my hon. Friend referred implicitly and explicitly in his remarks.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale for tabling the amendment and making his arguments in an extremely reasonable way, as is characteristic of him. We are used to that. We appreciate his great knowledge of the industry and this important sector. I do not have that knowledge in equal measure so my remarks on the amendment will be brief.

We need further thought on the matter. I was impressed with the original text of the Bill. It is a short Bill. I was extremely impressed by the remarks of Lord Kimball. I suppose that everyone accepts that he is the expert of both Houses of Parliament on all these matters, including rural matters relating to horses, but not necessarily to horse racing and betting. His speech on 6 November last year when the Bill was originally presented in the other place was extremely reasonable. He showed the value of the other place in proposing legislation. We receive it with a considerable amount of pleasure in the lower House as we take it further today.

I welcome this type of legislation, particularly on a Friday. The officials in the Box trying to attract the attention of the Whip and my right hon. Friend the Minister will agree with me, I hope, when—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should address the amendment, not matters external to the Chamber.

Mr. Dykes: As a European, I hasten to add—I hope without straying out of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker—that in some other European Parliaments Members can introduce private Member's legislation, which is so valuable in the House. We are all glad that the potential proportion of private Member's legislation has been increased under recent procedural changes.

I am chairman of the Anglo-French parliamentary liaison group. The Assemblée Nationale has a similar system of private Members' legislation. A Government Bill there is called a projet de loi whereas a private Member's Bill is called a proposition de loi. I do not know why I make that point, but perhaps it is interesting to see that private Members in the French Parliament can also deal with matters such as betting. In France, all betting is governed by the Tote whereas in Britain we have the private enterprise system of bookies, which many people prefer. Bookmakers take their own entrepreneurial view, sometimes in a quasi-cartelised way, which they are allowed to do under the law, and sometimes individually. If I remember correctly the modalities of the system, the Tote is based only on the weight of money inputs so it is a mathematical calculation done, I presume, by the Tote computer.

I welcome the expansion in the use of the Tote. It is a congenial way of betting. It is the way in which I mostly place bets. My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) and I had the pleasure of going to the races briefly last summer, although we had to rush back for business in the House. Apart from that, I attended only the Cheltenham Gold Cup meeting last year, also briefly, on the most important day—I think the Thursday. So it was a lean year for attending the races, which is something that I like to do if time allows. There is no time for such things nowadays, for self-evident reasons.

The Tote is a popular form of betting. Its usage has increased in recent times.

I strongly agree with the reference made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale to the fact that his informal uncle—not his real uncle—my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) has a deep knowledge of racing and horses. I have the pleasure of reminding the House that he also is an active visitor to the most famous riding school in my constituency, Suzanne's riding school, which is extremely successful and has done a great deal for riding for the disabled and other worthwhile causes. People in riding schools are interested in betting and use the Tote, as do other members of the public.

In respect of the national lottery, I would welcome other changes which have often been aired and are germane to the amendment—the degree to which the national lottery system should be protected or ring-fenced by arrangements such as those proposed in the original text of the Bill, which my hon. Friend's amendment

would remove. Such protection was necessary, and remains necessary to some extent, because the national lottery is still new and we needed to see its effects. It has had a considerable impact, and even those who did not like the concept of a national lottery—many people are against even modest betting and gambling—or its structure in the United Kingdom have often changed their minds as they have seen the enormous sums deployed on worthwhile charitable and social causes throughout the country. In my constituency we have benefited considerably from national lottery money.

However, I remain firmly of the view that a system that combined a smaller total prize potential than the multi-millions that are dispensed regularly, with more reasonable odds than the astronomically large odds that are available, would be better.

Mr. Tim Smith: May I suggest to my hon. Friend—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are not here to discuss the national lottery and the distribution of prizes. The amendment is specific, and I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would return to it.

Mr. Dykes: I shall obey your advice immediately, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was referring to the way in which the national lottery is protected by arrangements, which is germane to the amendment in one respect, but I shall not pursue that. I hope, therefore, that my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) will forgive me if, in response to Mr. Deputy Speaker's suggestion, I do not give way, unless he wishes to persist, with the permission of the Chair.

Mr. Tim Smith: I wanted to ask my hon. Friend about the amendment. That might be in order. I agree that huge sums have been raised for charity by the national lottery and it has been a great success. Of course it is true that the competition to run it was won by Camelot, which has done an excellent job. However, the national lottery is a state-approved monopoly. Now that it is so firmly established, I do not believe that it needs protection. It has tremendous advantages in terms of advertising and is the single event on which no bookmaker or the Tote can take a bet. That cannot be right.

Mr. Dykes: As I overcome my shock at my hon. Friend's insistence that I should refer to the amendment, I have a good deal of sympathy with his argument. That is why I am not yet persuaded what my own conclusion should be. I await guidance from the Minister.

Whatever the protection system of the national lottery—I understand and sympathise with my hon. Friend's point—an arrangement akin to the more modest payouts and odds system of the football pools would be congenial to millions of people when they consider the structure and characteristics of the national lottery.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale will not mind my saying that I still have doubts about his amendment. I would like further guidance on it, as the original text seemed rational and would strengthen the role of the Tote and the board in a way that many citizens would appreciate.

Lady Olga Maitland: I give a warm welcome to the amendment moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway). I served on the Standing Committee that considered the national lottery Bill, and I recall the vivid debate that took place when the Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), told the Committee that the success of the national lottery would in no way affect any outside organisations or interests. The debate was on protection for the pools organisations, Littlewoods and Vernons.

When the national lottery came into being, it was a success beyond our wildest dreams. It could not be threatened by any other organisation. On the contrary, its success threatened the survival of the pools promoters. Their take dropped sharply and they had to lay off staff, not in dozens, but in hundreds. Many of those laid off relied on the small sums that they could make from selling tickets.

10.15 am

We must also examine the effect of the national lottery on the Tote. People's betting habits have changed as a result of the lottery. Takings from the Tote have fallen sharply. Its income has gone down by at least £1.5 million—my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale suggested that the figure is more than that. That in turn affects support for other organisations, such as race courses and welfare interests. The pools promoters, through the constitution of their bodies, set up the Sports and Arts Council Foundation and the Football Trust, which have also suffered a drop in funds.

It is in no one's interest for the Tote to suffer loss. It is invidious to suggest that the national lottery is threatened by the Tote. People cannot place a bet on the national lottery, but they can place a bet on the Irish lottery. A Goliath of the scale of the national lottery could be generous and a bit of a sport, and allow other organisations to compete in a fair if more modest way. They should all have a chance.

I hope that the amendment will be seriously considered by my hon. Friend the Minister, who is a reasonable man. If he will not accept it today, I hope that appropriate legislation will be forthcoming in future.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy (Liverpool, Broadgreen): I shall take a few minutes to outline the Opposition's position. It is appropriate that I should follow the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), as we spent many hours together in the Standing Committee that debated the national lottery.

It might cheer the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) to know that, after the National Lottery etc. Bill was enacted, I spoke to representatives of the pools workers. Through their representatives in the House, they had presented their case for their business to be allowed to compete on fairer grounds. There was, of course, dismay that those representations were not heeded by the Government, but when I rang them and told them how disappointed we all were, they said, "Never mind, Jane, we are going out to put a bet on the national lottery to see whether we can be the first millionaires and bring the money to Liverpool."

That was the immediate reaction of local people. There is no denying that the lottery is hugely popular and successful, although I must confess to never having bought a ticket myself. When I go to my newsagents, especially on a Saturday, and see my neighbours standing

[Mrs. Jane Kennedy]

in queues, I regard it as quite an achievement, and to the Government's credit, that they have found a way of encouraging people to stand in queues at their newsagents to pay their taxes to the Exchequer.

The national lottery introduced scratchcards in an attempt to continue to allocate £15 million per week to good causes, and it has now initiated a midweek draw to sustain its sales. When debating the lottery's potential impact, we considered the fact that sales would tail off as public interest inevitably waned and people realised that they had only a slim chance of winning. That has not yet occurred, although it is too early to predict when—if at all—it will have an effect. I hope that it will not.

In the circumstances, we want to review carefully the case for allowing bookmakers and the Tote to accept bets on the outcome of the national lottery. Any decision to allow it must depend on a demonstration that there would be no significant impact on the £15 million per week that the national lottery allocates to good causes. Therefore, I hope that the Minister will resist his hon. Friends' arguments at present. We do not oppose the amendment in principle: it is a matter of waiting to gauge the impact of the midweek draw. In time, perhaps we will be able to demonstrate that further deregulation and relaxation of the gambling regulations could take place without any detrimental effects on the national lottery.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): This issue is important in my constituency as the Ladbroke Group plc is the largest employer in Harrow, West. Its telephone betting centre in Rayners lane is not a small operation—it looks more like Houston mission control, with a huge bank of monitors and many people taking bets over the telephone. The point of the amendment moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) will not be lost on my constituents who work at that centre and those who work in the betting offices of Ladbroke's and other companies throughout the country.

I believe that the national lottery is run spectacularly well by Camelot. Many people attacked Camelot initially and took a rather rose-tinted view of the other applicants, but Camelot is now returning a maximum amount of money to good causes and its running costs are less than those of some applicants who claimed that they would be doing us a favour. The success of the national lottery has had an inevitable effect on other associated industries. I believe that most people who complain that the lottery is affecting their businesses or charities are not telling the whole truth. I believe that they blame the national lottery simply because it is convenient and they know that their claims will receive press coverage.

Mr. Tim Smith: I am surprised by my hon. Friend's comments. Some £5 billion is bet on the national lottery each year, and that has clearly had some significant macroeconomic effects. For example, there is a large black hole in value added tax receipts, and research suggests that that is partly because consumer spending that would have been VAT-able has switched to the national lottery. Therefore, I think that it has had significant effects on businesses and charities throughout the country.

Mr. Hughes: I agree that the national lottery has had a significant effect on the pattern of retail sales, which has led to the black hole in VAT receipts that my hon. Friend mentioned. Some charities—particularly those that sell scratchcards—have been seriously affected. I was referring to those who claim to have been affected by the national lottery, but whose pattern of fundraising was clearly very different and did not appeal to people who spend money on the lottery. However, some bodies, such as the betting industry, have clearly been affected. Scratchcards have had a huge impact. The average bet on a horse race is about £2.60.

Mr. John Greenway: Plus tax.

Mr. Hughes: My hon. Friend is very knowledgeable in such matters. People would buy their newspapers or cigarettes and spend the change from a fiver in the nearest betting shop. Such sums constituted a substantial portion of the betting industry's income. People now choose to buy a couple of scratchcards, so the money is going directly to what my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) described as a national monopoly rather than to the private industries that run betting shops. I praise the way in which the big betting organisations, such as Ladbroke's and William Hill, have lobbied for change on a purely factual basis. The levy was altered in the Budget before last in order to ameliorate their losses.

Mr. Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that we should adopt a real partnership approach to the betting industry and its support for racing? In that regard, do he and his constituents who work at Ladbroke's headquarters in Harrow share my joy at this week's announcement that Ladbroke's has finally done a deal with Tote credit?

Mr. Hughes: Ladbroke's advised me that that was about to happen, and it is very good news for my constituents and for the many people who work in betting shops throughout the country.

Mr. Greenway: And racing.

Mr. Hughes: It is also good news for the racing industry. I have described to the House why the national lottery has substantially affected trade patterns and reduced the amount of trade in betting shops. As hon. Members have said, the industry has applied to be allowed to take bets on the lottery lucky numbers. That practice has not had any adverse effects on the success of lotteries in other countries, and such bets can be made on the lucky numbers in the Irish lottery.

I think that the time has come to have enough confidence in the national lottery and its continued success to allow private bookmakers to take such bets and begin to rebuild their businesses. That would be fair and reasonable, and it should not affect the success of the national lottery. The only factor that is liable to affect its success is the Labour party's wild talk about changing the contract completely and increasing Government control over the way in which the money is used for good causes. As the national lottery is such a great success, we should allow those bets to be made.

I understand why the words that my hon. Friend's amendment seeks to remove are in the Bill. We all know that, in a usual Session—let alone a short Session such as this—private Member's Bills are very delicate flowers.

Unless they enjoy the support of all hon. Members—but notably of the Government and the official Opposition—they do not stand a chance of being passed. I understand why the Government said, in line with the policy that they have so far adopted, that they could not allow an extension to allow betting on the national lottery to take place when my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale decided to insert the clause, but I urge them to think again. I ask them to think about those who work in the betting industry throughout the country and to think about the solidity of the national lottery. I hope that the Government will accept the amendment and the Bill so that we might bring some justice to an injured betting industry.

10.30 am

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): I shall speak against the amendment, but I hasten to assure my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) that I strongly support the Bill as originally drafted.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale said that he felt that the law would be clear because of the implications of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993, and that removing part of the clause would not immediately allow the Tote to accept bets on the outcome of the lottery. I believe that there would still be an ambiguity in the law. If the Bill were enacted, it would appear to allow betting on any event, whereas the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 appears to prevent it. For the purposes of clarity, surely it would be best to leave the relevant part of the clause in being.

My hon. Friend was honest with the House in that he argued that betting should be allowed on the outcome of the national lottery. He was perhaps keenest to advance that general argument, which has been taken up by other contributors to the debate. It is a valid argument, but I feel that this is the wrong moment to embark on it. This is a complex subject and, given the passions that were aroused during our deliberations on the National Lottery etc, Bill, perhaps we should consider it in more detail and debate it more thoroughly. I believe that that debate should be based on more detailed research and evidence. I would say that it is valid for us to trot round the course this morning. We might even say, "Lay your bets now." This is not the moment, however, to start the race. That should be left for a future occasion.

If the amendment allowed bets to be placed on the outcome of the national lottery in the Tote, we would immediately have the ludicrous and contradictory situation of such betting being allowed on the Tote but prohibited in betting shops.

Mr. John Greenway: No. I understand my hon. Friend's confusion. The National Lottery etc. Act 1993 prohibits all betting on the outcome of the national lottery, whether in Tote betting shops or in other high street betting shops.

Mr. Merchant: I am aware of that. With respect to my hon. Friend, perhaps he was not listening to my argument earlier. I said that what he has outlined was probably the case, but that I thought that there might be an ambiguity if the Bill becomes law, the amendment having been agreed to. The interpretation might be that the Tote could accept betting on the outcome of the national lottery. If that interpretation was made by the courts, we would have the ludicrous situation of national lottery outcome betting being allowed in the Tote, but not in betting shops. That would be unacceptable.

I am saying that if the House wished to alter the present implications of the National Lottery etc. Act on betting on the outcome of the national lottery, that should be done across the board and not only for the Tote. Betting shops should be included as well. We should consider briefly whether it would be a good thing for the Tote to be allowed to bet on the outcome of the national lottery, even though I think that we should put off a final decision until a later date.

There is a danger that the national lottery might be damaged. We need to assure ourselves beyond all doubt that that would not be the outcome. It has been said that the national lottery has been an unparalleled success, and more successful than expected. That success is demonstrated by the fact that money put on the national lottery has to an extent come from money that would have been used for betting. Indeed, the betting industry's turnover has fallen if the national lottery is excluded. If it is included, the industry's turnover has increased. In other words, there has been a substitution. That is strong evidence that the national lottery has been a success. It is also evidence that when we change what is permitted in betting there is a slightly unpredictable change in the amount of money deposited in the different sections of betting. On that basis, we cannot be certain that if betting is allowed on the national lottery outcome there will not be a similar change, with a haemorrhage of funds flowing away from the national lottery towards betting on the outcome of the lottery. There could be some damage to the lottery, which needs to be researched and, wherever possible, quantified.

Mr. Tim Smith: I am not sure whether my hon. Friend is saying that, if there is any damage at all, that settles the matter. It is entirely understandable that, initially, the Government wanted to provide a protected environment for the national lottery. Camelot made assessments of the likely turnover, which have been wildly exceeded. The money that is going to good causes is much greater than forecast. Surely in those circumstances the national lottery could have the confidence to be able to take on a bit of competition.

Mr. Merchant: I accept my hon. Friend's point. I am not saying that we must be certain that there will be no damage to the lottery; I am saying that we need to consider, on the basis of the best research available, what is likely to happen. We must ensure that any predictable damage is fairly limited. It is the degree of damage that is important. I am sure my hon. Friend accepts that, if the damage could prove fatal, we would have to consider carefully any argument for changing the law. We must consider carefully the impact of any change and achieve the right balance. That is precisely the purpose of current legislation. Before we introduce change, it is incumbent on us to be certain that there will not be unacceptable damage.

There is a second and important argument that needs to be taken into account when we consider whether at some future stage the Tote should allow betting on the outcome of the national lottery. The purpose of the national lottery is different from the purpose of other sorts of betting. Its objective is entirely altruistic. The national lottery does

[Mr. Merchant]

not aim to make profits for itself, for its own purpose, or for its owners; it aims to generate moneys to be spent on good causes. That is one of the reasons why the lottery is so popular.

Betting on the outcome of the national lottery is a different matter, because that betting would presumably be run for profit, or in the case of the Tote there would be a specific objective. There is perhaps a moral argument, but certainly there is different motivation. That is an important point to bear in mind.

Mr. Dykes: I am seeking information. I am not enough of a mathematician to be sure about the matter, but presumably the danger is that the odds offered by the bookmakers, and by the Tote, would be more generous than that which would be the equivalent gain from the national lottery system.

Mr. Merchant: I, too, am not an expert mathematician. My immediate instinct, however, is that my hon. Friend is correct. The result must be that many people who are now attracted by the national lottery might instead be attracted by something similar to it and linked to it which offered them a greater chance of gain. That would substitute money that currently goes on the national lottery for money that goes on pure betting but does not produce the beneficial outcome—proceeds for good causes.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: One does not need to be a great mathematician to understand that the odds in the national lottery are fixed, regardless of the number of people who participate, so the risk-return ratio changes as the prize gets bigger. That is unlike, for example, Tote betting, where the odds are adjusted according to the number of people betting on particular outcomes. The betting would swing towards benefiting either the national lottery or the Tote, depending on how big the rollover—the main prize—was. It is a complicated assessment to make, but I imagine that many people would be interested in working out all the parameters.

Mr. Merchant: My hon. Friend is clearly a great mathematician—a true Pythagoras. I am grateful to him for such a clear explanation and complex calculation. It reinforces my point—there is potential danger to the national lottery if we allow betting on its outcome.

I simply suggest that this is not the moment to enshrine in law a significant change in the way in which we view the national lottery. The issue will no doubt be debated at length on some future occasion and, in the fulness of time, it might be right for the House to change the law. I would not necessarily oppose it for all time, but this is not the right time to make the change. For that reason, in principle, I oppose the amendment.

My final concern about the amendment relates to the nature of the Tote. Because the Tote channels money into one sport—racing—we must bear it in mind that, to an extent, money spent on the Tote goes to that one final cause. It is a good objective and I would not criticise it in any sense, but so far the Tote has operated to allow the profits from betting on sporting events to go into a specific sport. That seems to be a sensible balance, but the Bill would change that to allow the proceeds from betting on any event to go into one sport—racing. That is a limited and reasonable change to the Tote, but to go a step further and allow such a wide change that betting could take place on the outcome of the national lottery and then to allow the proceeds from that to go into one good cause—racing—strikes me as a change of a different order.

I merely question whether it is healthy for the Tote to develop so widely. Perhaps it could be argued to the contrary but the matter must be looked at carefully and I urge a note of caution. The matter must be examined more closely than the Bill seems originally to have intended.

This is a good Bill, and I support it. The amendment, however, widens it too much, which is why I oppose it. The issue it addresses may be worthy of discussion in the future, but not now; we should stick to the original Bill.

10.45 am

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) on piloting the Bill through the House. I also congratulate my noble Friend Lord Kimball on introducing the Bill in another place initially. It is an excellent Bill, which supports an excellent organisation: the Tote.

On the issue of whether the national lottery should be the only future event on which bookmakers and the Tote cannot take bets, I have corresponded at length with the Department of National Heritage on behalf of one of my constituents, the business development director of William Hill, Mr. Ian Spearing. William Hill has an interest in the matter, but I think that it is right on this issue: the time has come to make a change.

I understand that, initially, it was right that the national lottery should be protected because we wanted it to be a success. It has been a huge and overwhelming success, and has far exceeded expectations. The Government should now show their confidence in the national lottery's ability to compete with other forms of gambling.

I wrote to the Minister of State, Department of National Heritage, my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich (Mr. Sproat), on 20 June last year and he replied on 22 July and said:

"The Government has no plans to introduce legislation to legalise betting on the outcome of the National Lottery."

The first reason that he gave was that

"The last Lottery to be held in this country was abandoned mainly because the focus had switched from people playing the official Lottery to betting on the outcome."

I was interested to learn that. Do you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, remember the last national lottery in this country? It took place in 1826 and it is on that event that the Department of National Heritage chooses to base its first argument.

Being an assiduous man, my constituent did a little research of his own. He said:

"What the Heritage Department does not state is how the last lottery was conducted. According to 'An Economic and Social History of Gambling in Britain and the USA' in running the Lottery, the Treasury sold a given number of tickets to brokers who then bid above par for blocks. The brokers thus, in effect, underwrote the Lottery. In turn, brokers sold shares in the tickets at prices which exceeded the face value by a substantial margin and provided them with income and profit. Thus it was the Government itself that

created the environment for a secondary market. In fact, I would suggest the main reason the Lottery was stopped was because the 'poor' started playing via the brokers."

I put that argument to the Department of National Heritage to see whether it could confirm it, and my hon. Friend wrote back on 30 August, saying:

"I am aware that there are significant differences between the current National Lottery and the last state lottery held in this country in 1826, particularly with regard to the cost of tickets. I am also aware that opinions vary about the exact causes of the abolition of lotteries in the nineteenth century."

We are now approaching the end of the 20th century and we have a very different creature in the national lottery today. A good deal of thought was given, quite rightly, to how it should be established and it has been established in such a way that it has proved an enormous success. We therefore need bother no further with the history of this matter.

The second reason that my hon. Friend gave—this is the real point—was that

"The purpose of the National Lottery is to raise as much money as possible for the arts, sports, the heritage, charities and projects to mark the year 2000 and the beginning of the third millennium. If money were to be diverted away from buying Lottery tickets to betting on the outcome, the amount raised for these good causes would decline and the Lottery would fail to achieve its central purpose."

That is at the heart of the argument. My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) made exactly that point. He is naturally concerned that the national lottery would be damaged if such a change were made. However, we are talking about two different markets. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy) described the people who queue up on Saturday afternoons to buy lottery tickets not as gamblers but as "taxpayers". That was a rather good description. We know that they are not gamblers but the national lottery appeals to them. It would be nice to think that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) suggested, they were all buying tickets in order to contribute to charity. It would be nice to think that that was their primary motive. I am sure that they welcome the fact that a large proportion of the proceeds goes to charity, but what really attracts them is the absurd idea that, at huge odds, there is the possibility of winning such a vast sum of money that, when people do have the misfortune to win, very few of them have any idea what to do with it.

People go in on a Saturday afternoon and the queues build up towards 7 o'clock, which I believe is the deadline. Then they all rush home and watch the result on the telly. Of course the majority of them lose. Anyone who knows anything about gambling does not go anywhere near the national lottery because the odds are so diabolical, but it is wonderful, inoffensive entertainment and I make no criticism of it because it has been a huge success.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: May I correct my hon. Friend on one point? Once the pot gets beyond a certain size, the odds start becoming very attractive. Syndicates will buy a vast number of tickets on the basis that the odds suddenly become attractive once the pot becomes over £16 million or £17 million in a roll-over week.

Mr. Smith: I have investigated that matter. I think that it is necessary to buy about 5 million tickets to cover every possibility and one would have to have a big syndicate of people all rushing around the shops to buy them up, but, when there is a rollover, there is a possibility that a person could corner the market. However, he would have to hope that he was the only person who won and that he had the whole lot, so it is a risky business.

I recognise, however, the validity of what my hon. Friend says. The difficulty is that, when a person bets, he has no idea how many other people will be betting. At least the bookies give him some odds and he knows that those are the odds at which he places his bet. I personally feel that, if people want to bet, that is better. I rarely bet, but I enjoy going to the races, which are rather dull if I do not have a bet.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: My hon. Friend has spent most of his speech referring to people who bet on the national lottery as "they". I hope that he will continue his speech with the term "we". As he is an occasional lottery better like myself, we should collectively embrace these people rather than referring to "them over there" and the constituents of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy).

Mr. Smith: Of course I have bought lottery tickets from time to time. I even bought one of those scratchcards, but I was so upset when I did not win that I have not bought one since. I have found the same with the weekly lottery. I gave much thought to what the numbers might be and bought one ticket. When not one of them came up, I was so deeply upset about the gross waste of money that I did not do it again for a few weeks.

I must admit that I have participated in the national lottery—of course I have. It is an entirely harmless activity. The people who participate in it are part of a different market from, I would not use the term professional gamblers, but people who take an interest in the science of gambling and who like to think that they are applying a little expertise when they place a bet, like hon. Members, some of whom no doubt will place bets on certain aspects of the general election outcome.

For example, it is a pity that the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) is not here now because there is an interesting bet available on the number of Liberal Democrat Members there will be in the next House. There is an interesting misconception about that. The bookies think that the Liberal Democrats will start from their present number, which I believe is 26, but of course—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am not sure that that comes directly under the amendment. I am waiting for elucidation on it.

Mr. Smith: One large group of people bets on the national lottery and another group takes betting a little more seriously and is better informed. Not many people bet on election outcomes—bets are mostly on horse racing, dog racing and that sort of thing—but people can bet on other activities. For example, it is interesting that there is quite a lot of betting on golf now, but may I finish my point about the Liberal Democrats because this information might be of interest to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker? The bookies think that, because the Liberal Democrats have 26 Members now, that is the starting point, but we all know that they are going to lose all the

[Mr. Smith]

seats that they won in by-elections, so the starting point is lower. Therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you can get a good bet. I would strongly recommend that. Working out how many Liberal Democrat Members of Parliament there are going to be is much easier than working out the number of Members there will be of almost any other party in the House.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: I just wonder whether my hon. Friend is giving this good advice to Mr. Deputy Speaker, having insulted him earlier by suggesting that he was at least 150 years old.

Mr. Smith: I certainly would never suggest that. I am deeply distressed that my hon. Friend should have placed that interpretation on my words because I think that I am right in saying that no one in the House can remember the events of 1826 and probably not many can remember the events of 1926, but may I revert to the point that I was making about the two different markets that are involved because it is important? There would be quite a lot of betting on the outcome of the lottery and bookmakers, being inventive, creative people, would create quite a lot of interesting bets that people cannot get at the moment.

As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, at present, people win £5 if they get three numbers, they win a slightly larger sum if they get four and they can win a significant sum if they get five or more. When we think of what the possibilities are when six numbers come up, obviously, there is an interesting market there, but all I am saying is that we have reached the point where the national lottery has been such a huge success that it should have the confidence in its own ability to compete successfully in the market. As a Conservative, I am not entirely comfortable with what is essentially a state-protected monopoly. I hope therefore that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State will accept the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway).

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: I am most grateful to have caught your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, following the remarks by my hon. Friend the Member for—

Mr. John Greenway: Beaconsfield.

Mr. Jenkin: I knew it was another constituency beginning with "B", a few of which have come up this morning.

I make no apology for pointing out, particularly to my hon. Friends, that we Conservatives have not created another natural business in the national lottery. We are not dealing with a privatised utility whose monopoly status can gradually be eroded such as that of British Gas or British Telecom, which are natural places for business. We are dealing with the national lottery, which is simply an emanation of the state.

I know that all our instincts suggest that, once something is thriving, it should be opened up to competition and the industry would continue to develop, but, by setting up a national lottery, we have done something of which probably Adam Smith and most certainly my noble Friend Lady Thatcher would be ashamed. We have created something that can be the product only of a monopoly.

If it were fully open to competition, the national lottery would cease to be a national lottery. It would lose its profile and effectiveness and the whole thing would degenerate into a scrum among perhaps a large number of much smaller operations, some of which would not be set up on the present basis of the national lottery, so they would not give anything to good causes.

We have to accept that we Conservatives have done rather an unfree market thing in setting up the national lottery. I do not apologise for that because I am not an economic liberal or a laissez-faire nightwatchman state-type Conservative. I am a Tory and the powers of the state are to be used for the benefit of the people, so I do not feel particularly precious about that. My great friends from the Adam Smith Institute will perhaps write to me to correct what may be a misinterpretation of Adam Smith's view on this.

Mr. Stephen: Does my hon. Friend accept that the activities of the national lottery are for the benefit of people, in that huge sums of money generated each week are applied in large measure to good causes? Does he further accept that although the national lottery is a state-run monopoly, it is in competition with other forms of betting such as horse racing and the football pools?

11 am

Mr. Jenkin: I agree with my hon. Friend, and I particularly agree with his comment about good causes. Huge sums of money have gone to good causes in my constituency, such as the Mercury theatre in Colchester and the local night shelter, as well as to charities, the arts and sports. My constituency has done rather well out of the national lottery, and I must confess that I am embarrassed by how well it has done compared with other constituencies. I hope that that will continue.

That success would not have been possible but for the fact that the national lottery is a monopoly, as it can only thrive as a monopoly. We ought not to be talking about deregulating its market—or opening it up to what my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) called "competition"—because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) commented, there is already a lot of competition. We ought to be talking about enhancing and protecting its monopoly position, because that is how the national lottery will best continue to do the job that we have set it—namely, to raise money for good causes and to pay a bit of tax, as the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy) pointed out.

My instinct is to be against the amendment. I regret that my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) is not in his place at the moment because I wanted to say to him that if this were a French legislative chamber, we would be leaving the French judges in a great muddle. The judges would look at the travail preparatoire and would wonder why we were debating this amendment at all, as its real purpose is simply belt and braces. Its purpose is to clarify for the avoidance of doubt—as the legal expression goes—that the Bill in no way alters or amends the effects of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993, which prohibits anyone or any organisation, be it private or state, from organising bets on the national lottery. We should leave the Bill as it is, as removing that part of the subsection may raise questions about the 1993 Act.

I hope that you will forgive me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for making a comment which is relevant to the amendment and to the Bill as a whole. I doubt whether we should regard as "liberalisation" the opening up of competition with a totally nationalised form of betting. We should not give the Tote too much freedom, as it is a nationalised industry competing with the private sector. We must put the Tote into the private sector to compete on a level playing field with other organisations before we start to open up these liberalising arguments.

Mr. Tim Smith: Would not the disadvantage of such an arrangement—which, on the face of it, is attractive—be that horse racing would suffer considerably?

Mr. Jenkin: That is like saying that we should not have had a private sector operator for the national lottery because a private sector operator would be out to make profits for itself instead of raising money for good causes. However, we all know that Camelot was the best bet because it promised to raise the most money for good causes. I do not see why we could not create a semi-protected position for a privatised Tote with arrangements to divert money into the racing industry. That does not alter the fact that removing this part of the clause holds out the prospect that there will be moves to liberalise the national lottery, which would be detrimental to the lottery. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State will make clear that the Government do not support the amendment.

I wish to add one more point. If it is planned at some time in the future to liberalise the national lottery to allow people to bet on it, it would be necessary also to amend this Bill. The only advantage of removing this part of the clause—if liberalisation of the national lottery were to take place—is that the Bill would have to be amended. I would like some clarification from my right hon. Friend on that point.

Mr. Stephen: I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) on piloting this useful Bill through the House. I support the amendment, and I agree entirely with my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) about the effect of the lottery upon the horse race betting industry. I was also interested to hear that the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) has placed a bet on the outcome of the election in his constituency. He did not tell the House whether he was betting that he would win his seat or lose it. I suspect probably the latter.

As a Conservative, my starting point must be freedom of choice for people to spend their hard-earned money as they wish. If they wish to have a little flutter, they should be allowed to do so on the Tote, the lottery or at the racecourse. I would be against the amendment if I thought that the activities of the Tote were not in the national interest, but those activities are very much in the national interest. The Tote puts a huge amount of money into racing, as indeed the football pools have put money into the sport of football and the Foundation for Sport and the Arts has generated huge amounts for good causes—money that has benefited my constituents.

Racing used to be very much in the national interest because, for centuries, we needed horses for war. We needed horses with stamina, strength and speed to perform in the arduous conditions of the battlefield. I was a member of one of the last British regiments to be equipped with horses, so I have studied this matter in some detail. I am glad to say that we do not need horses for that purpose any more. The Household Cavalry does, however, make a tremendous contribution to tourism in this country, and adds glitter, colour and pageantry to our national life without which we would all be the poorer.

Horses are now bred for sport, and horse racing gives enormous pleasure to many hundreds of thousands—perhaps millions—of people. Riding for the disabled is also an enormous source of pleasure, not only for disabled people but for those who help them. It engenders a love of animals, and those who care for horses are among the best animal lovers in the country. A constituent told me not long ago that her husband spent too much money on sick animals. "The only problem," she said, "was that he did not know they were sick until they came past the winning post at the end of the field."

The Tote competes with bookmakers and the national lottery. Bookmakers are perhaps the most colourful element at our racecourses, which would not be the same without them and their oddly named assistants, the tic-tac men, whose skill beggars belief. Bookmakers had a reputation in the past for being crooked, and it had been known for bookmakers to abscond before the end of a race. However, bookmaking is now an honest and properly run industry which benefits the public and the racing world.

I wish that the money raised by bookmakers, the Tote and the national lottery could pay for all the public expenditure that the House must authorise. I would much prefer it if income tax could be abolished and that everything could be paid for out of voluntary contributions, rather than having money extracted from our constituents by the Inland Revenue; I fear, however, that that is a long time in the future.

Our people have a long history of betting on just about anything, and there is no reason why they should not continue to do so, unless the bet is contrary to public policy. I could not contemplate that, for example, someone might bet on a person being murdered, and then go to the bookmaker to collect a large sum of money after having committed that murder. That would clearly be contrary to public policy. In the past, people bet on the outcome of cockfights. I would not approve of that, because that too would be contrary to public policy.

Some people bet on the result of elections. Such betting is not contrary to public policy, although it is not usually very profitable. Not long ago, however, I heard that, in a local election, a candidate—he was a sandwich-board man by profession—who had very little chance of winning put on his sandwich board a message to the electorate that they might do themselves a bit of good if they went along to the bookmakers and put a large sum of money on him to win the election. Many electors did just that, and he was elected.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: That is a very important point. My constituent, Screaming Lord Sutch, has bet on himself and on the number of votes that he might receive in the many by-elections he has stood in, and, in most cases, that is how he has paid his election expenses. It is a very good tradition.

Mr. Stephen: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention.

[Mr. Stephen]

I do not think that betting on the national lottery result can in any sense be said to be contrary to public policy. Having listened very carefully to the speeches earlier in this debate, I still hold that view and I therefore support the amendment.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): We have had an interesting and knowledgable debate. I do not know the sources of my colleagues' information on betting, the national lottery and the Tote, but they are clearly better informed on those matters than I was until I received my briefings on the subject.

The amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) attempts to reverse an amendment made in another place. The words that he wants to remove are a necessary part of the Bill, and we cannot support the Bill without them. They establish that the new freedom of the Tote to take bets on non-sporting events does not extend to the national lottery. As drafted, the Bill ensures that the Tote is placed in the same position as other bookmakers in relation to the national lottery, and that is clearly right.

Under the law, bookmakers are prohibited from taking such bets. Parliament banned side betting during passage of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 because it was thought that betting on the lottery might reduce the flow of funds to good causes. It was considered that side bets on the national lottery could damage the lottery itself, with players switching from buying lottery tickets to taking bets on its outcome, thus reducing the amount of money going to the national lottery, and hence to good causes. The ban is enforced by the provision, which has been placed in the Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Act 1963, that bookmakers stand to lose their bookmaker's permit, without which they could not trade, if they took bets on the national lottery. The Government continue to support that ban.

11.15 am

With all due respect, my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale is slightly misinformed on the effect that his amendment would have if passed. The amendment made in another place ensures that the Tote may not take bets on the national lottery. As I have said, that puts it on the same footing as other bookmakers prohibited from taking bets under the 1993 Act. However, the section of the 1993 Act that stops the Tote's betting subsidiaries, Tote bookmakers and Tote Direct, taking side bets on the national lottery would not stop the Tote board itself doing so. Therefore, the amendment made in the other place simply closes a legal loophole.

If the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale were passed—although I cannot accept it—it would recreate a legal loophole, in which Tote bookmakers and Tote Direct could not take bets on the lottery, whereas the Tote board could. We know that the Tote board would not exploit such a loophole, as Lord Wyatt, chairman of the Tote board, has given us that assurance. However, I think that it is preferable, as we are considering an Act, to close that loophole, to make statute law clear and not to have to rely on Lord Wyatt's assurance, although of course we entirely believe him.

Mr. John Greenway: My right hon. Friend will not be surprised to hear that I have heard that argument before. The Tote board would need premises from which to take such bets and, as the Tote bookmakers would be the only source of such premises, they would therefore be debarred. I heard what my hon. Friend said, but there is also another side to the argument.

Mr. Maclean: My hon. Friend is right. However—although we are considering hypothetical situations—if, for example, the Tote board decided that it wished to exploit the loophole, I am sure that it would be possible to devise certain franchising arrangements in which the Tote board would technically and legally be taking the bets, but in which it was renting out the buildings, facilities and machines belonging to Tote bookmakers. That could be done, and I suspect that it would be totally legal to do so. So there could be ways around the problem. However, I do not suggest that anyone will try to find ways round it. I am absolutely certain that the board does not wish to do that. It has given an assurance, and it is an honourable organisation. Nevertheless—as we are considering a Bill, and for the avoidance of any doubt—we think that it makes sense to plug that loophole.

I am of course aware that bookmakers have mounted a vigorous campaign to remove the general restriction not only on the Tote's but on bookies' ability to bet on the national lottery. They have tried to demonstrate that the concern of the Department for National Heritage is not justified. I must report, however, that the Government are not currently persuaded that that risk to good causes is one which they should take.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) commented that the Government—perhaps not today, but soon—might be persuaded to change their mind. After listening to the very powerful arguments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), I cannot help but feel that that day may be sooner rather than later. Fortunately, I am served by excellent staff in the Home Office, and whatever arguments I have been given to mount today against those of my hon. Friends, none of them relies on the 1826 national lottery as a main defence of allowing the grave new sin of betting on the national lottery.

The Department of National Heritage is responsible for the national lottery, and it has not been persuaded by the figures provided by bookmakers on the experience in Ireland. If the sales of national lottery tickets were reduced by no more than 8 per cent., the amount the lottery raises for good causes could be reduced by at least £120 million a year.

Bookmakers have called for a degree of equity in the market place, maintaining that the lottery amounts to unfair competition. However, there is a clear distinction between an enterprise such as the lottery, which is run under licence by Camelot for public benefit, and licensed betting shops which operate for private gain. They both pay taxes, but the betting shops make pure private gain, whereas the bulk of money raised by Camelot goes to pay taxes and to support the five generic good causes.

Comments have been made about the midweek national lottery draw affecting business. The director general, as the regulator of the lottery, agreed to the introduction of the midweek draw to maintain the level of lottery turnover and to allow Camelot to achieve its projected contribution to good causes. As the midweek draw started only on Wednesday of this week, it is too early to come to any conclusion on its effects.

It is dangerous to speculate and I do not wish to hold out hope to either side in the dispute about whether people should be able to bet on the national lottery. I am not an expert on the subject, but, as an occasional buyer of lottery tickets, I do not expect the midweek draw to make nearly as much money as the Saturday draw. However, if it is a success and maintains funding, the balance of arguments will change slightly in favour of what the bookmakers have requested. In those circumstances, it would not be right for the lottery to have it all ways—to have Saturday betting and a midweek draw, keeping the funds high and not allowing betting on the outcome of the lottery. It is impossible to come to any conclusion yet. We must wait to see how the midweek draw works.

We have introduced several measures recently to assist the betting industry.

Mr. John Greenway: I suspect that my hon. Friend the Minister is about to talk about issues on which the betting industry and the Tote are grateful for the support given by the Home Office. Does he agree that, if the House decides not accept the amendment and leaves the Bill unamended, it would be sensible to ensure that any future legislative changes to the rules to allow betting on the outcome of the national lottery deal with this matter simultaneously, to avoid the Tote being disadvantaged?

Mr. Maclean: My personal view is that I sincerely hope so. If the time comes when it is regarded as sensible to allow betting on the outcome of the national lottery, I shall argue strongly to my ministerial colleagues that the Tote should be in the same position as betting shops. I would not want it to be given a monopoly, but I would want it to be in the same position.

Mr. Rendel: It seems to me that the Minister has made two contradictory statements. He has made it clear that he regards the matter as purely technical, without any real effect, because he accepts that the Tote board will not make use of the loophole that he thinks exists even if it is allowed to remain. He has also said that he will reverse the relevant part of the legislation if others are allowed to take bets on the lottery. However, I think that I also heard him say that if the amendment were passed today, the Government would not want the Bill to pass. Will he confirm that? If the matter is purely technical, he could let the Bill through even with the amendment.

Mr. Maclean: I do not think that there is any contradiction in what I have said. I have pointed out that this is not simply a technical matter—it closes a loophole. There is a loophole in the legislation. We have every confidence that the Tote board, as an honourable organisation, will stick to its undertaking, but it is right to pass legislation that we think is as perfect as possible. We know that there is a loophole, so it would be foolish to let the Bill through without plugging it.

The situation may change. I cannot speculate on when that may happen—it could be in 12 years or two years. The Government may not change their mind on betting on the national lottery. A different Tote board may lose patience with the Government's view and exploit the loophole. It would be foolish to get into that position.

The issue is not merely a technical matter of no importance. It is important that legislation should carry out the Government's intention. It is the Government's intention that there should be no betting on the outcome of the national lottery by high street bookmakers, Tote Direct, Tote bookmakers or the Tote board. I have set out the general arguments why the Department of National Heritage does not want betting on the outcome of the national lottery for the moment. I shall conclude in a minute by outlining the steps that the Home Office has taken.

It is right to give credit to the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope). He, perhaps more than any previous Home Office Minister, has immersed himself in all aspects of the betting and gaming industry and brought forward proposals for sensible deregulation. He has tackled the issue with courage and vigour. His initiative has resulted in a number of measures to make betting shops more attractive to customers. The blacked-out windows are due to be removed, if that has not already happened. All-cash amusement with prizes machines were introduced last June.

The indications are that those measures have been profitable for the betting industry. The Government have not been dog in the manger, saying, "You cannot bet on the national lottery, but we are not going to let you improve your attractiveness to customers in other ways." We have tried to deregulate the gambling and betting industry where sensible to make life easier for it and better for the people who use the shops, giving them better chances.

In addition, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has done his bit to help, reducing general betting duty from 7.75 per cent. to 6.75 per cent. in March last year. The industry will also have greater freedom to advertise if the order currently under scrutiny receives parliamentary approval. All that amounts to a significant package of measures to help the industry.

Those measures are making a difference. We are pleased to note—we have heard it mentioned this morning—that there is sufficient confidence in the industry for Ladbroke to have made a major acquisition recently, installing Tote Direct terminals in its shops. The expansion of terminals will give racing and bookmakers the impetus to develop a super-bet to challenge the supremacy of the lottery.

The Tote Direct scheme has been successfully extended. The company is owned by the Tote and Coral. Its terminals in betting shops feed bets straight into Tote pools. Lord Wyatt was understandably jubilant when announcing the coup at a press conference on Tuesday this week.

That change could have major implications for the financing and marketing of racing. The number of Tote Direct terminals in Britain's betting shops is set to leap from 2,400 to more than 4,300, making possible the search for a super-bet to rival the national lottery.

Mr. Tim Smith: I am interested that my right hon. Friend has twice talked about challenging and rivalling the national lottery. I think that he agrees with me that it is reasonable that there should be fair competition and he does not agree with my hon. Friend the Member for

[Mr. Tim Smith]

Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin), who says that the national lottery is a paternalistic institution that needs to be protected for all time.

Mr. Maclean: My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield made a telling and powerful speech. He is now tempting me to agree with some of his eloquent phrases. Many have professed their conservatism this morning and then made arguments that might get them drummed out of the brownies and certain other clubs around Westminster. Some of my hon. Friends will have to make amends for the views that they have expressed about state-run monopolies as paternalistic organisations.

I accept that Britain's strength and greatness is based in many ways on some of our great institutions, for which we want no competition from any quarter—the monarchy, Parliament, this House and the other great institutions that make Britain a place worth living in. I am not certain whether the national lottery has yet moved into that league of institutions that make Britain the place that it is. I do not regard the national lottery as entirely paternalistic. It is successful and it does the job that Parliament set it up to do. The House set it up in its current form and if it wishes it can amend it or the competition to it.

It is important that the Tote Direct system that has been set up will allow through terminals the opportunity for super-bets. That will greatly increase the pool of money, and that in itself could make it a worthwhile rival to the lottery. It is hoped that the money going into the Tote through Tote Direct will rise to £100 million and be added to the race course pool of £74 million a year. Tote jackpots will be greatly boosted by that move.

11.30 am

The Government cannot accept the amendment, but I hope that in my extensive reply to the debate I have shown the House that the Government's mind is not completely closed to the possibility that one day, when matters have settled and we have considered the midweek lottery figures and other issues for a little longer, it may be possible to allow betting on the outcome of the national lottery. However, for the moment that would be premature. The Government have not adopted a dog-in-the-manger attitude to the betting industry. We are doing all that we can to allow it to compete successfully without the additional carrot of the national lottery.

Mr. John Greenway: This has been a worthwhile two-hour debate and in many respects it has shown the House at its best. That is easily said, but hon. Members have been open minded and those who have spoken are interested in racing and in the national lottery. The House has given the issue, which as the Minister said will return in future, a thoroughly good airing.

The Minister's comments were encouraging and we understand why the Government are not able to support the feature of the Bill to which my amendment relates. Perhaps we in the racing world and in bookmaking should not wait and see but should continue to negotiate in the hope that in future the Government will decide in our favour.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

11.33 am

Mr. John Greenway: Despite my disappointment at having to withdraw my amendment on Report, I am pleased that this is a landmark Bill for the Horserace Totalisator Board. This is undoubtedly a day of great rejoicing because in a few minutes the House may give the Bill its Third Reading and we can look forward to Royal Assent.

It is impossible to overestimate the value of the Tote to racing. We heard much about that on Report. It has a turnover of about £300 million on which it makes a profit of about £11 million, all of which goes to racing. That is equal to about one fifth of the amount from the horse race betting levy on the much bigger betting turnover of several million pounds placed with high street bookmakers.

Many people in racing have argued that the Tote should have a monopoly on betting. That is not an issue for today, but if it does not have a monopoly it should have the ability to compete on equal terms with high street bookmakers and, increasingly, to work with those bookmakers in marketing the super bet. That must be the right approach. Increasingly, people want to place bets on non-sporting events. The Tote is currently restricted, but the Bill liberalises its activities and gives it the freedom that Conservative Governments should be about. Our philosophy is to give people freedom, choice and opportunity and the Bill does precisely that. It is a worthwhile deregulation measure and I greatly welcome Government and Opposition support in addressing the issue.

It is important to allow betting not just on all events, including non-sporting events, and for Tote bookmakers to be on an equal footing but to reverse the loss of trade that is suffered by other betting shops and which the current disadvantage has brought about. It is crucial to put that right and the Bill does that.

As I have said, it is difficult to overestimate the value of the Tote to racing. It does a formidable job and its support is cherished by all those in racing. I shall give the House a brief idea of the value of that support.

Mr. Tim Smith: How will the Bill work because I understand that at the moment bets on the Tote create a pool from which prize money is paid, leaving a balance. Therefore, it is impossible for the Tote to lose money. Will that be possible under the new arrangements? Will all bets be similarly pooled?

Mr. Greenway: I understand that they will all be pooled. That is what makes the odds so interesting and gives the punter the certainty of a sporting chance. That is the nature of pool betting and it is that which is makes it so valuable.

In racing, pool betting often throws up quite different odds from those offered by a bookmaker. I know that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are looking forward to a visit to a racecourse. One can bet on the Tote and get quite different

odds from those offered by bookmakers. Contrary to what the big three bookmakers often say, the Tote is not always one way. I was once asked by a punter for a tip. Apart from the obvious one of, "Do not bet what you cannot afford", my tip was to examine the race course odds, leave the bet as late as possible and inspect the place odds on the Tote.

The Tote can often offer extremely good value, as the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) discovered when we visited Newbury race course on an all-party racing committee day out. I shall explain why the Tote gives good value to racing. I said earlier that we have probably lost £1.5 million to £1.75 million in profit over the past 10 to 11 months because this measure has not been on the statute book. On Second Reading in another place the chairman of the Tote, Lord Wyatt of Weeford, to whom I pay tribute for his stewardship of the Tote and whose chairmanship will come to an end in a few weeks, said that the sponsorship value would have been 50 races with prize money of £30,000 or 30 races with prize money of £50,000. That goes to the heart of what my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) asked me on Report.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) spoke on Report about the Cheltenham Gold cup. It is one of the most prestigious steeplechases of the year and it is sponsored by the Tote. It is Tote sponsorship that makes Cheltenham festival what it is. At York, the Ebor Trophy race is held on the three days of what are known as the York Ebor meeting. That is held in late August and it is arguably the best flat racing festival in the world. Without the sponsorship of the Tote, it would be a less successful event. As a result of this measure, we can look forward to the Tote being able to improve and increase its sponsorship throughout the world of racing.

I should like, with your indulgence, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to refer to Jodami, a horse from Ryedale, which won the Cheltenham Gold cup three or four seasons ago and which, sadly, sustained an injury when it narrowly failed to win the Gold cup in Ireland on Sunday. It has now had to retire. We are all very sad about that in north Yorkshire—not only have we now lost Jodami to racing but I lose Peter Beaumont's yard in Brandsby to another constituency after the election. However, there are plenty more racing stables in need of substantial financial support in what will remain of Ryedale.

We cannot underestimate the value of the Tote to racing. However, its input cannot be sustained without continual improvement of the Tote's arrangements. What is the future for racing? Interestingly, only this week the British Horse Racing Board published a new discussion paper entitled "Racing Industry Review: Options for Change" in which it outlines the future of the racing industry. The review highlights the importance of the Tote and the levy in the racing industry's financial arrangements.

The review makes the point—it is important to put this on record—that the Government have a clear financial interest in the success of racing as they take some £400 million a year in general betting duty out of the tax paid on bets in betting shops. Only £56 million comes back in the levy, and we shall have to redress that balance at some point.

To maintain the turnover in racing, whether in the Tote bookmakers that we are debating or in the high-street bookmakers, racing must be competitive. The quality of racing is in the competitiveness in the sense that racing does not always have to involve horses of groups 1 or 2 calibre, or steeplechasers with ratings in excess of 130; it means having horses of equal form and ability, and some of the most exciting racing takes place with horses in the lower groupings which may have ratings of under 100. That competitiveness stimulates and encourages people to bet on racing. The only way in which the racing industry will remain competitive at all levels is if we ensure that the sport is properly financed. The contribution to racing from the Tote and bookmaking generally is crucial in this regard.

What is the future for the Tote, bookmakers generally and betting on all kinds of events, not only horse and greyhound races? I believe that new technology and deregulation will have to go hand in hand. The announcement this week that Ladbroke is joining in the Tote's direct operation is all about making the best use of new technology to have access to the multi-bets and the multi-pool bet to which my right hon. Friend the Minister referred.

Parliament must continue to have an open mind. It must also take a keen interest in ensuring that the regulatory framework is right, not just to ensure that the Tote and bookmakers have the opportunities they need to run their business but so that all betting is properly conducted and that the punters are treated fairly. My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield raised an important matter when he spoke of the value of pool betting, its security and efficacy.

Mr. Tim Smith: Will my hon. Friend explain how the pool works? How can the concept of a pool be consistent with the idea that one can walk into a bookmakers and place a bet at fixed odds? I do not quite understand how that works.

Mr. Greenway: We are getting into very technical matters and, in spite of comments about my expertise, I am not entirely sure that I can give my hon. Friend an answer or that it would be entirely germane to the Bill. As the Minister would no doubt say, I shall arrange for Lord Wyatt to write to my hon. Friend and explain it to him. The point is that people wish to make all kinds of bets at fixed and variable odds and that they can securely be accommodated within all the betting systems.

Finally, I hope that no one listening to the debate will think that we are simply in the business of stimulating gambling without any concern for the possible effects on individuals. We are in the business of ensuring fairness for Tote bookmakers and ensuring that the racing industry has a flourishing future. That is certainly my motivation in asking the House to grant the Bill a Third Reading.

Equally, we are in the business of ensuring that the disgraceful abuse that took place in 1826 and to which my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield referred never recurs. That is why the interest of my right hon. Friend the Minister and the Home Department in the levy board and the Tote is vital and so greatly appreciated. I am utterly confident that there is no reason why such abuse should recur, but Parliament must continue to take a close interest in betting matters. The Bill will do much to redress the disadvantage under which the Tote has laboured for too long and will, I hope, put matters right within a few days.

11.47 am

Mr. Tim Smith: I join my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) in paying tribute to Lord Wyatt of Weeford, the chairman of the Tote, who is due to retire on 30 April. He has been an absolutely splendid chairman. When I was the parliamentary private secretary to the Home Secretary of the day, I had the good fortune to be invited to a splendid occasion called the annual Tote lunch, which takes place at a very nice hotel in Kensington. Lord Wyatt always made a most amusing speech on such occasions, although it was largely at the expense of the other guests. It is quite right that the Tote should celebrate its achievements because it has been enormously successful.

Mr. Maclean: The annual Tote lunch is not an event with which I am familiar. Does my hon. Friend happen to know when the next one might be?

Mr. John Greenway: On 5 March.

Mr. Smith: I was not aware of the date because, unfortunately, I have not been invited this year—perhaps if certain people read *Hansard*, they might be able to remedy that omission. It is a splendid occasion and it is right that the Tote should celebrate its success.

In betting, we might like to start from a different starting point, but the fact is that bookmakers exist and do an excellent job. The Tote is an important part of the overall picture of betting in racing, for the reasons outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale, and it makes a unique contribution to racing. I was greatly encouraged by the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Minister about Tote Direct, which is good news because it will expand the business of the Tote considerably and will allow the Tote to provide more prize money for races and more sponsorship for racing. That must be welcome.

The Tote operates not only at horse races, but at dog races. I am not very experienced in betting—I asked my hon. Friend whether fixed-rate betting was consistent with a pool because I do not fully understand those matters.

Mr. Greenway: The Tote betting at greyhound tracks is different to the Horserace Totalisator Board Tote. Most greyhound tracks run their own pool for betting on greyhounds on their track on the day of the races.

Mr. Smith: I am grateful for that clarification—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This Bill is entirely about the Horserace Totalisator Board and Third Reading speeches should be confined to what is in the Bill.

Mr. Smith: I think you are right, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Bill is about horse racing, but I wonder whether it is not too late to extend it to dog racing. What I am about to say would be applicable and relevant to horse racing.

I mentioned earlier the rather attractive bet that one could obtain on the number of Liberal Democrat Members in the next Parliament—we all know that there will be substantial reduction. Dog racing is interesting because there is a fixed number of dogs in a race—normally six—and the Tote operates like all Totes in that it gives the running odds, which are determined by the amount of money that is going on each dog. It is the same in horse racing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This Bill is about horses, not dogs.

Mr. Smith: I am very disappointed at your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because it means that I shall be unable to give you some very helpful advice about how you should bet the next time you attend dog racing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: To ensure that there is no misunderstanding, let me say that I am going to Newbury races tomorrow and they are for horses only.

Mr. Smith: I am delighted to hear that. Newbury race course is one of the most attractive race courses in the country—I am sure that the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) agrees that it is an excellent course. I hope you have a fantastic day out, Mr. Deputy Speaker; I hope that you place all your bets with the Tote; and I hope that you have great success and come in on Monday morning with a big smile on your face. The Tote is convenient at race courses; it will be near the directors' box in which you have lunch, so you will not have to go very far to place your bet; and it provides an excellent service, with all sorts of combinations of bets.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale for bringing forward the Bill because, since the advent of betting on the Irish lottery in betting shops, the Tote has been placed at a serious disadvantage. I understand that it would have been possible for my right hon. Friend the Minister of State to have dealt with the matter through regulation rather more speedily than has been possible through primary legislation. Nevertheless, the Bill is welcome because it places the Tote on an par—to use the hackneyed phrase, on a level playing field—with betting shops. I am pleased that it has all-party support.

11.54 am

Lady Olga Maitland: I formally congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) on introducing this excellent and important Bill.

I have to make a confession: I am not one of the world's greatest punters. As my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) recalled, we have had some pleasurable excursions out to Ascot in great family gatherings, although they were perhaps done more for social reasons than for the purpose of betting. Nevertheless, the piquancy of going to Ascot was making my little visit to the Tote, with my £1 coin—or, if I were being daring, my £2—and asking, "Could I place a bet—oh, how do I place a bet?" and they would say, "Well, you can have it each way or for a place," and I would say, "Any way will do, provided I get something back." At the end of a day's racing at Ascot—or at Fakenham, which is enjoyable but rather more on par with a donkey derby—my great joy is to find that I have put £5 out and got £6 back. My fury was aroused when I assisted my son, who was then only 12, with his betting—although he could not place bets, I was able to abide by his wishes. That little wretch would come back with a fortune—he had an instinct for betting which I was unable to match.

Let me return to the Bill. A natural characteristic of the British is in favour of fair play and we would not be having fair play had the Bill not come into being. It is absolutely iniquitous that, all these years, the Tote—which is an utterly respectable statutory body, headed by the biggest grandees in the land—has been unable, for some extraordinary reason, to operate on a level playing field with the other bookmakers. That was unworthy treatment. It is common sense that the Tote should be allowed to operate in a host of betting ventures other than dogs and horses—incidentally, I am not at all interested in dogs.

I would be interested in placing a bet with the Tote, which is easier than going to some of the other bookmakers, on the general election result. It would be reassuring to know that I could go to the Tote and bet on my own success in Sutton and Cheam—not only on the certainty of winning, but on the size of the margin by which I would win. When the Bill is passed, I shall be able to do that.

The Tote's success will be good news not only for the racing industry, but for the causes that the racing industry supports. I congratulate my hon. Friend and wish his Bill well.

11.57 am

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: I start by adding my congratulations to those who brought the measure forward. My noble Friend Lord Kimball, who introduced the Bill in another place, is well known in the House for his interest in these matters and for the enormous amount that he has done over the years as a Member—first, of the House of Commons and now of the House of Lords—in advancing the interests of the horse racing industry and other country pursuits.

There is some danger in adding the name of Lord Wyatt of Weeford, because any congratulations to him will now look like an application for an invitation to the Tote lunch in March. However, if that were the way that the Tote wanted to read my congratulations to Lord Wyatt, I should not be displeased. He has played a tremendous role in the Tote's success. It has been able to do formidable things for racing, and he deserves unreserved congratulations on that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring), the Member in charge of the Bill, did well in bringing the Bill forward and getting it through all its stages in this Parliament. I confidently predict that it will receive a Third Reading. It can then soon become law.

I have been staggered at the expertise that my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) has shown in carrying the Bill through its remaining stages today. He obviously has great expertise, and the many people who work in that industry in his constituency and throughout the country can feel well pleased with the way in which they were represented by him today.

We should pay tribute to the work of the all-party racing and bloodstock industries committee, whose members considered this measure and expressed to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Minister their support for the Bill. Evidently, the committee had great influence in persuading the Government that it was time that they supported the Bill to ensure its passage. My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale is chairman of that committee, so he played a leading part from the start in ensuring the Bill's introduction.

On Third Reading, we may not voice our regrets about what is not in the Bill, and naturally I would not do so. It would have been helpful if the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale had been passed, but we may rest assured that it is safe to allow the Bill as it stands to proceed, largely because of the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Minister on Report. His views were clear from what he said within the limits of selective responsibility, but he stretched those at one or two points, which was very helpful to my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), myself and others who have argued that the Bill should go further in the direction of accommodating betting on the outcome of the national lottery. That was a satisfactory outcome, and I am sure that the Bill, when it becomes law, will soon be followed by a Bill that will enable the Tote and the betting shops to do the things that we talked about on Report.

Many supporters of racing agree with the Tote when it says that it must compete with bookmakers on an equal basis. We have heard that the Tote cannot take fixed-odds bets on non-sporting events. That appears curious, but it dates back to the Horserace and Totalisator and Betting Levy Boards Act 1972. That may not be as long ago as the 1826 lottery, but it is a long time ago. What was done in 1972 was obviously appropriate for the conditions in 1972, but things have moved on and now, in 1997, the Tote should, as far as possible, be in the same position as the bookmakers. If Ladbroke's disagrees with me, I shall know about it pretty soon, but I doubt that the bookmakers would argue with that.

Interestingly, until 1996, the Tote never applied much pressure to be allowed to take bets on non-sporting events, and the fact that it feels able to take them on is a sign of the success that Lord Wyatt has had with the Tote.

The Bill is welcome. It will do a great deal to enhance the Tote. We have heard today that more is possible provided that those of us who want freedom to bet on the outcome of the national lottery continue our campaign. We have also heard that the Bill does not apply to dogs, and that there will be no dog racing at Newbury. We have heard about all sorts of things on Report and on Third Reading. The measure is most worth while and I look forward to it passing quickly on to the statute book once it has received its Third Reading and Royal Assent.

12.4 pm

Mr. Dykes: It gives me great pleasure to follow others who have spoken and to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) on his excellent Third Reading presentation. I hope that he will not mind my saying that I am glad that his amendment was not agreed and that the Bill reached its Third Reading without amendment: the original text is much stronger. I think that even my hon. Friend would be fair enough to see the force of that argument despite his great skill in advancing arguments in favour of the amendment.

The Bill is important. I hope that the fact that two hon. Members who represent the borough of Harrow are speaking in the debate will not give the impression that there is an excessive interest in horse racing or betting in that borough—it is just a coincidence. The historic link is that Ladbroke's headquarters was originally in my

[Mr. Dykes]

constituency of Harrow, East, albeit in an unattractive, modern, concrete building. It has now moved to the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) and is in a much nicer building. I regret the move, but I understand the technological, operational and managerial reasons for it. I wish the company well and remain friends with it, but at a slightly greater distance. I even tried to have a bet on which building it would occupy in Harrow, West, but it was not possible to place a bet with an appropriate local bookmaker, certainly not on the Tote.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware of a second connection, which plays an instructive role in ensuring that racing is maintained as an important industry in this country. Until the second world war, there was an important race track at Northolt park on the borders of my constituency and Ealing—part of the site is in my constituency. We do not want more race tracks to be abandoned; we want racing in this country to thrive.

Mr. Dykes: That moving, almost emotional, intervention from my hon. Friend gives me the opportunity to agree with him. It also gives me the chance to refer—without pomposity—to the fact that I am chairman of the Anglo-French parliamentary liaison group. The industry in France is much bigger than ours and more money is invested in it for breeding and training. I welcome any move to expand an industry that is congenial, attractive to millions of citizens and an important provider of jobs.

I have a predilection for trotting, and I regret that there are no trotting race courses in this country—I believe that that is true, at least in England. That is a great omission: trotting holds a certain monotonous fascination; it is popular in the United States and France, but not in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: There may not be an official trotting race course, but my hon. Friend is welcome to come to my constituency—to Appleby and Westmorland—each spring for the Appleby trotting and harness races. I might even invite him to make a speech on his views on matters pertaining to Britain, Europe and the world.

Mr. Dykes: I am extremely moved by that kind suggestion from my right hon. Friend the Minister of State. It would be an even more agreeable combined double if the process of amity and connection could be completed by the extension to both of us of an invitation to the next Tote board lunch.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale. Bookmakers have a dubious reputation in some people's eyes, but not mine. The bookmakers I know are decent members of the community.

I do not want to sound too nauseating, but I shall use the appropriate epithets and say that today's debate has been characterised by the contributions of jovial John. If the informal, colloquial uncle of jovial John, my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), had remained here, he would presumably have been hearty Harry. Diligent David, the Minister of State, gave an effective reply on behalf of the Government.

On a personal note, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) for her kind references to our occasional visits to the races. Somewhat nervously, in case we should give the wrong impression, I hasten to add that those visits are rare. Those visits, with our crowd of mutual friends, have been all too few and far between owing to the pressures of parliamentary life, and they have not happened for some considerable time.

My hon. Friend need not be discouraged by the mistakes that amateur punters and occasional visitors to race courses make when they try to place bets. On a recent official visit to Hong Kong I attended the wonderful Happy Valley race course, where attendance rates and betting money from the local Chinese population are so stupendous that each meeting—particularly the Wednesday evening meeting, which is particularly well attended—adds several percentage points to Hong Kong's gross domestic product. It contributes through the tax levied to some worthwhile local public and social causes. That reminds me of an occasion when I attended Happy Valley with a skilled business friend from the Hong Kong community. He was an enthusiastic and expert punter. We tried to emulate the locals. We stood alongside the queue of Chinese punters going to place bets and listened carefully to the words—in Cantonese, of course, not Mandarin—that they used to place the bets. We were astonished to find that each one said an identical phrase in Cantonese.

We, rather pompously and self-importantly, decided to take the risk of going up to the window and saying the same thing to place the appropriate bet. The amount of money given seemed to be equal each time, which was rather fascinating. When we went up and said what we thought were the same words in Cantonese, the glass window was slammed down as if we had said the wrong thing. We clearly got the Chinese tones wrong. Anyone can make mistakes when they make bets as an amateur.

I conclude by referring to the notable work done by Lord Wyatt, who will soon finish his job as chairman of the Horserace Totalisator Board. I wish him well. I share the general enthusiasm for the work that he has done with his colleagues, the way in which the board has been developed and the way in which it will be helped by the Bill. That does not mean that I would go so far as to share his eccentric and bizarre views on domestic politics or the future of Europe. My enthusiasm in congratulating him on his work is tempered by a fear that, as he will have less to do with the board and racing in general, he might spend more mischievous time on running down Europe and expressing his archaic 1850 views on its future.

Mr. John Greenway: My hon. Friend ought not to be too harsh on Lord Wyatt. I understand that he has accurately predicted the results of the past two general elections and has placed substantial bets, with great success, on the basis of his predictions. Of course, he could not do so on the Tote until now. It remains to be seen whether he will take that opportunity after the Bill is passed.

Mr. Dykes: That intervention emphasises my point that Lord Wyatt is a great expert on betting. I hope that his correct prognosis will be repeated, but some of his views on the future of Europe and, indeed, on the danger of mixing with foreigners too frequently are well known.

Lord Wyatt, and all of us who have spoken in the debate today have paid tribute to Lord Kimball, the promoter of the Bill in the other place. In the debate in the Lords he summed up the crux of the Bill, saying that the Bill

"will allow the Tote to take bets on non-sporting events. The Tote's betting offices have been hit by the introduction since March of this year by all the bookmakers in their shops of betting on the Irish Lottery numbers. This now amounts to as much as 2.5 per cent. of all their off-course turnover. The fact that the Tote has not been allowed to take these bets has meant that since March of this year it is estimated that the Tote has been deprived of over £1 million and that, in a full year, it would be deprived of in excess of £1.5 million."—

as my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale said.

"This is money that has been lost to racing. After all, all the profits of the Tote go to racing."

Then, with even more emphasis, if that is possible, he said:

"The Tote has some 200 betting offices out of approximately 9,000 off-course betting shops in this country. The problem is that, if a punter goes into a betting shop and cannot get the bet that he wants—and in this case it is the popular amusement of betting on the numbers that are coming out in the Irish draw—he goes into another betting shop where he can get the bet that he wants."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 6 November 1996; Vol.575, c. 710.]

That is the rationale behind the Bill.

I am glad that the Bill has proceeded so felicitously through all its stages in both Houses. I assume that the House will be minded today to grant it a Third Reading. That would give me much pleasure, as I am sure it would my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale, with all his skills and knowledge of the industry, and all the other hon. Members who have taken part in the debate today.

12.13 pm

Mrs. Kennedy: My upbringing discouraged at an early age any interest that I may have had in horse racing or the gambling associated with it. However, to follow the comments of the hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen), I regard the horses bred for racing as incomparably beautiful animals, and I recognise that we would not have the one without the other.

I am here to present the Opposition's view on the Bill. We recognise the Bill's worth and the fact that it clearly assists the Tote in the increasingly tough competition that it faces by relaxing restrictions on the range of events on which it can receive bets. The Tote, with the rest of the gambling industry, has suffered since the introduction of the national lottery.

We discussed earlier the fact that the lottery and scratchcards have increased the number of people involved in gambling. One of the most important consequences is that gambling is less often portrayed as an immoral minority activity, but strictly applied regulation is still necessary. The businesses involved in the gambling industry, including the Tote, accept that it is in their best interests for their integrity to be protected by proper regulation.

Reputable business practice and appropriate regulation have contributed to an irreversible change in the landscape of gambling in the United Kingdom. Betting on horses and dogs, bingo, football pools and in casinos has become an integral part of the entertainment industry. I was pleased to visit the Mecca bingo club in Knotty Ash in my constituency—there is a real place called Knotty Ash, and I invite hon. Members to come and visit it. There is an extremely successful bingo club in Knotty Ash, which claims 35,000 members who regularly take part in the events organised there.

One of the consequences of the national lottery is that it has forced the industry to recognise the competition and to invest in improving facilities to attract people into bingo clubs. That is one example that has been given; the Minister referred to improvements in high street betting shops.

For the most part, those who make use of such forms of entertainment are exercising their own choice and do not gamble stakes beyond their means. It is therefore not our intention to seek to limit that choice. Our aim is to ensure that the firms involved operate legally and with propriety, and that any social implications are recognised and taken into account separately.

Mr. Dykes: The hon. Lady referred to the bingo industry. She may be interested to know that one of the most attractive bingo clubs is in the middle of my constituency. It is run by the well-known chain, Gala Clubs. It is a superb facility, where many people come regularly, and not only at weekends. Modest sums of money change hands, but it is a huge sector that provides great enjoyment to a large number of people. Understandably, however, the bingo industry sometimes feels like the poor relation because it does not receive the attention that politicians should give it. Does the hon. Lady agree, and are there ways in which we could better promote the excellent bingo industry?

Mrs. Kennedy: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention, but I shall not go too far down that route, as it strays somewhat from the purposes of the Bill. Various points were put to me by the managers of the bingo club. In the debate on the Bill in Committee, there was some comment about the need for a wider examination of the regulations that affect gambling in the United Kingdom, rather than the current piecemeal approach. Perhaps we could return to that on another occasion.

We support the Bill as drafted, and congratulate the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) on the progress that he has made so far with an excellent piece of legislation.

12.18 pm

Mr. Maclean: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) for introducing the Bill and for his excellent advocacy of it. I am also grateful to all my hon. Friends who have spoken in support of it, and I am very grateful to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy) for her contributions today. I believe that she also served on the Standing Committee.

The hon. Lady is an excellent advocate at the Dispatch Box; she has made a fluent contribution to the debate and done so with such decency. I am glad that the Opposition and the Government are in agreement. If the time comes that I must disagree with her over the Dispatch Box, I shall feel a right swine and a cad, because she presents her arguments with extreme decency. If the hon. Lady is an example of new Labour, I am glad that there are plenty of old Labour Members behind her whom we can treat as bogeymen.

[Mr. Maclean]

I am pleased to place on record the Government's support for the Bill. It removes an unnecessary restriction on the Tote, and places it on the same footing as other bookmakers. It will help the Tote to compete on an equal basis with other bookies in the fixed odds market. In this day and age, it is clearly unnecessary to prevent the Tote from taking bets on non-sporting events—in fact, I was surprised to learn that the Tote was restricted in that way.

What could be the reason for limiting the Tote's powers in that way? I understand that it dates back to the Horserace and Totalisator and Betting Levy Boards Act 1972—not quite 1826 legislation. That Act allowed the Tote to enter the fixed odds market for the first time. When the Tote was first set up in 1928, there were no off-course betting shops and the Tote provided pool betting on race courses. When the major step was taken to legalise off-course betting shops in 1961, the Tote faced formidable competition. It was not until 1972 that it was given the powers it needed to take fixed odds bets.

It was intended that the Tote should, as far as possible, be in the same position as a bookmaker. Therefore, it was given unfettered powers to take fixed odds bets on sporting events. However, as we have heard this morning, the Tote's powers to offer such bets on non-sporting events were restricted. At that time, it was thought undesirable for a statutory body to take bets on matters such as a general election and the royal family. The Home Secretary's approval was therefore required in the case of non-sporting events. Today, most people expect the Tote to decide what bets it should offer and take.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) is absolutely correct: fairness is one of the key features of the British character. Fairness regarding the treatment of the Tote and other bookmakers was examined by the Home Affairs Committee in its 1991 report. It noted that the Home Secretary could, by order, approve non-sporting events on which the Tote could take bets, but that no order had been made. Primary legislation was needed to extend the Tote's powers so that bets could be accepted on any event, otherwise individual events had to be specified.

As hon. Members may imagine, drawing up such orders could be difficult. In its evidence, the Home Office commented that it did not contemplate making an order to allow bets on matters such as snow on Christmas day or martians landing. The Tote argued that it was anachronistic that it was unable to take bets on non-sporting events, that such bets gave publicity opportunities to other bookmakers, and that, if a punter wanted to place bets on a horse and an election result, he would patronise another bookmaker for both bets rather than place the bet for the horse with the Tote and then go next door to place the other bet.

The associations representing punters favoured allowing Tote bookmakers to take bets on non-sporting events. The bookmakers—then and now—agree with the proposition, so long as there is no bias in the legislation in favour of the Tote. The Home Affairs Committee commented that there was no logical reason why Tote bookmakers should be hamstrung in that way. Although bets on non-sporting events then accounted for less than 1 per cent. of turnover, they were profitable for bookmakers, and it was said that customers expected to be able to find a full range of bookmaking services in a bookmaker's shop. My right hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd), then the Minister responsible for the Tote, expressed the view that there was good argument for amending the legislation.

Why has it taken so long for a Bill to come before the House? In 1972, the restriction was not seen as irksome. The demand for bets on events other than sporting events was minimal, and the Tote did not press hard for the extension in its powers until last year. Circumstances have changed because of the new area of business that the bookmakers have ingeniously created: betting on the Irish lottery numbers, or what is called Lucky Choice, and more recently the new numbers game in betting shops called 49s.

I, too, pay tribute to Lord Wyatt for his excellent chairmanship of the Horserace Totalisator Board over the years, and to board members. He has been an excellent source of advice for the Government. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes), I hope that, in the free time that Lord Wyatt will have available from April, he will feel free to write on whatever subject takes his fancy.

I wish to thank all those who have advised me on the Bill, including my civil servants. I pay tribute to the Under–Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North–East (Mr. Kirkhope), who has been in the forefront in trying to make changes in betting legislation.

It is only fair to say that some of the best unofficial briefing that I have received has been over the past few days in the back of the ministerial car. If we are looking for a successor chairman of the Tote, I can do no better than recommend Allen Loveridge, my Government car driver. I suspect that that applies also to other members of his syndicate. He was able to explain to me how 49s worked. None of us this morning wanted to get into technical explanations of how odds are run. I suggest that, if the Home Affairs Committee ever wants advice on those matters, it should look no further than the Government car pool drivers, who seem to be a unique source of expertise on all matters relating to betting. I now know what 49s are—and they are worth having a go on, actually.

The bookmakers saw that, in Ireland, betting on Irish lottery numbers was extremely popular. Bookmakers here are prevented by law from betting on the United Kingdom lottery. Lucky Choice—betting on the Irish lottery—turned out to be a success and the bookies found it to be a lucrative slice of their business. They can make more from that type of bet than from the traditional horse race bet because they do not have to pay levy on it. Money goes to the levy board for the support of racing only from horse race bets.

Last year, the Tote was hit very hard in its betting shops. If its customers wanted to play Lucky Choice, they could not do so in a Tote betting shop. They had to go elsewhere. The Tote was losing potential income and it was losing customers, possibly not to return.

I shall make it clear why the Government attach great importance to income to the Tote, which is a unique body. It is run as a commercial operation, but its profits are applied for the benefit of horse racing, not private gain. Any income lost to the Tote is income lost to horse racing and horse breeding, one of Britain's most important industries.

The House may be interested to know about the Tote's contributions to racing. I have been reading the Tote's annual report for 1996. To the year ending 31 March 1996, turnover was over £304 million, an increase of almost 12 per cent. on the previous year. It paid out £238 million to winning customers and paid betting duty of over £13 million. Its gross profit was £45 million. Net profit before contributions to racing was £10 million. Its total contribution to racing was £8.3 million, an increase of 12.5 per cent.

How did racing benefit from these moneys? It appears that £1.58 million was paid in levy to the levy board while £0.86 million was directed to the sponsorship of races. Payments of slightly more than £5 million went direct to race courses, while £0.66 million went to the Greyhound Racing Trust. The capital contribution was a further £0.76 million.

The Tote has a particularly important role in sponsorship. The Tote's contract to support the Tote Cheltenham gold cup until the turn of the century is extremely important. In 1986, its contribution to prize money was £118,000. The Tote's bookmaking division is Tote Bookmakers, which has about 200 shops throughout the country.

The Tote has taken full advantage of the deregulatory measures the Government have introduced. In April 1995, restrictions on betting office facilities were relaxed to allow clear windows, larger television screens, notices on windows with information about facilities and odds on offer, and a wider range of refreshments.

I particularly welcome the change to shop windows and the removal of blacked-out glass, as it suggested that betting shops were immoral or seedy and it made them seem the equivalent of sex shops. That was an anachronism, and I am glad that we have been able to change it.

The changes have given the Tote the impetus to develop new corporate branding in a number of key outlets, both on and off the course. It has also taken full advantage of further deregulation last June, which permitted the installation of two amusement-with-prizes machines in betting shops.

Bookmaking is, however, a competitive business. As Lord Wyatt said in another place when the Bill was introduced:

"the Tote is a successful, fully commercial enterprise, operating in competition against the biggest bookmaking chains in the country in a cut-throat arena. The margins in bookmaking are small, although it does not seem that way to those of us who have lost money on bets and I believe that the bookie almost always wins. I assure the House that, according to the figures, the margins in bookmaking are small. Bookmakers have also had to compete against the national lottery."

Earlier, I mentioned bookmakers' ability to take bets on the Irish lottery numbers. Lord Wyatt pleaded eloquently for the Tote to be allowed to join in. He said that the Tote was "bleeding" at the rate of nearly £40,000 a week and that

"That money could have gone to racing, as all our profits do."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 6 November 1996; Vol. 575, c. 711-12.]

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and my hon. Friend the Minister responsible for these matters responded to the Tote's pleas in respect of bets on the Irish lottery. An order was passed to allow the Tote to take bets on foreign lotteries and it came into force on 20 December, just in time for the Christmas holiday season.

As I explained earlier, when the Home Secretary exercises his power under the 1972 Act to approve a non-sporting event, the event must be specified. The Tote can therefore now offer such bets. I have seen notices—other hon. Members may also have seen them—outside betting shops giving details of the odds on offer, which the Tote maintains are much better than those of the national lottery.

Naturally, no sooner had the Government taken action to enable the Tote to compete with the Lucky Choice bet than the other bookmakers produced a new non-sporting event on which to bet. Bookmakers have been creative in their response to the challenge of the national lottery, creating their own daily numbers draw—that thing called 49s. The Tote cannot offer that new bet because the order that we made last December was specific to Lucky Choice. Clearly, in a fast-moving market with new developments at every turn, it is inappropriate that the Tote must come to the Home Secretary each time it wants to specify a new event.

In response to my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), we could have gained a few more months on this Bill by bringing forward an order permitting the Tote to participate in 49s. That would have done merely for that purpose, but in June we would have had to change something else, and in July we may have needed to make yet another change. This is a fast-moving market and, rather than having to bring an order through the Home Office to the House every time the bookmakers think of something different on which to bet, it is better to have this Bill.

It is not always easy to frame an order for a particular event, so this Bill is the solution to removing all delay in the future and avoiding technical difficulties. I warmly support it and am grateful for the warm support that my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale has had from both sides of the House. I believe and trust that the House will support it. We should leave it to the Tote to decide, on its judgment and taste, on what events bets can be offered.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Police (Property) Bill

Considered in Committee.

[Miss Janet Fookes *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

POWER OF POLICE AUTHORITY TO RETAIN UNCLAIMED PROPERTY

12.33 pm

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): I beg to move amendment No. 6, in page 1, line 10, leave out 'a year' and insert '18 months'.

This simple and straightforward amendment seeks to substitute for the period of 12 months the period of 18 months in relation to the time for which the police have to keep property before they can move to acquire it as property in their own name. This is partially a probing amendment to ascertain why the figure of 12 months is in the Bill, but I shall also advance arguments as to why the period should preferably be longer.

By way of explanation, this sub-paragraph is part of a number of conditions that the Bill would impose on the police before they are able to exercise a new right of acquiring ownership of property that has fallen into their possession. Such property may have been forfeited or may otherwise have come into police hands. As we all know, the police acquire a vast amount of property as part of their daily work. Of course they cannot for ever act as custodians of that and decisions must be made on disposing of it in one way or another.

Under the Police (Property) Act 1897, the police have the power to auction this property. That was clarified by regulations passed in 1975. The police do not have the power at present to keep the property even if it would clearly be of great benefit to them. The Bill aims to ensure that they have that power.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): How long do the police have to keep property under the 1897 legislation before they can auction it?

Mr. Merchant: I was going to come to that point, but I will answer it directly as my hon. Friend asks about it now. Under the 1897 Act—in fact, I believe that it is under the 1975 regulations—the police have to keep property for 12 months before they are able to auction it, although it is six months for property forfeited, so there is a different time scale. However, if they seek to acquire it for themselves rather than to auction it, there is a reason why the period should be different, which I will move on to later.

First, the period of 12 months strikes me as arbitrary, even under the 1897 Act and certainly in the Bill. One needs to take into account various factors that might make a forceful argument for making the period longer. The real owner—the original owner, if you like—of the goods that have passed into police hands needs to be afforded some time to assert his rightful claim. We must take into account factors such as possible illness, possible period abroad, and moving out of the region where the property was originally taken by the police for one reason or another, whether it was lost or part of the proceeds of a crime.

The person who originally owned the property might have moved out of the region and it might have taken time for him to discover where the property was and how to reassert his rights to claim that property, so there are reasons why a period needs to be allowed. In a modern world where people travel much more and where sometimes information from the region where the person used to live takes considerable time to reach him, we might talk in terms of a longer period than that in the Bill.

The second and final argument was touched on, perhaps without his realising it, by my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith). There is a distinction between the police auctioning goods which have come into their hands and acquiring them, and this is recognised by the fact that the power does not exist at present. Even if the Bill were passed, the power would be used sparingly.

The difference is simple. The police must be seen to be absolutely above criticism when it comes to handling other people's property. Therefore, the regulations need to be tight. It is one thing when goods are being auctioned; when property is to be acquired by the police, it is a different question. It must be clear to all concerned that the police are not in any way misusing their powers to obtain property which could be useful to them. I am sure that the police would never dream of doing that, but we must make sure by regulation that no one thinks that. For that reason, an extra precaution needs to be put on the police in this Bill, and a period of 18 months will do that.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): Perhaps it would be helpful if I speak now to indicate the view of the Government in case my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) is tempted to accede to the amendment. I am afraid that I hope to persuade him otherwise.

The effect of this amendment would be to require property to remain in the possession of the police for 18 months before it could be retained on the decision of the police authority for use by the police. Section 2(3) of the Police (Property) Act 1897 provides that property which has come into the possession of the police in connection with their investigation of a suspected offence may be disposed of after it has remained in the possession of the police for a year. This is to allow time for a person claiming to be the owner of the property to apply to the court for an order for the delivery of the property, as provided for under section I of the Police (Property) Act 1897.

If property can be disposed of after 12 months, I see no reason why a decision to retain an item should not be taken after it has remained in the possession of the police for 12 months. The property could be sold after 12 months and completely disappear from view. It would not be possible to trace it. So it does not make sense to allow a longer period of time for a claim to be made in respect of property which is to be retained in the ownership of the police authority for use by the police force.

After a suitable period of time to allow the owner to make a claim, it is right that a decision should be made about the future ownership of the property. If no period were set, the property would have to be kept by the police indefinitely, and this would lead to considerable expense in terms of storage and maintenance. This is a matter of judgment, and I have listened carefully to my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant), but I believe

that 12 months is the right period of time. It is neither too long nor too short. If property had to be retained by the police for 18 months before it could be retained or otherwise disposed of, it would place an additional burden on the police with no real benefit to anyone.

Mr. Tim Smith: How much unclaimed property do the police have in their possession? How much room does it take up? What burden is it placing on the police at the moment? To what extent would that burden be increased if we were to accept the amendment?

Mr. Maclean: I cannot give my hon. Friend an exact inventory of the amount of property that the police have around the country, but it can be considerable. Tracing owners of lost property and getting better property marking systems on to computer are priorities for police forces around the country. I consider it a tragedy—as do the police—that after excellent raids such as Bumblebee, the police can fill warehouses with stolen silver and property which is almost impossible to return because it is not properly marked with a post code. There are warehouses full of JCBs, crawlers and other plant which are impossible to return because plant has no unique vehicle identification numbering system. A Home Office Committee, which I started a year ago, has met plant operators and others to try to draw up security schemes for plant similar to those used by the motor industry. Vauxhall led the way in this area, with better and safer locks. If we are not to have more warehouses full of unreturned property, it is absolutely vital that all those in the plant and machinery industries take their responsibilities seriously, as car manufacturers have done.

The short answer to the question by my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) is that, if police must retain current amounts of property for 18 instead of 12 months, there will, of course, be a 50 per cent. increase on space requirements. I have better uses for police stations than to fill them with property—which I should like to be returned to owners or disposed of as soon as possible.

Amendment No. 6 proposes an 18-month period, which is inconsistent with the 12-month period specified in section 2(3) of the 1897 Act. I have explained to my hon. Friends why I think that the period should be 12 months and why the Bill is correct. Therefore, I urge my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford, the Bill's promoter, not to accept the amendment, and I urge the Committee to reject it.

12.45 pm

Mr. David Evennett (Erith and Crayford): I am grateful for an opportunity to say a few words on the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant)—who is a neighbour, and a very good neighbour, to my constituency in south-east London—for giving us some ammunition and an opportunity to rethink the issue. He and I normally agree on politics, on government and on many other matters, but I must disappoint him on this occasion and say that I cannot accept his argument or his amendment.

My right hon. Friend the Minister—who I am delighted to have with us today—has made a very powerful case. In London, under the Metropolitan police, there have been some very successful trawls—such as Bumblebee, which he highlighted—to recover property. It would not be in the interests of the police or of the public if the police had to keep that property for a further six months before they could dispose of it. Time is important to the police, and they have a very difficult and important job to do. Our duty is to help them, and I believe that all hon. Members believe that they should be supported.

I think that 12 months, as specified in the Bill, is a fair and reasonable time for people to come forward to claim their property, if they want to do so. It would be wrong to change that provision now, not only because of the practical difficulties caused to the police, but because it would be out of line with the 1897 Act, which originally set the 12-month period. Therefore, I cannot accept the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham. It has given us an opportunity to highlight the reason why we wanted the 12-month period in the Bill, but I very much hope that he will withdraw it.

Mr. Merchant: I have listened very carefully and with great interest to my right hon. Friend the Minister and to my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett). Having had an opportunity—which the House has not previously had—to hear why a 12-month period was originally specified in the Bill, I appreciate why those arguments are convincing. I was particularly convinced by the arguments that the police should not be custodians of warehouses, and that their very success in cracking down on crime has resulted in the problem of having to look after such large quantities of property. I also appreciate the argument that property should be disposed of as soon as reasonably proper.

After hearing those arguments, I think that the 12-month period is acceptable. Therefore, on that basis, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clauses 1 to 5 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 6

PROPERTY IN POSSESSION ETC. OF PERSON TAKEN INTO POLICE CUSTODY IN SCOTLAND

Mr. Maclean: I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 5, line 17, leave out "77" and insert "77(1)".

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Janet Fookes): With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendment No. 5.

Mr. Maclean: The first part of amendment No. 5 is the most substantial element in this group, so I shall address that first. I hope to be commendably brief.

Amendment No. 5 makes it clear that any expenses incurred by a chief constable in carrying out any of his functions in relation to the class of property to which the new part VIIA of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 applies will be defrayed by the appropriate police authority. Section 77(2) of the 1982 Act relates to the expenses incurred by the chief constable in performing his functions under part VI of the Act in relation to lost or abandoned property. The section requires police authorities to defray such expenses.

The new section 86E(3) of the 1982 Act, as inserted by clause 6, would mean that expenses incurred by the chief constable in carrying out his functions in disposing of the

[Mr. Maclean]

relevant property are to be defrayed by the police authority. It is appropriate to provide that the chief constable's expenses in carrying out any of his new functions under part VIIA should be defrayed by the police authority. There is no reason to restrict that to cases in which the police dispose of the property. The proposed new section 86I, inserted by amendment No. 5, together with amendment No. 1, makes provision for all the chief constable's functions under the new part VIIA.

Amendment No. 5 also defines the term "chief constable" in part VIIA of the Act as the chief constable for the police area in which the property comes into police possession. The term also includes a constable acting under the chief constable's direction for those purposes. That is in line with the definition of the term in part VI of the Act, relating to lost or abandoned property.

With that simple explanation, I hope that the amendments will be accepted.

Mr. Evennett: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Minister for explaining those technical amendments. They make the Bill better and more effective and I therefore have great pleasure in accepting them.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr. Maclean: I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 5, line 34, at end insert—

"(2A) Any person who, immediately before the date on which a determination under subsection (1) above is made, owns the property in question, shall be entitled within one year after that date to recover possession of it as owner.".

The Second Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 3 and 4.

Mr. Maclean: Section 71(2) and part VI of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 entitle the rightful owner of lost or abandoned property to recover possession of it within one year of the date on which it was disposed of, if it was disposed of by the police otherwise than for value. Amendment No. 2 gives a similar entitlement to the previous owners of property to which the new part VIIA of the 1982 Act applies, in circumstances in which the police have retained the property under the new powers. That means that owners will have at least two years in which to make a claim for their property.

Amendment No. 4 is the more substantial of the two other amendments in the group. Section 76 of the 1982 Act confers a right of appeal on a previous owner of lost or abandoned property against any decision made by the chief constable on entitlement to compensation under section 72.

Amendment No. 4 extends that right of appeal to a sheriff to previous owners of property disposed of by the chief constable under the new section 86E of the new part VII of the Act. Amendment No. 3 is a consequential drafting amendment to allow for the insertion of amendment No. 4.

I hope that the amendments are acceptable to my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford and to the Committee.

Mr. Evennett: The Bill—I hope that it will soon be an Act—will apply not only to England and Wales, but to Scotland and Northern Ireland. I have pleasure in accepting the technical amendments to which my right hon. Friend the Minister has spoken.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 3, in page 5, line 40, after "86G." insert "—(1)".

No. 4, page 5, line 42, leave out "; and subsections" and insert—

"(2) The previous owner of any property disposed of for value under section 86E of this Act may appeal to the sheriff against any decision of the chief constable made under section 72 of this Act as applied by subsection (3) of section 86E.

(3) Subsections".

No. 5, in page 6, line 6, at end insert—

"Further financial provision

86I. Subsection (2) of section 77 of this Act shall apply in respect of functions under this Part of this Act as that subsection applies in respect of functions under Part VI of this Act.

References in this Part to "chief constable"

86J. In this Part of this Act, "chief constable" means the chief constable for the police area in which the person taken into custody, within the meaning of section 80 of this Act, is so taken; and includes a constable acting under the direction of the chief constable for the purposes of this Part of this Act.".—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

Clause 6, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 7 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Bill, as amended, reported.

Order for Third Reading read.—[Queen's Consent, on behalf of the Crown, signified.]

12.55 pm

Mr. Evennett: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I have been privileged to present the Bill and I thank the supporters and sponsors from all three main political parties for their help and support. I also thank the Minister for his contributions and for his support during the Bill's progress.

The measure is modest, but it has considerable support not only in the House but throughout the country and among police forces. That is important. Currently, the police are required by law to dispose of unclaimed or forfeited property in their possession by auction and that needs to be amended. Police time and effort to dispose of such property is wasteful when they do so much other important work. We do not want them to look after lost property and it is important to assist them in whatever way we can so that they can get on with their real job of apprehending and dealing with criminals. My police chief, Philip Selwood of Bexleyheath police station, which covers Bexley, does an excellent job and has my total support for his continuing work. We congratulate all police forces on their tremendous work.

The Bill would allow some equipment to be taken into police use if that is appropriate. Alternatively, at the end of 12 months, the police would be able to dispose of property that has been forfeited or is unclaimed. This modest measure will help them in their work and it will be appreciated by the police and others in our society. I commend it to the House.

12.57 pm

Mrs. Jane Kennedy (Liverpool, Broadgreen): I have been asked to respond to the measure on behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends, and I shall be brief.

In his introduction to the Bill published in *The House Magazine* on 2 December last year, the hon. Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) referred to debates during the passage of the Bill that led to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

In Standing Committee B, in reply to an amendment that had been moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael), the Minister of State, Home Office, the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) described the amendment as objectionable

"because it would remove the existing legal safeguards which protect the interests of innocent people whose property has been used for a criminal purpose without their knowledge or consent."

He also said:

"If a power for the police to make use of forfeited property were deemed desirable in principle, the necessary provision should be made by amendment to section 2(1) of the 1897 Act and regulations issued under it. That would ensure that the protection already afforded to the blameless owners of forfeited property under that Act was retained."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 3 March 1994; c. 1172.]

I acknowledge on behalf of the Opposition that the Bill does exactly that.

The earlier debate focused on the proposal to allow the police greater powers to determine what to do with computer hardware and software seized during the course of a criminal investigation. It was suggested that the police, in pursuit of the criminals who supply hardcore pornography via the Internet, should be empowered to turn that equipment against the criminals. That idea had arisen following evidence presented to the Select Committee on Home Affairs by the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Metropolitan police and the Police Federation.

We therefore welcome the Bill, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Erith and Crayford on his success in winning a place in the ballot. We are satisfied that its provisions will ensure that the blameless owners of stolen property continue to be protected and, further, that the responsibility is placed squarely on the shoulders of chief police officers in Scotland to discover the owners of property wherever possible and to notify them of their right to reclaim it before action is taken to dispose of it.

As the hon. Gentleman acknowledged, it will be necessary to introduce new regulations governing the exercise of the powers conferred in the Bill and for the Home Office to issue guidance to chief officers of police. It has been a matter of education for me since I was elected to the House in 1992 to observe the increasingly numerous occasions on which changes to legislation are made by statutory instrument. Indignation has turned to interest as the general election draws closer. It may even be possible that it will be my hon. and right hon. Friends who introduce from the Dispatch Box the amendments that will be required as a result of the Bill.

I welcome the Bill and wish it a speedy passage on to the statute book.

1 pm

Mr. Maclean: I suggest that the hon. Lady does not risk her money on the Tote or anywhere else by betting on that latter point.

The Government warmly welcome the decision by my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford to introduce a Bill whose purpose is to prevent the police from having in every case to dispose at auction of particular items of unclaimed or forfeited property which are of such specific use that it would be more efficient to keep them for use in the police service rather than having to sell them at an inadequate price on the second-hand market.

As the House knows, it is a terribly technical and complicated Bill. I am grateful that my hon. Friend has not been deterred by its complexities and technicalities or by having to make equivalent changes in the appropriate Scottish legislation. He sees the Bill as worthwhile, and the House agrees with him. It is certainly the Government's view. I congratulate him once again on his success in getting the Bill to this stage. I wish it a speedy journey through another place and look forward to seeing it on the statute book.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Human Tissue (Amendment) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

1.2 pm

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

When one introduces a private Member's Bill, the first question one is always asked is, "Whose Bill is it? Is it the Department's?" Oh, that it were. Then one is asked whether it is from an outside organisation. This Bill is not. In fact, it is a carbon copy of a Bill introduced in another place by the late Lord Finsberg. It is identical, down to the last comma, to the Bill that he succeeded in getting through all its stages in another place some two years ago.

The late Lord Finsberg was not only a colleague in the House but a near neighbour in that his constituency of Hampstead and Highgate was contiguous with mine. He had a good reputation and record of service to his constituents. He was one of the few men in British politics who saw service at the local level when he was the distinguished leader of Camden council, on the national stage in the House of Commons and on the European scene through his membership of the Council of Europe. The Bill is part of his legacy, and I am pleased to try to progress it this afternoon. When Geoffrey Finsberg died, it was said of him that his motto had been "Service to others before himself". Service to others is the philosophy of those who donate organs so that others may have a better life and a longer life.

Some of us are of an age that enables us to remember the reaction when Christiaan Barnard undertook the first heart transplant operations. The initial operations were medically successful in one sense, but the patients lived only a few days because they tended to reject the new heart. Heart transplants were initially a major step for medical science, but they did little to prolong the life of individual patients. Each one was newsworthy and we received daily bulletins on how the patient was doing, but what was newsworthy then is commonplace today.

Recently, I took part in a telephone appeal for the Jewish National Fund, which every year has a "Green Sunday" appeal, normally in January. I asked a certain individual whether he would be willing to make a donation and he replied that he had received a new heart nine years ago and that all the charitable fundraising and giving that he now did was for Papworth hospital where he had received his new heart, rather than for any other charity. Heart transplants today prolong life and transform the quality of life of those who receive them.

Some years ago, I received an invitation to join in the Kidney Foundation's London bridges walk and, as I had suffered from nephritis at a relatively young age, I agreed to take part. During that and subsequent walks, I have met many people who are awaiting transplants and many who have received them. On one occasion, I met a young boy whose mother had given him one of her kidneys, so she can now say that she has given her son the gift of life twice over—first when he was born and then when he subsequently received her kidney. He was a bright, cheerful active lad who was benefiting from his kidney transplant. On those walks and at photo calls—like some hon. Members, I am modest and reluctant to take part in photo calls, but I can occasionally be persuaded to do so—I have met people who are awaiting kidney transplants. The difference between the children who have had a transplant and those who are still waiting for one is amazing.

We all have friends and colleagues who have received a kidney transplant and we all remember the contribution of the late Michael McNair-Wilson to the House after having received a kidney transplant. He remained to the end an active Back Bencher. I shall always remember a visit that he and I paid to our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in February 1992 to discuss the case for compensating those who had been infected with HIV on the national health service. The Prime Minister had previously agreed to compensate haemophiliacs who had been infected with HIV but, at that time, a small group of people who were not haemophiliacs were not going to receive compensation. Michael McNair-Wilson said to the Prime Minister, "The reason I'm putting this forward is that I might have been one of those people, because I was receiving blood transfusions and might have received infected blood." Those words persuaded the Prime Minister and, 10 days later, he announced a change of policy.

What happened to Michael McNair-Wilson has happened to many other people—a new kidney has immeasurably improved the quality of their life and has prolonged their life. Some years ago, there was a threat to the renal unit at the Royal Free hospital and I met several of the kidney patients there who were protesting and trying to safeguard their unit, which they did. Many of them had received a kidney transplant over 10 years ago. Before they had received the transplant, the quality of their life had been very low and the length of their life had been uncertain but, after the transplant, their whole life was transformed. They were no longer subject to dialysis—and the Treasury would say that dialysis was very expensive. However, this debate should be about not money, but principle. It should be about improving patients' quality of life.

Towards the end of his life, Winston Churchill was once asked how he was, and he said that he was all right, considering the alternative. The alternatives for a person on dialysis are either that he does not have dialysis and dies, or that he receives a transplant and lives a longer, better life.

Despite the tremendous benefits to individuals of kidney transplants, there is a huge shortage of donors of organs. We know that, at present, more than 5,000 people are waiting for a kidney transplant and we know that some of them will die before they have that opportunity. We also know that there are people waiting for dialysis and they are doing so because, until some people receive a transplant, they will continue to clog up the dialysis system. Some people are waiting for a kidney and may not get it and may die, and others are waiting to go on to dialysis because there are so many on it.

The situation is so grave that some people may have to receive a transplant from a living person. I mentioned the young boy who received a kidney from his mother. Recently, a husband received a kidney transplanted from his wife. They were fortunate to be compatible both in life and in their kidneys, because one of the problems with kidney transplants is the need to receive a compatible one. Those sacrifices are a sign of true love, but they are not recommended by doctors, who believe that it is unwise for a human being to be left with one kidney.

Not only are there too few transplants, which has the corollary that many people must remain on dialysis for much longer, but as a result many people who would benefit from dialysis may not receive it. I have read a statistic—perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister can confirm whether it is still accurate—that we were 21st in the European dialysis league, ahead of Bulgaria but behind far too many countries.

On 16 and 17 November 1987, there was a conference of European Health Ministers, sponsored by the Council of Europe. Those who know me well will agree that I do not say that something is good simply because it is done in another European country. I do not say that something is good because it is done in the majority of European countries. However, considering what was said at that conference and the description that the conference gave of the law in other countries, I believe that we should re-examine the law in this country and change it.

I apologise for the fact that I shall describe the position in various countries alphabetically, but that is by far the easiest way. After all, I was not educated at a grammar school—but then, despite the new-found enthusiasm of the Labour party for grammar schools, many hon. Members were not educated in one either.

In Austria, it is regarded as acceptable to remove organs from corpses regardless of age, provided that the person has not expressed an objection during his or her life. The views of close relatives are not taken into account.

In Belgium, organs may be removed from Belgian citizens unless it is proved that they have expressed opposition during their life, but those who are not Belgian citizens must express consent.

In Denmark, it is acceptable under Danish law to remove organs from corpses provided that the deceased has not expressly objected to removal, and the views of close relatives will not be overriding. Thus, Denmark is one of the countries where one must opt out of organ donation, not opt in.

In France, it is acceptable to remove organs from corpses provided that the deceased has not expressed an objection to removal. People have to opt out rather than opt in; the views of relatives will be taken into account only if the deceased was a minor or incapacitated or if relatives can testify that the deceased expressed opposition to the removal of organs.

In Germany, consent has to be given before somebody dies for any organs to be removed; otherwise the consent of relatives has to be sought, but relatives cannot overrule the wishes of the deceased. It is a case of opting in rather than opting out.

You will be relieved to know, Madam Deputy Speaker, that in southern Ireland the rules are the same as in the United Kingdom. The wishes of relatives can overrule the wishes of the deceased.

In Italy, it is acceptable to remove organs on the basis of presumed consent when no express objection has been made by the individual during his or her life. Someone has to opt out of organ transplantation rather than opt in. The views of relatives will not be overriding.

In tiny Luxembourg, it is acceptable to remove organs provided the person did not object in writing during his or her life. The College of Physicians in Luxembourg has recommended that the views of relatives should be overriding.

In Holland, organs may be removed provided that the deceased has given express consent or, in the absence of a donor card, the relatives of the deceased have given consent. In principle, the wishes of the deceased are paramount, but in practice the relatives have a right of veto, although the Dutch are seeking to change the law and may do so in the near future.

In Norway, which is outside the European Union, organs can be removed provided that the deceased has not expressed opposition. It is a case of opting out rather than opting in, and relatives cannot overrule.

In Portugal, removal cannot be performed if the deceased had objected during his or her life. People opt out rather than opt in.

In Spain, organs can be removed in the absence of an express objection during a person's lifetime, although the views of close relatives can override the views of the deceased.

In Sweden, organs can be removed if the deceased has given written consent.

In Switzerland, it is acceptable to remove organs provided the deceased had not expressed any objection. People have to opt out of organ transfer rather than opt in.

In Turkey, organs can be removed if the deceased has given consent. The views of relatives cannot override those of the deceased.

Most countries have a process of opting out of organ transplantation, not opting in. In almost all countries, the views of the deceased override the views of relatives. What people in this country find slightly surprising is that, when a person signs a card, it is often automatically assumed that his or her organs will be transplanted. We know that that is not so and that doctors will seek the views of relatives before they transplant the organs.

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): Can my hon. Friend explain one point that puzzles me? Perhaps he can explain the point with regard to the practice in other countries, to which he referred extensively. What happens when the body of a deceased person is under the control of relatives, as may well happen, and those relatives object to transplantation or to the organs being removed? What are the authorities able to do? What do they do in practice? Do the police call at the house to take away the body? How do they pressurise grieving next-of-kin who do not want to release the body?

Mr. Marshall: If grieving next-of-kin said, "You cannot have the body. It is going straight to the crematorium", one would be unlikely to wish to intercept the body in the coffin and take it away. However, we must remember that a large number of people die not at home but in hospital.

One of the problems with our present system is that, in the United Kingdom, the relatives of 50 per cent. of those who die in intensive care beds and who have requested that their organs be used for transplants, refuse to allow organs to be removed. That is a high figure when we consider that, if we give someone else our heart, we give them a chance to live for years to come. When someone dies, we can give a kidney to two people because they get one each. So we can give two people the chance of life. We may give someone else our lungs. One Member of the House was given lungs by a donor. Corneas can also

[Mr. Marshall]

be donated. So we can benefit several people by donating our organs. The high proportion of relatives who refuse permission demonstrates the difficulties. I understand from the Department of Health that 25 per cent. of useable organs cannot be used because the relatives object. That seems a high figure.

Kidney dialysis is like a moving escalator. For every person who gets off it by receiving a new kidney, there are people at the bottom waiting to get on. Each time we have debated human transplants in recent years, the number of people waiting for a kidney transplant has been more than 5,000. The number of kidney transplants peaked in 1989, when there were 1,732. In 1995, the last year for which I have figures, there were 1,645. So more than 5,000 people have been waiting year by year. One of the reasons why so many people are waiting is the current law in the United Kingdom, which is different from that in many other European countries.

We are told that one of the reasons for not changing the law is that when doctors go to relatives and ask for the organs of the deceased, if the relatives say yes, the second question, in good taste, is whether the deceased was suffering from human immune deficiency virus, hepatitis C or Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. I gather that CJD is difficult to detect even by doctors so I suspect that the average relative would not know whether the deceased had suffered from CJD. I suspect that many mothers do not know what their sons are up to and do not discuss over Sunday lunch whether their son has HIV. It is an issue which, perhaps for reasons of good taste, should not be discussed with relatives and one on which they may not give a good answer.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): My hon. Friend said that the relatives of 50 per cent. of those who died in intensive care refused to allow organ transplant. Does that refusal come about as a result of the nature of the responses given to the secondary questions or do 50 per cent. give a flat no because it is not something that they wish to contemplate at that particular moment?

Mr. Marshall: It is much more the latter than the former, but we have to accept that our relatives do not always want to discuss that issue. They are traumatised by death. However, I believe that death would be less of a trauma to them if they were told that their relative had signed a card which was decisive and that, in dying, their relative was giving a chance of a much better and longer life to others.

We must accept that organ transplants have altered dramatically since the pioneering days of the 1960s. People have recognised that, in dying, they can give life to others. The gift of life is the greatest gift that one man can give to another. My Bill is designed to make that easier, and I hope that the House will give it a Second Reading this afternoon.

1.24 pm

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on raising an important subject, about which I am sure many of our constituents care deeply. Some of them will have been directly or indirectly involved in the decision-making that my hon. Friend described, which takes place at a time of great grief and difficulty for families. Others will have been involved in their role as medical professionals.

My hon. Friend treated the subject fairly and comprehensively. I congratulate him on that, and on taking up the torch, as it were, from one of our predecessors in the House, whom we all admired and respected. I am glad that my hon. Friend saw fit to do that.

I confess that I am deeply ambivalent about the Bill, which is one of the reasons why I am glad to have caught your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker. Like all hon. Members, I of course recognise the great contribution that transplant surgery, in all its wonderful forms, can make not only to people's quality of life, but to their very existence. I am well aware of the growing number of examples of people who would not be with us today, and would not be contributing to the community as they do, were it not for the miracles of transplant surgery.

I am equally aware that, as my hon. Friend said so fairly, transplant surgery depends on a reliable and regular flow of donated organs in an appropriate condition, so that they are not dangerous for the recipients, so that they are not rejected by the recipients' bodies and so that all the other medical criteria are satisfied.

I am, perhaps, slightly more aware of this than some might be because I have the good fortune to have the extremely successful St. Helier hospital in my constituency—you may well know it, Madam Deputy Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) will know it well.

St. Helier hospital is well known for many facets of its work, but what is relevant to the Bill is the fact that we have a highly successful and respected regional unit for renal dialysis and transplantation at St. Helier. I know Dr. Eisinger, the director, very well, and I can speak with some authority in saying that the renal unit saves lives, improves the quality of lives and does invaluable work. That links up with my hon. Friend's argument because, clearly, without the techniques and raw materials, so to speak, the unit could not do all the wonderful things that it does.

I strongly support the donor card campaign to which my hon. Friend referred. I am perplexed, however, and I should be interested to hear from my hon. Friend or from the Minister why, legally and in practice, the possession of a donor card in one's wallet or handbag does not automatically conclude the issue. The Government, rightly, go to a great deal of trouble to promote the donor card as a sensible idea, especially in relation to people who have the tragic misfortune to die at a young age. The organs of such people are more desirable, if I may express it that way, because of their vigour and youthfulness.

Why, therefore, when people make the conscious decision to carry a donor card, can subsequent legal or practical difficulties arise after their death, when the relatives, in their grief and shock, often find that they cannot bring themselves to give approval, as my hon. Friend would wish, to the decision to remove organs?

My hon. Friend correctly devoted much of his speech to the onus of decision making. He asked whether the House favours the idea of opting in or opting out of the procedure, and whether it would be possible for relatives

to play cards—if I may couch the argument in such terms—that are of a higher value than those held by the deceased when a decision is made.

Intuitively, I favour the opting-in argument, which I believe is more desirable ethically. In saying that, I am adopting a position that is likely—all things being equal—to reduce the number of available, suitable organs. We must face that consequence. However, I remain a little uneasy in this area. I believe that real value must be attached to the susceptibilities of the relatives of the deceased and to their grief and confusion. Such feelings are particularly strong when death occurs suddenly in hospital in a remote and rather impersonal environment. Perhaps we should take account of that aspect of the moral and ethical dilemma rather more than my hon. Friend suggested in his admirable speech.

I take a strong view on euthanasia: I am strongly and categorically opposed to it, whether it is voluntary, semi-voluntary or compulsory. Because I take that view, I am conscious—my hon. Friends may not share my misgivings—of a possible slippery slope regarding public attitudes. Provisions in law that override the misgivings and objections of families in tragic circumstances may lead—if we are not sensible in our law making in this and in subsequent Parliaments—to a situation where, for practical, technical and common sense reasons, it is deemed appropriate and utilitarian for people not only to plunder bodies for parts, but to take a rational decision, which I would regard as horrific, to end a person's life because that is what a cost-benefit analysis dictates. My hon. Friends may think that I am exaggerating the position and becoming a little hysterical. However, when considering ethical issues such as this, we must emphasise the likely long-term consequences of certain decisions which, in themselves, may seem perfectly correct.

I warmly welcome my hon. Friend's initiative. He has done the House a service in requiring hon. Members to re-think the matter. I sympathise with his argument, and I strongly support the tremendous efforts of the health professionals who are involved in this branch of medicine. I pay special tribute to the staff at the renal unit at St Helier hospital in my constituency. Having said that, I add two caveats: first, we should cling to the principle of opting in rather than opting out; and, secondly, it should be possible in the minority of cases—which is what it will become in the fullness of time—for the nearest and dearest to veto or trump the decision of the deceased. If we pursue our campaign of dramatising and publicising the great value of organ donation to society, it is clear that the practice will occur more often. That can only benefit the recipients. I congratulate my hon. Friend on the legislation, but I hope that he and the Minister will take account of those two important reservations.

1.35 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on introducing an important Bill. As my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) said so eloquently, the Bill turns on an extremely tricky area. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South produced some very good arguments in advocating why we should go down the road that is set out in the Bill. I congratulate him warmly on that. I am sure that many people throughout the country will have a great deal of sympathy with everything that he said.

I echo what my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South said about the late Lord Finsberg, who initiated the Bill. The fact that it is a measure started by Geoffrey Finsberg is almost a reason in itself why we should support it. It would be a tremendous tribute to him. He had a long and distinguished career in politics, in local government, in the House and in another place. His tragic death has left a hole in all our lives. All of us in the Conservative party in London feel his loss enormously and remember what he did in rebuilding the fighting machine that the London Conservative party became in the 1970s. I pay a warm tribute to my late hon. Friend for all that he did, including initiating the Bill.

It is almost impossible to speak on the issues raised by the Bill without making an on-the-one-hand, on-the-other speech. We could, of course, go along automatically with what my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South said in introducing the Bill, but it is not quite as simple as that.

There are 6,000 people waiting for organ transplants, of whom 5,000 are waiting for kidneys. We are told that there is no lack of money and that there is clinical expertise. I know that from what I have been told by hospitals in my constituency, and especially by the Clementine Churchill hospital, which carries out private operations. The problem lies with the shortage of organ donors. It is a worldwide problem and a worldwide business. One hesitates to call anything in such a sensitive medical area a business, but we must recognise that it is one.

The falling number of road accident deaths has meant that not so many kidneys are being made available. Advances in neurological practice have also had an impact. I understand that we were able to attract a great many foreign-sourced kidneys into the United Kingdom because we had a much better and quicker ability than other countries to match kidneys.

The allowable timetable has, of course, increased with better technology being available to keep transplanted kidneys. However, we were able to say that within the allowable timetable we would be able to ensure that a kidney that had come from another part of Europe, or more especially from the United States, would be made use of. We were able to say, "We can definitely make use of this kidney if you get it on to a particular flight." The United States would not have been able to match the kidney with a possible recipient. Technological advances and an increasing ability to datamatch in the United States have meant that we have lost out.

There is a shortage of organs and it is not surprising that that has prompted a number of people, including some doctors and my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South, to propose a change in the law with a view to retrieving more organs from deceased persons.

I ask my hon. Friend, however, to imagine a doctor in a hospital trying to take organs against the wishes of a distraught parent of a young person killed in a road accident, or against those of a pregnant woman whose husband has just been killed. It would be absolutely horrendous to put such a proposition to grieving relatives at that difficult time. In both those instances, the dying people would probably have expressed no wish about what should happen to their organs when or if they died because they would not even have thought that they might die. One can see that such a proposition would cause

[Mr. Robert G. Hughes]

enormous damage, primarily to the dying person's family. The family would already be traumatised and would be further traumatised by that request.

I therefore wonder what would happen to the organ donor scheme. I understand that that is precisely what has damaged organ donor schemes in other European countries and we must take seriously the prospect that it could happen here. I do not seek to criticise doctors, but for understandable reasons, a doctor who believed that he could save a patient's sight, transform his way of life or even save his life might become over-anxious to get hold of a donated organ. Inevitably, the doctor would put more pressure on a dying person's family than would be suitable at such a difficult time. The doctor would not mean to do so, but doctors are only human and if they felt that an opportunity was available to them, they would try to take it.

As legislators, therefore, we must be extremely cautious in ensuring that that does not happen. Clause 1(3) is controversial as it removes the present provision for considering, in certain circumstances, the wishes of relatives. Clause 1(4) reinforces that provision by preventing anyone from prohibiting removal of any part of the body, except in specified circumstances. However, the Bill does not deal with the point that I made earlier: how an angry or grieving family could be prevented from prohibiting removal of an organ. That matter should be specifically addressed.

Before we allow ourselves to go down that route, we must deal with that matter because it would harm the cause of organ donation. Who would lay himself or his family open to such a provision if he believed that organ donation would become an automatic process, that control would be taken away from him, and that things that he did not want to happen would happen automatically in hospital in those circumstances?

It is a Government priority to maximise the supply of organs for transplantation and I am sure that relatives' refusal is a matter of concern which Ministers and the Department of Health are addressing. My noble Friend Lady Cumberlege, the Under-Secretary of State for Health, raised that point when the late Lord Finsberg presented the Bill in another place. A more fruitful course, however, would be to continue to promote organ donation through publicity and education, encouraging people to join the NHS organ donor register. We should also encourage them to discuss openly with their relatives their wishes and those of their family.

I hope that I am not robbing my hon. Friend the Minister of a point that he may wish to make later. He adds to my guilt that I do not have an organ donor card, as I see that he is studying his as he sits on the Front Bench. I notice that he has now quickly put it away, but it is a great credit to him that he has one and I must look into the matter for myself.

The Government have shown their commitment to increasing the supply of organs through a number of interesting initiatives in recent years. That has included television and other media publicity, organ consent boxes on driving licences, educating hospital staff about discussing donation with relatives and a reimbursement scheme for donating hospitals. All those are important and we have to get it as much as possible into the public consciousness that all those routes are open to people.

The NHS organ donor register was launched in October 1994. I understand that already 4 million people have applied to join it. The register can be quickly accessed by transplant co-ordinators in hospitals and the families can then be consulted with sensitivity. The Department of Health continues to give considerable publicity to that register; we all should be pleased to note that, as the number on it increased, the number of refusals should therefore decrease. Currently, there are about 10 to 12 each week whose details were on the register—about half of the total number of donors—so it has had a significant impact.

In the Department of Health, as in any Government Department, such things are considered with a new perspective and perhaps with new thoughts. There may be new ways of doing it, but the fact that the total is about 10 to 12 each week is a tribute to the way in which the scheme was put together in the first place. I hope that we will be able to do even better. Therefore, rather than introduce a measure of compulsion, it is preferable that the Government should continue to promote organ donation through publicity and education and through encouraging people to join the register.

I should like comment on the study by the UK Transport Co-ordinators Association—[HON. MEMBERS: "Transplant."] The UK Transplant Co-ordinators Association. I beg hon. Members' pardon. What did I say? I am not going to suggest that I cannot walk and chew gum at the same time, but I cannot read a paragraph and talk at the same time. I was trying to say that the UK Transplant Co-ordinators Association and clinicians confirm that it is almost unknown for relatives to refuse consent if they know that the deceased has expressed a wish to be a donor.

That is the crux of the debate. If there were evidence that people were overturning the express wish of their deceased relative, we would have to think again, but there is no such evidence. Refusal nearly always occurs when the deceased has not left instructions that he or she wishes to donate. The study that I referred to by UKTCA and MORI shows that the commonest reasons for refusal are claims that the deceased has said that he or she did not wish to donate, and the inability of relatives to agree in the absence of instructions. Unless a future survey along the same lines proves that things have changed and that a barrier is going up against the deceased person's wishes, we have to go the way we are going.

The Bill has much to commend it. The thoughts behind it have much to commend them. Clearly, people who are desperate for a transplant operation want the Government to go much further, but our job as legislators is to say, "Hold on a minute. What is the balance of rights in this? What is the balance of rights and wrongs? What is the balance of people having control over their own lives and their future?" We have to say today that the balance has been struck about right and that, regrettably, the Bill goes just that bit too far.

I hope that, in responding to the Bill, the Government will introduce new measures that are along the lines that they have been advancing, and give us fresh thoughts about how to increase the number of organ donors and those saying that they wish to be an organ donor in the event of their death. In addition, I hope that the Government will not support the Bill's line, at least at the moment.

1.48 pm

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): I commend this Bill, and I welcome the initiative of my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall). The Bill is short—it is contained in one page. I wish that we had commendably short Bills such as this all the time, as it would make the work of the Chamber much easier. It harks back to the time when the Chamber frequently had short Bills. In 1876, Prime Minister Disraeli produced one of the most momentous pieces of legislation of the Victorian period, the Royal Titles Act. That, too, was only one page long.

This Bill deals with the sensitive area of death and what we do with the human body. My welcome for it is based on my knowledge that donors have saved lives with their kidneys, hearts, corneas, lungs, livers and skin grafts—although skin grafts often come from live donors. The way in which one neighbour helps another in this context is one of the most heartening parts of our so-called selfish society. I welcome the fact that people are coming forward honourably and generously to give their very own organs to save lives. I believe that to be heroic, and it is an adjunct to people giving blood to save lives.

It is right that a person who is giving a vital organ, or some other part of his body, expresses his own view about it. As a society, we have recognised for hundreds of years the right of an individual to decide on the disposal of his property after death. That has been true since this House passed the Wills Act 1837, which is still used as the determinant Act for the disposal of property. The same principle should apply to the human body. The Bill requires

"a person lawfully in possession of the body of a deceased person to authorise the donation of the body or any specified part of the body for therapeutic or medical purposes if the deceased person had requested such a donation."

That principle is at the heart of this Bill, and I am happy to support it.

As a lawyer who has acted in this area, I have experience of trying to recognise an individual's right to decide on what happens beyond death. I believe that one recognises a person's desires if that person at that point is of sound mind. I would like my hon. Friend the Minister, or my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South, to assure me that the form for the donor card will contain a requirement to assess whether the person who signs the card is of sound mind, so that we can honourably recognise his decision after his death. Perhaps that matter could come up in Committee. What will happen if, in future, medical science finds a way in which to perform human brain transplants? We may be many decades away from such transplants, but it is not ridiculous to suggest the possibility. In the 1920s, for example, it may have been thought ridiculous to suggest that we might transplant a human heart. I realise that, under our current understanding of the law and the Bill's provisions, we are not considering brain transplants—as the Bill deals with persons who are deceased, and of course the definition of "death" is based on brain death—but I believe that a parliamentary debate on the issue may be necessary in future, and that it will involve greater ethical issues. The thoughts on euthanasia expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) are very pertinent to those ethical issues.

The main ethical issue today—I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South will assure the House that he had it in mind when tabling his Bill—is to ensure that, under the current system, it is never suggested to people who give their organs, "You would be better off dead, because someone else could use your organs." I say that bluntly, not because I think that such a suggestion is likely to be made but because it could be made. The House's job is to foresee possibilities, and I hope that, perhaps in Committee—with the addition of a few words or a small clause, although I do not resile from my praise of the Bill's brevity—we can ensure that such pressure is never put on people.

Mr. Forman *indicated assent.*

Mr. Booth: I am grateful for this opportunity to welcome the Bill, and I assure the House of my support for it, particularly because it deals with voluntary donations. I hope that the Bill's successful passage will send out a reminder to the public that to give a part of one's body can be life saving, that it is honourable and generous, and that it can be a human being's last act to help a neighbour. I hope that the Bill's passage and this debate will somehow increase such acts.

1.56 pm

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on promoting his Bill, which provides an opportunity to debate an important issue. The hon. Gentleman gave us a splendid tour of how organ donation operates around the world; I congratulate him also on his research. I doubt whether many people would argue with the proposition that there is a shortage of organ and tissue donors in Britain. The Bill is not the first attempt to address the issue of how to acquire more donors.

We should also remember that donors are needed in life as well as in death. We frequently hear calls, especially in the winter months, for more and new blood donors. Emergency appeals for bone marrow donors seem to be made more often these days, and we even hear appeals, occasionally, for living organ donors. However, the newly deceased provide the greatest potential supply of organs and human tissue. Kidneys, hearts, lungs and livers are needed for suffering patients; there is also a need for human tissue, such as corneas to restore sight. There is now an opportunity for deceased people to donate their skin for use as specialist dressings and grafting material for people suffering from very serious burns.

The Bill attempts to deal with the apparent and long-standing problem of a lack of donors. I say that it is an apparent problem because the United Kingdom Transplant Support Service Authority—the body responsible for overseeing these matters—does not collect figures annually or make estimates of the number of potential donors. Figures are certainly available for the number needing a donor. The Minister mentioned during an Adjournment debate last week that 6,000 people are awaiting organ transplants, around 5,000 of whom need kidney transplants.

Those figures seem to change little year on year. In March last year, for example, the Minister told the House in a written answer that 6,122 people were awaiting transplant surgery, 5,280 of whom needed kidney transplants. He also told us that 402 people had died in the previous year while on the waiting list. I have been affected by that—as has the House—because my good

[Mr. Kevin Hughes]

friend Jimmy Boyce, who was the Member of Parliament for Rotherham, died while waiting for a heart transplant. We all felt for Jimmy.

This is a continuing problem. Vigorous efforts should be made to encourage a greater supply of organs and human tissue. I hope that all hon. Members will join me in congratulating the NHS organ donor register on its efforts. Having 4 million people on the register is a good start, but I am sure that we can all make greater efforts.

In addition to the clear humanitarian reasons for increasing the supply of donors, there are sound economic reasons for transplantation. I understand from the National Kidney Federation that kidney dialysis costs around £10,000 per patient per year, but that supporting a post-operative kidney patient costs only £3,000 to £5,000—and the patient may have not only a more productive life after a transplant, but a better quality of life.

Modern medical advances and the great leaps forward that have been made in transplant technology and rejection suppression mean that the pool of people suitable for transplant grows continuously. It follows that the number of people whose quality of life could be bettered is also increasing.

The supply of organs for donation appears to have reached a plateau. Several solutions to that problem have been put forward. Elective ventilation—artificially maintaining the integrity of a dead patient's organs until consent can be obtained—is perhaps the most frequently considered. Another possibility is to require people to opt out of organ donation, rather than the current system of opting in through the national register and the donor card. I understand that that is favoured by the British Kidney Patients Association, among other interested groups.

Recently, it has been proposed that the organ supply problem can be solved by the breeding and use of transgenetic animals. There appears to be a broad consensus on the ethics of that approach, but there are still important public health and moral implications to be considered.

The Bill would impose an obligation on the person in charge of the deceased person's body to carry out the wishes of the deceased on organ donation. That is certainly a bold solution, but it is not without pitfalls. First, there is the problem of consent. The Human Tissue Act 1961 was clear that the possibility of a deceased person having withdrawn consent to organ donation was ground for refusing to allow donation.

The Bill would remove consideration of the possible withdrawal of consent. In theory, any consent document signed at any time by a deceased person could be viewed as an agreement to donate organs. There is a danger of people, mindful of the fact that they may later change their minds, choosing not to sign an organ or tissue donation consent form. It is therefore possible that the number of people volunteering to become organ donors will reduce. We certainly want to consider the matter further in Committee.

The Bill proposes to remove the veto from relatives and others who may have a connection with the deceased. It is often said that it is wrong to ask a spouse or other relative to sign a donor consent form at the time of a loved one's death. Strong emotions do not make for calm decisions. Perhaps there is some merit in amendment of the law, but I am sure that the House agrees that there are difficult legal questions about a deceased's remains. Those questions need to be addressed. Has the Minister taken advice about that? Will the Bill, should it become law, require consequential amendments to other statutes?

Finally, there is the issue of clinical opinion. I am told that, in the main, transplant specialists are opposed to any system of donation other than the current one. Has the Minister received that same view? If clinicians do not want to change the law, the Bill may be unworkable. However, if medical specialists are lobbying for a change in the law, the Minister should state what steps he and the Department of Health are taking to address clinicians' concerns.

The Bill raises important matters that I am sure the House will wish to consider further and in deeper detail. The hon. Member for Hendon, South has made a timely contribution to the debate on organ donation, and the Opposition hope to have the opportunity to study it further and in more detail in Committee.

2.6 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): We are debating an important subject and I join other hon. Members in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on presenting an opportunity to debate it. I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to our late friend Lord Finsberg who so ably represented the constituency of Hampstead and Highgate for many years. I was born in Highgate and I know that he was a good and able Member of Parliament who gave the House, his constituency and his country distinguished service.

I have listened to the debate with interest and it is obvious that there is much concern about the lack of organs for transplant. Organs become available only in the most distressing circumstances. In every culture, in every society, and in every age, people are reluctant to discuss some issues. In Victorian England, people did not talk about sex, but they did talk about death and money. In modern Britain, death is the taboo subject. We need only to consider how we approach the friends or relatives of those who are faced with imminent death to know how sensitively we feel that we need to behave.

The problem with the matter that we are debating is that people think it is about death. The only time relatives are formally approached is when they are confronted by the death of a loved one. To approach the problem from the angle of a change in legislation—effectively to ride roughshod over the understanding and sensitivities of relatives—is to go about it in the wrong way. We need to change the terms of the discussion. We must explain to relatives, perhaps at a propitious moment, which would be before they are confronted by the death of a loved one, that the issue is not about death but about giving life—and a better life—to others.

I carry a kidney donor card, which is now called an organ donor card because I have ticked the box to show that everything is up for grabs in the event of my death, but I have never been asked to consult the next of kin who appear on my card about what I want; nor have my next of kin ever been asked to record their understanding of what they think should happen to my body in the event

of my death. We need not an amendment of the law to turn over people's sensitivities, but a public campaign to change the instructions on the card that we carry to give someone a better life.

The organ donor register should, for example, contain not only the wishes of the donor, but the pre-death consent of the next of kin as to what will happen in the event of the donor's death. We need to change what happens so that obtaining the consent of the potential donor and his next of kin is not the end of the matter; in the event of the donor's death, the relatives must know what they will face.

The trouble with the present arrangement is that, although we have achieved a great deal in getting people to carry organ donor cards, we have not prepared the relatives for the shock of what will confront them. A dead person's relatives are often not in the correct psychological state to deal with the fact that someone has died, let alone to choose what happens to the body. That is precisely the kind of decision that they are incapable of making unless they can be persuaded that they have already made that decision.

I beg hon. Members to think about tackling the problem from the opposite direction. A change in the law is inappropriate; persuasion is the answer. There are examples of how we can change by invocation how people behave and what is regarded as acceptable. Twenty years ago, people thought nothing of getting into a car when they were over the limit, to drive home from the pub. That was part of the game that they played with the police. Such behaviour has become wholly unacceptable. How did we achieve that change? It was done without changing the law, the method of enforcement or the penalties—it was done by invocation.

We need a much better campaign of invocation and education—and perhaps a change in the system of recording the wishes of organ donors and their relatives. In that way, people will be ready to give the necessary consent at the appropriate time. It is therefore with regret and considerable anxiety, but some certainty, that I oppose the Bill.

2.12 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I greatly appreciate the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) has introduced the Bill. I had long been an admirer of Lord Finsberg. In fact, I was part of his campaign team when he was first elected to Parliament, and I had remained in touch ever since. It is very moving that one of his last acts was to introduce the original Bill.

The crux of the matter is that about 6,000 people are now waiting for an organ. In 25 per cent. of cases, the families of potential organ donors resist the request that their relatives' organs should be made available to give life. That fact led me to discuss the issue with my husband because, years ago, I had signed an organ donor card, and so had he. What I had not realised is that, in the event of my death, my husband, even knowing that I had signed the card, could—in his distress or after having second thoughts—override my wishes. That card was simply a worthless piece of paper.

When I write my will, I know that my wishes will be carried out on my behalf in the event of my death by the trustees, who are obliged by law not to deviate one jot. How is it that a will in the form of a card, which I have filled in and which states my express wishes—I want my organs, whatever use they might be, to be made available to give life to another person—can be overridden, yet my final will and testament will be adhered to by the law? When one considers the matter in that way, it is logical and sensible that the wishes of a donor, when written down on a piece of paper in the form of an explicit request, should have the same power as any request that I might make in my will.

Therefore, I hope that the Bill will come to fruition. I fear that, today, we may not be successful because of lack of parliamentary time, and I regret that. The issue is of fundamental importance, because I believe that it is my human right to be able to ensure that my wishes are carried out.

Some interesting research has shown that, where a person has made an explicit request, on the whole and mercifully, the family rarely override that wish—but they can. A wider issue is that when someone who has not made an explicit request dies, the family has a right to say, "No, I do not wish this to go ahead", and that happens in about 25 per cent. of cases. We should examine their reasons for doing that and not be too harsh. They often say that, in the trauma of grief, they feel that giving the body up for a donation is somehow extra surgery. Even if it makes no logical sense to think that, because the person is dead, such considerations can have great emotional power over grieving relatives. Sometimes, relatives say, "My relative has suffered enough—don't do any more." We have to bear in mind that fog of emotion and the time has come to try to clarify what people can do and whose wishes should be respected.

I totally endorse the Government's endeavours to publicise the organ donor scheme. I have looked down the list of all their initiatives and can only say that, although we have had years when the Government have worked hard and pumped money into a big publicity campaign, that does not happen every year or with the same energy. Sometimes, people come across their cards haphazardly—for example, I had not realised until today that I should have signed the section of my driving licence that provides for organ donor consent. How many people in the Chamber have signed the consent on their driving licence so that there is no shadow of doubt that that is their wish? It is a brilliant idea and it should be built on and publicised because, nowadays, there is barely a person in the land who does not carry a driving licence.

The Bill is so important that I wish it the very best passage, and if it does not pass all its stages right now, I very much hope that it will be picked up on another day. It means so much to me to know that, in the event of my death, someone, somewhere will benefit. It would also help the relatives to know that the spirit of their loved one, in a sense, continues in service in another being, and has made a better life for them. It eases the pain, the sharpness of death, to know that good is coming out of a tragedy.

I very much hope that we shall carry on in our endeavours to ensure that all our wishes are adhered to and that other people may benefit.

2.19 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam): I join others in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon,

[Mr. John Horam]

South (Mr. Marshall) on introducing the Bill. As we all know, he is a doughty campaigner on several health subjects—indeed, I would say relentless, considering the way in which he has pursued me concerning haemophiliacs. I noticed that he managed to get a well-contrived mention of the problems of haemophiliacs into his speech, which was otherwise about organ transplantation. His campaigning has been praiseworthy, although it is quite intimidating to be on the receiving end of some of his campaigns.

It is noteworthy that my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South has campaigned so much on health subjects when he is primarily an economist, and speaks also on economic matters. As a fellow economist, I am delighted by that, because it shows clearly that economists, who are often maligned, are also human beings. He will recall that one of the most famous of political economists, a Labour Member, was once called a desiccated calculating machine by another member of the Labour party. I do not wish to be disputatious about this, but it shows the low opinion in which economists are sometimes held. I am glad that my hon. Friend is striving manfully to present the other side of the coin.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South said, as have others, that the Bill is a replica of the Bill that was introduced by the late Lord Finsberg in 1995, which passed through the House of Lords but did not succeed in the House of Commons. Geoffrey Finsberg was my hon. Friend's neighbour in north London. There must be something about the air in north London that brings about—

Mr. John Marshall: Very healthy air.

Mr. Horam: Or perhaps it is the electorate in north London who bring about this admirable concern for selfless health matters, if I may put it like that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South took us on a fascinating tour of Europe. Uncharacteristically for him, given his views on European Union matters, he brought into play the strength of the arrangements in other European countries and said that we were a long way down the list of European countries when it came to the provision of dialysis. That is a fair point.

On a happier note, more people are alive with transplanted kidneys in the United Kingdom than in any European country—15,000. As my hon. Friend would be the first to say to me, given the wonderful performance of successive Conservative Governments, we are now leaders in Europe on economic matters; we are also, clearly, leaders in Europe on transplantation matters, which is the subject of his Bill. I should like to put my hon. Friend's point about our relatively poor performance in renal dialysis in that perspective—we are excellent on transplantation.

I must correct my hon. Friend's point about the percentage of relatives who refuse to allow organs to be removed for donation from people who have died in intensive care. He mentioned the figure of 50 per cent., which was picked up by one of my Conservative colleagues. We have different evidence. In 1989-90, an independent study showed that 30 per cent. of families consulted refused permission; in 1993, a study showed that relatives refused permission in 26 per cent. of cases. I am not sure where my hon. Friend found the figure of 50 per cent.; it does not appear to coincide with the information that we have. Our information is not specifically related to intensive care units, but concerns all cases where permission has been refused by the relatives.

Mr. John Marshall: The information was contained in one of the speeches in the debate instigated by the late Lord Finsberg.

Mr. Horam: I shall check on that if I may. I am not saying that my hon. Friend is wrong about intensive care units, but there is contradictory evidence about what happens generally when permission has been refused. I shall look into the point raised by my hon. Friend.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) gave a characteristically balanced and rational appraisal of the situation and asked a significant question. Why does not the possession of a donor card automatically close the issue? Why is the card not enough to show clearly the wishes of the deceased with no further argument? The possession of a signed donor card satisfies the requirements of the Human Tissue Act 1961, which my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) proposes to amend, and under which organs may be taken without anyone being consulted. That requirement is fulfilled under existing legislation. However, the Human Tissue Act also requires it to be established that the deceased had not changed his or her mind after signing the card; the only sensible way to check up on that is to consult the family. That is the first reason why relatives have to be consulted.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) suggested, I was consulting my donor card. I was checking on the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington. The donor card states at the bottom:

"Let your relatives know your wishes."

In addition to carrying and signing the card, someone must let his relatives know his wishes. In that way, there can be no doubt that the wishes of the deceased remained as they were at the time of his signing the card and he has not resiled from them since.

My hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth), who is no longer in the Chamber, mentioned that the donor should be of sound mind. We want to ensure that no one who signs a donor card is under a misapprehension about what it involves, as it is a significant thing to do.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West paid tribute to Lord Finsberg and raised an important point about the family. The relatives of the deceased will have memories and emotions of him or her. My hon. Friend made a telling point. One can imagine the situation where a young man has died in a car accident. His organs could be most usefully used in a transplant, but his relatives would be in shock; they would be particularly traumatised because he was young. It would be horrific if they made a decision and were then overruled so that organs were taken out of the young person against their wishes. If that happened, with all the tabloid publicity associated with such a gruesome incident, it would be a setback for voluntary organ donation, which we all support. We must address that problem. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South understands the problem and would not want to set back the cause of organ donation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West made the key point that, if a person has clearly said that he wishes his body to be used for organ transplantation after his death, permission is almost never refused by his relatives. In practice, under the current arrangements, the voluntary system works almost to maximum efficiency, which is crucial. I am glad that my hon. Friend raised that point.

My hon. Friend the Member for Finchley made an interesting point about the shortness and simplicity of the Bill. I agree: if all Bills were as short as this one, the House would be extremely grateful. My hon. Friend spoke of the Royal Titles Act 1876. Disraeli had a thing about shortness and simplicity: his Cabinet consisted of only 12 members, one of whom was the Master of the Horse, Lord Cardigan. So Disraeli clearly had things worked out in a way that we have perhaps gone back on since then.

The hon. Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) made a characteristically forthright speech. I congratulate him on his maiden speech from the Opposition Dispatch Box. As is traditional in these cases, I wish him a long sojourn on the Opposition Front Bench. I am sure that he will hone his skills to perfection in the long years ahead of him. As he was substituting for my usual opponent, the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron), there was no change in the friendly Yorkshire tones in which the problem was aired. The hon. Member for Doncaster, North mentioned Jimmy Boyce, the Member of Parliament for Rotherham until his sad death. He was my pair and I was personally in contact with him literally a few days before he died—

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 14 February.

Remaining Private Members' Bills

DOGS (ELECTRIC SHOCK COLLARS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 18 April.

BREEDING AND SALE OF DOGS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 18 April.

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Not moved.

LAND REGISTRATION BILL [*LORDS*]

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—[*Mr. Stephen.*]

Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 75 (Third Reading), and agreed to.*

Queen's and Prince of Wales's consent signified—

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

WITNESS PROTECTION BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [31 January].

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

DISABLED PERSONS AND CARERS (SHORT-TERM BREAKS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 14 February.

WELFARE OF BROILER CHICKENS BILL [*LORDS*]

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 14 February.

OBSCENITY BILL [*LORDS*]

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

POLICE (HEALTH AND SAFETY) BILL

Ordered,

That Standing Committee C be discharged from considering the Police (Health and Safety) Bill and that the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House.—[*Mr. Robert G. Hughes.*]

SEXUAL OFFENCES (PROTECTED MATERIAL) BILL

Ordered,

That Standing Committee C be discharged from considering the Sexual Offences (Protected Material) Bill and that the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House.—[*Mr. Robert G. Hughes.*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Monday 17th February, notwithstanding Standing Order No. 14B (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community Documents), the Speaker shall not later than Ten o'clock put the Questions on the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Lilley relating to Pensions and to Social Security.—[*Mr. Carrington.*]

WELSH DEVELOPMENT AGENCY BILL

Ordered,

That the proviso in paragraph (2)(ii) of Standing Order No. 86 (Nomination of Standing Committees) shall not apply to the Welsh Development Agency Bill.—[*Mr. Carrington.*]

Telecommunication Masts (Planning Guidance)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mr. Carrington.*]

2.35 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): I am grateful to have the opportunity of a debate on the subject of telecommunication masts and planning guidance.

First, let me explain the background to the debate. The issue has been boiling on and off in the local and national media for more than a year. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), who is my neighbour, raised the issue on the Adjournment on 1 March last year. There are now four appeals against planning refusal that affect a particular area of our two constituencies. Those appeals prompted me to apply for the debate.

I am grateful for the support of all councillors of all parties on the matter, and of others. It is not a party political matter and should not become so. My hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk regrets that he cannot be present for the debate, but he wishes to be associated with my remarks, as I was with his.

Back in March last year, my hon. Friend expressed the general fear that telecom masts would sprout up all over the countryside and that even areas of special landscape interest would be affected. The Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency, my hon. Friend the Member for West Hertfordshire (Mr. Jones), responded positively and sensitively to the points raised. He focused on the code of best practice that he published shortly afterwards in April, and promised that the code would be closely monitored. He also emphasised the sensible point that the best way forward was for all parties—mobile telecom companies, planning authorities, those locally affected and conservation groups—to maintain a constructive dialogue.

I took up the challenge on behalf of my constituency. I have initiated and attended meetings with councillors and planning officials. Local authorities and others have had to learn a new technical language—including terms such as footprints, coverage and sight lines—in order to understand the key questions. Some authorities have not been as fleet-footed as they might have been. I am pleased, however, that Colchester borough council has eventually engaged the mobile telecom companies in serious discussions as to how best they could help to resolve each other's problems.

I invited all the companies making applications in my area to come and see me. Most came, and I should like to thank Orange, Cellnet and Vodaphone for taking the trouble to keep me informed. After some initial reluctance in some cases, they were all keen to explain their obligations under their licences and anxious to avoid unnecessary controversy.

I warned all the companies of the backlash that they would provoke if they pressed their proposals. Cellnet has wisely withdrawn its proposals, and Orange this morning informed me that it is withdrawing two of the four appeals that are pending. In a fax this morning, Orange states:

"You will be aware that we currently have failed to obtain Planning Permission on three locations already, and have lodged Planning Appeals on two of them. Since these appeals were lodged, and as a direct result of your intervention, we have been in discussion with the other three operators".

That is progress, I suppose. At least the operators are looking to use one shared facility, as opposed to a multiplicity of sites, although the situation is still unsatisfactory.

I fully appreciate that my hon. Friend the Minister is constrained from commenting on specific planning proposals that may at some future date end up on his desk requiring a decision. However, I make it absolutely clear that I am here today because of the potential threat to the historic landscapes of the Stour valley in my constituency. The skylines in and around Dedham vale, which so inspired John Constable two centuries ago, have remained almost unchanged until today. Not surprisingly, the threat of telecom masts is a highly charged issue in my constituency and in that of my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk.

The region is an area of outstanding natural beauty—AONB—and has specific protections. I acknowledge that protection, which has prompted the companies concerned to give up hope of erecting masts within the AONB. However, two companies have written to inform me of applications outside the area that have been refused by the Colchester borough council which they propose to take to appeal. Sites such as Gun hill and Hill Top farm, as their names suggest, are prominent and visible. The structures, which are more than 20 m—or over 60 ft—tall, will be seen for miles around and will dominate the skyline.

Since my hon. Friend's Adjournment debate last year and following our most helpful meeting with my hon. Friend the Minister of State, I have sought to reassure my constituents in several ways. First, I have told them that the world is watching the mobile telecom companies. They have special privileges in the planning process, as set out in planning policy guidance note 8. Colchester borough council advises me that the thread running through the guidance is that operators are obliged to provide a certain level of service under the Telecommunications Act 1984. That is a material planning consideration that should prevail over—or at least be given equal weight to—all other considerations. However, the companies have wisely been cautious about asserting those privileges hitherto—seeming to prefer agreement to imposition, as set out in the code of best practice.

Secondly, such impositions in sensitive areas in the face of furious local opposition and national concern about heritage sites would be a setback for the industry. As I have said, in my meetings with the companies concerned, I warned them of the backlash that they would invite from Members of Parliament and conservationists. Thirdly, I continue to set great store by the Government's general commitment to the environment and the countryside. I have taken it on trust from my right hon. and hon. Friends that what is most feared for the Stour valley will not be allowed to happen.

There will now be appeals, and local people may be forgiven for feeling that there is a question mark over the Government's commitment. I am advised by the Colchester borough council planning department that, ultimately, the matter rests in the hands of Ministers. The code of best practice seemed intended to avoid such a confrontational approach by the companies. As far as the Council for the Protection of Rural England and other conservationists are concerned, the code will have failed if it allows companies to lodge appeals over the heads of the local planning authorities. PPG8 seems destined to bias any inspector's report in favour of development.

Therefore, I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to address his reply to the general effects of applications for development just outside the boundaries of protected areas such as AONBs. Is the presumption in favour of development inviolate, or does protecting our natural heritage come first? A constituent reiterated that point in a letter to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, in which he said:

"concern would be much eased if we could be assured that, in the event of appeals against the local planning authority's decision, the Inspector would have both the power and the intention to take into account the environmental impact in each case."

How will the balance be struck? Do the protections afforded to AONBs, national parks and other sensitive areas extend to sites outside the boundaries of such areas if the development in question would adversely affect the landscape? Crucially, in light of the appeals that are now going ahead, is it not time to announce a review of PPG8? Colchester borough council and I have consistently pressed for such action. Could there be any better way of signalling to the operators that their activities will be severely constrained in order to protect the environment if they press ahead with their plans?

In his reply, will my hon. Friend the Minister bear it in mind that technology may rescue us from making those choices sooner than we might think? How long will it be before mobile communications are taken over by satellites instead of terrestrial radio? What is the prospect of cellphone systems with much more local, much smaller, less visually intrusive antennae? The representatives of one company that visited me told me how technology would eventually be able to conceal transceivers in roadside signs, trees and lamp posts. What will happen tomorrow to the huge aerial arrays that are under consideration today? We are told that they will be taken down. But they will be far too useful to their owners for them to allow them to be taken down. Our planning law does not adapt well to the practice of temporary consents.

Christian civilisation has waited nearly 2,000 years for mobile phones. Our precious countryside, which has evolved over thousands of centuries, is changing faster than ever before in what amounts to the twinkling of an eye under the pressures of the modern world. Can we merely say no on this occasion? When we sing:

"And did those feet in ancient time

Walk upon England's mountains green?",

are we simply referring to a commodity that the British people will be happy to trade in for an extra minute's conversation as they drive up the A12? If we reflect upon it, I think not. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will concur. I am grateful to him for giving up his time to attend the debate, and I look forward to his response.

2.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): I suddenly thought it was Sunday, for a moment.

I listened with interest to what my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) said about the impact of telecommunication masts on the countryside. I was about to say that it is a hobby, but it is a matter of distinct long-term importance that my hon. Friend has

[Sir Paul Beresford]

made clear to the House. We understand his argument when we think of the countryside that he is talking about, lives in, works round and is part of his and other constituencies.

I shall start in reverse, as it were, and take up the concern that my hon. Friend has expressed about what happens to telecommunications installations when they become redundant. In an age when technologies develop rapidly, it is something that we must consider. The House will be aware that installations by licensed telecommunications companies are governed by the Telecommunications Act 1984 as well as—I am not putting one above the other—the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. Both the telecommunications code and the operators' licence obligations require that apparatus must be removed when redundant. Provisions under the planning Act reinforce this requirement. It is also a condition of development permitted by the General Permitted Development Order 1995 that redundant apparatus is removed, and that local planning authorities may attach, if they wish—I hope that some of them are awake to this—similar conditions to planning permissions that they grant.

My hon. Friend talked about satellites. These are fine for transmitting television programmes to millions of viewers but, unfortunately, they are apparently not suitable at present for systems that must provide for an extremely large number of two-way conversations at the same time.

My hon. Friend talked also about possibilities of making masts smaller. That is already happening. I understand that many base stations are already a passable imitation of street lights and antennae serving individual streets. They can be no larger than burglar alarms. The difficulty is that the range and capacity of this smaller apparatus is limited and therefore not suitable for many locations, especially in the open countryside. The choice is often between one large mast and a number of smaller but still fairly obvious ones serving the same area. We can expect, however, that technological refinements will make masts smaller and less obtrusive. We are working in discussions with the operators and the Department of Trade and Industry.

Here and now there is a continuing need sensitively to accommodate masts in the landscape. Our policy is to facilitate the growth of telecommunications systems because of the benefits that they can bring. For example, fast, reliable and cost-effective communications can help to attract new business and assist established firms. I understand that they even assist farmers in the countryside.

There are other benefits too, such as safety and security. Accessible communications systems can reduce the need to travel, using the telephone driver information systems. They can enable more effective use to be made of the existing road network. I must emphasise, however, that this must be done while honouring our commitment to protect the environment, and especially our best and most sensitive areas. In short, the Government's land use planning policy seeks to balance the national importance of the telecommunications industry with the need to protect visual amenity.

My hon. Friend mentioned specific developments in his area. As he appreciates, it is not appropriate for me to comment on such matters at this stage, given that appeals may be lodged. Our general policy on the development of telecommunications is set out in planning policy guidance Note 8, which facilitates the growth of new and existing systems, while honouring our commitments to environmental objectives, including well established national policies for the protection of the countryside and urban areas. The PPG confirms the need, in the context of telecommunications development, to protect the best and most sensitive environments. Those include national parks, areas of outstanding natural beauty, and conservation areas. The need to protect those and other defined areas is recognised under both licensing and planning legislation.

Code system operators' licences may impose their own environmental conditions, which help to protect those areas. Equally, the control of development under the Planning Act recognises the special needs of those areas. The installation of any mast in an area of outstanding natural beauty or other protected area is subject to full planning control.

Elsewhere, the general permitted development order allows code system operators to carry out various types of development, including the erection of masts of up to 15 m high, without the need to apply for planning permission. That freedom was reviewed in 1992, when we decided that the 15 m limit struck the right balance. Masts over the 15 m limit require a full planning application, but that does not mean that local planning authorities are powerless to prevent masts under 15 m in unsuitable locations. A code system operator wishing to erect a mast of up to 15 m in height must apply to the local planning authority for its determination as to whether it wishes to approve details of the mast siting and appearance, and the authority can refuse approval to one or both of those aspects if it considers that it is justified. As with applications made for other kinds of development, a code system operator has the right of appeal to the Secretary of State for the Environment when the authorisation sought from a local planning authority is not forthcoming.

Decisions taken by local planning authorities on planning applications, and by the Secretary of State on appeals, must be made in accordance with the local authority's development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. National planning policies, too, may be a governing factor when such decisions are made. In the context of telecommunications applications, that means not only the policies set out in PPG8 but relevant policies in other guidance notes. For instance, PPG8 cites green-belt policies—PPG2; countryside policies—PPG7; and policies for nature conservation—now PPG9—as particularly relevant.

To help keep the number of masts to a minimum, our planning policy guidance encourages mast-sharing, and licences issued by the Department of Trade and Industry require operators to consider that. There are, however, technical constraints. A choice must sometimes be made between one larger and more conspicuous mast shared by several operators and more than one smaller, less conspicuous masts for a number of individual operators.

Local authority development plans apply national landscape conservation policies on a site-specific basis and may well formulate policies for locally defined landscape areas. Increasingly, plans contain policies and

proposals specifically for telecommunications development. PPG8 specifically advises that those should be formulated having regard to the need to protect the best and most sensitive environments. While such established planning policies that have been the subject of public consultation form the basis for decision-making, other material considerations will come into play on a case-by-case basis. Visual amenity is one such consideration and the visibility of a mast from a designated area, such as an area of outstanding natural beauty, can be a material consideration in relation to both prior approval determinations and full planning applications.

I have sought briefly to explain the land-use policy framework, which offers a firm basis for decisions on proposals for telecommunications masts. Planning authorities have a substantial degree of control over that type of development through the prior approval procedure and the need for a full planning application to be submitted in sensitive areas.

My hon. Friend mentioned the code of best practice that my Department published last year. To encourage better working of the prior approval procedure, we set up a working group consisting of representatives of local planning authorities, the code system operators, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Welsh Office. The code has been generally welcomed as setting out a helpful information base and providing a positive framework for code operators and local planning authorities to work together over the siting of masts. It encourages co-operation to make it easier for prior approval applications to be dealt with effectively within the 28-day period allowed. The code refers to designated areas and locations of environmental sensitivity.

When the code was launched, we undertook to reconvene the working group to review its operation. With the help of the code operators and local planning authorities, the group is monitoring the working of the code. My Department has undertaken a preliminary survey of the code's effectiveness. One of the survey's findings was that 11 per cent. of the applications for prior approval reported during the survey period were refused by the local authorities.

All in all, that demonstrates the point that I made early on that local authorities have substantial control over such mast development, particularly in and around sensitive areas. I welcome the continuing dialogue within the group, which is considering the suggestions for amending and amplifying the code in the light of the practical experience of its operation. We must consider my hon. Friend's case as well.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at five minutes to Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 27 January 1997

HOME DEPARTMENT

Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Animal Procedures Committee will publish the findings and outcome of the review of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The review of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 by the Animal Procedures Committee is still in progress. It is hoped that the committee will make a preliminary report to the Secretary of State by July 1997.

Detainees

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ensure that all people held in custody under immigration law will be given the reasons for their incarceration in writing in their mother tongue; and if he will make a statement. [13055]

Mr. Kirkhope: All immigration detainees are fully informed of the reasons for their detention. This is done orally, in a language which the person understands, through an interpreter if necessary. The Government see no justification for providing written reasons.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the current total of immigration detainees are *(a)* awaiting deportation, *(b)* awaiting an appeal and *(c)* not subject to any process. [13060]

Mr. Kirkhope: There were 891 persons recorded as being in detention solely under Immigration Act powers on 11 December 1996. This figure excludes non-asylum port cases who have been in detention for less than a month; information on such persons is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Information on the current stage of the 891 cases is given in the table.

Persons in detention solely under Immigration Act powers on 11 December 1996

Current stage of case	*Number of persons*
Asylum seekers	
Awaiting initial decision	152
Awaiting result of appeal	379
Awaiting removal after refusal	223
Other persons	
Deportation cases awaiting removal	30
Deportation cases awaiting appeal decision	20
Other cases[1]	87
Total	891

[1] Information on these cases could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Asylum Seekers

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total number of asylum seekers held in detention at the end of (i) October, (ii) November and (iii) December; in which establishments they were held; what were their *(a)* nationalities and *(b)* gender; and how many were deported and from which establishments. [12321]

Mr. Kirkhope: The available information on asylum seekers detained, and on the number deported from detention, is given in the tables. The number deported does not include those who are removed as illegal entrants or under port refusal procedures.

A comprehensive breakdown of those recorded as deported from detention, by location of detention, is available only at disproportionate cost.

Number[1] of asylum detainees deported[2] during October, November and December 1996

Month	*Number of deported asylum detainees[3]*
October	8
November	7
December	12

[1] Provisional figures.

[2] Removed under the deportation process, including those who departed voluntarily after deportation action had been initiated.

[3] Persons detained solely under the powers contained in Schedules 2 or 3 of the Immigration Act 1971.

Table 1: Number of people recorded as detained[1] [2] on 5 November and 11 December 1996 who had sought asylum at some stage, by gender

Gender	*As at 5 November*	*As at 11 December*
Male	739	681
Female	69	73
Total	808	754

[1] Persons detained only under the powers contained in Schedules 2 or 3 Immigration Act 1971.

[2] These figures include people who have been in detention for less than a month. Because of the delay in recording receptions into, and releases from, detention and the large number of persons detained for a short period, the figures should be used with caution.

Table 2: Number of people recorded as detained[1][2] on 5 November and 11 December 1996 who had sought asylum at some stage, by location of detention

	As at 5 November	As at 11 December
Prisons		
HMP Rochester	145	137
HMP Haslar	98	86
HMP Birmingham	21	15
HMP Wormwood Scrubs	10	8
HMP Magilligan	8	6
HMP Brixton	4	5
HMP Manchester	3	5
HMP Greenock	4	4
HMP Armley	—	2
HMP Doncaster	2	2
HMP Elmley	2	2
HMP High Down	—	2
HMP Wandsworth	3	2
Other prison[3]	25	16
Other places of detention		
Campsfield House	153	162
Tinsley House	110	112
Harmondsworth	91	87
Police Cells	42	36
Meadvale Buildings	33	33
Queens Buildings	7	14
Manchester Airport	10	9
Dover Harbour	14	5
Other place of detention[3]	23	4
Total	808	754

[1] Persons detained solely under the powers contained in Schedules 2 or 3 of the Immigration Act 1971.

[2] These figures include people who have been in detention for less than a month. Because of the delay in recording receptions into, and releases from, detention and the large number of persons detained for a short period, the figures should be used with caution.

[3] The "Others" categories may include places of detention already listed.

Table 3: Number of people recorded as detained[1][2] on November and 11 December 1996 who had sought asylum at some stage, by nationality

Nationality	As at 5 November	As at 11 December
Nigeria	114	106
Algeria	68	79
India	70	75
Sri Lanka	55	51
Zaire	43	42
Ghana	46	40
Pakistan	44	39
China	42	38
Turkey	38	32
Romania	19	17
Cyprus	17	15
Israel	15	15
Angola	19	14
Bangladesh	13	11
Gambia	14	11
Yugoslavia	15	10
Iran	9	9
Jamaica	9	9
Russia	9	8
Columbia	14	7
Ethiopia	9	7
Poland	10	7
Tanzania	6	7
Uganda	5	7
Kenya	5	6
Liberia	10	6
Lithuania	5	6
Sierra Leone	6	6
Ecuador	4	5
Ivory Coast	7	5
Morocco	5	5
Iraq	—	4
Lebanon	—	4
Slovakia	5	3
South Africa	3	3
Bulgaria	2	2
Cameroon	—	2
Congo	2	2
Eritrea	3	2
Philippines	—	2
Others[3]	41	25
Nationality doubtful	7	10
Total	808	754

[1] Persons detained solely under the powers contained in Schedules 2 or 3 of the Immigration Act 1971.

[2] These figures include people who have been in detention for less than a month. Because of the delay in recording receptions into, and releases from, detention and the large number of persons detained for a short period, the figures should be used with caution.

[3] The "Others" categories may include places of detention already listed.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people who had applied at some stage for asylum were deported from Birmingham prison during (i) October, (ii) November and (iii) December; and what were their nationalities; [12325]

(2) how many people who had applied at some stage for asylum were detained in Birmingham prison during (i) October, (ii) November and (iii) December; and what were their nationalities. [12324]

Mr. Kirkhope: The available information on asylum seekers detained in Her Majesty's prison, Birmingham is given in the table.

There were no failed asylum seekers recorded as being deported from Her Majesty's prison, Birmingham during each of the months October to December 1996. This does not include asylum seekers removed as illegal entrants or under port refusal procedures.

Asylum seekers detained[1] at Her Majesty's prison, Birmingham as at 5 November and 11 December 1996, by nationality.

	5 November	11 December
Nationality		
India	9	7
Israel	4	—
Nigeria	3	—
Algeria	2	5
Others[2]	3	3
Total	21	15

[1] Persons detained solely under the powers contained in Schedules 2 or 3 of the Immigration Act 1971.

[2] The "Others" category may include nationalities already listed.

Immigration (Detention and Deportation)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were deported under Immigration Act powers from the United Kingdom in (i) October, (ii) November and (iii) December; and what were their nationalities. [12328]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested for October 1996 is given in the table. Reliable information for subsequent months is not yet available.

Persons removed[1] from the United Kingdom under the deportation process[2]

Nationality	*October 1996[3]*
European Economic Area	
Italy	1
Netherlands	1
Other Europe	
Bulgaria	1
Cyprus	1
Former Czechoslovakia	1
Hungary	1
Malta	1
Poland	5
Russia	1
Other former USSR	5
Turkey	5
Former Yugoslavia	8
Americas	
Brazil	1
Colombia	3
Jamaica	8
Trinidad and Tobago	1
USA	3
Venezuela	1
Other Americas	4
Africa	
Algeria	1
Angola	1
Egypt	2
Ghana	12
Kenya	1
Morocco	2
Nigeria	19
Sierra Leone	2
South Africa	5
Tanzania	1
Tunisia	2
Uganda	1
Zambia	2
Zimbabwe	5
Other Africa	10
Indian sub-continent	
Bangladesh	5
India	16
Pakistan	15
Middle East	
Lebanon	1
Remainder of Asia	
Hong Kong	1
Malaysia	4
Singapore	1
South Korea	1
Thailand	1
Oceania	
New Zealand	2
Not known	4
All nationalities	169

[1] Including voluntary departures after deportation action had been initiated.
[2] Excluding illegal entrants removed.
[3] Provisional data.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons who had completed their prison sentences were detained further under Immigration Act powers; and for how long each was detained in each of the last three years. [12331]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is not available centrally.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people who were convicted of a criminal offence, punishable by a person sentence, but not served with a deportation order as part of the sentence, were at a later date served with a notice of deportation in each of the last three years. [12329]

Mr. Kirkhope: The total numbers of notices of intention to deport issued in respect of a convicted criminal on the grounds that the person's continued presence in the United Kingdom was not conducive to the public good, were 125 in 1994, 79 in 1995, and 80—provisional figure—in the period January to September 1996. Data for the whole of 1996 are not yet available. Separate data on those criminals who had served a prison sentence, and those who had not, could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Marchioness Inquiry

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list *(a)* the cost to date of transcribing the proceedings of the reconvened inquest into the victims of the Marchioness disaster and *(b)* the charge that is made to a (i) relative and (ii) other interested party to (1) peruse the transcript and (2) purchase a copy. [12414]

Mr. Sackville: I understand that the cost of typing the transcription was £6,000. Under the present rules the charge for supplying a copy to an interested person, including relatives, would be £2,400. There is no charge for inspecting relevant documents.

Gambling

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research he has commissioned on the incidence of addictive gambling in *(a)* adults and *(b)* young people under 16 since the introduction of the national lottery. [12468]

Mr. Kirkhope: The Home Office has not commissioned primary research, but in September 1996 we published a report, "The Social Implications of Casino

Gambling". This examined international experience in casino regulation and problem gambling. I have placed a copy in the Library.

Our second consultation paper on casino deregulation, issued on 18 November 1996, commented further on the social implications of casino gambling.

Prisoners (Restraints)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on his policy with regard to the chaining of a prisoner to an inanimate object; [11932]

(2) if he will list the circumstances under which restraints may be removed from a prisoner; [11933]

(3) if he will make a statement on his policy in respect of the use of mechanical restraints on prisoners receiving hospital care; and if he will place in the Library a copy of the guidelines issued by the Prison Service; [11934]

(4) if he will arrange for a copy of the report of the Prison Service's inquiry into the death of Geoffrey Thomas to be placed in the Library; [11935]

(5) what is the current timetable for revising the security manual in respect of new guidelines for restraining prisoners receiving hospital care; and if he will list the major changes. [11931]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Ron Davies, dated 27 January 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the use of restraints on prisoners in hospital and the report on the death of Geoffrey Thomas.

Current instructions are that a prisoner will be chained to an inanimate object only in the circumstances set out in paragraph 60.18 of the Manual of Security. This states:

> "Unless the doctor (or midwife where relevant) objects for medical reasons, an escort chain should be used to secure the prisoner by one wrist, preferably to an officer, on to an item of furniture if the officer needs to be free to cover an exit."

This advise applies only to those prisoners whom the governor judges to require restraint under the criteria set out in the Home Secretary's statement to Parliament on 18 January 1996. A copy is attached.

The circumstances in which restraints may be removed from (or not applied to) a prisoner are set out in paragraphs 5.3.4–6, 53.16, 59.11, 59.17, 59.18 and 60.18 of the Manual on Security, a copy is in the Library.

The policy in respect of the use of mechanical restraints on prisoners receiving hospital care is set out in the Home Secretary's statement to Parliament of 18 January. (I attach a copy of the subsequent instruction issued by the Director of Security and Programmes on 19 January 1996).

You asked if a copy of the report of our inquiry into the death of Geoffrey Thomas will be placed in the Library. The investigation into the circumstances surrounding the physical restraint of Geoffrey Thomas in a hospice in Cardiff is nearly complete. The conclusions and any recommendations for changes in practices will be urgently considered. It would be premature to anticipate the outcome of this review in advance of decisions yet to be taken.

It is not normal Prison Service practice for a report of an internal inquiry to be published. Therefore there are no plans to place a copy of the report in the Library.

Hong Kong Residents

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with the Governor of Hong Kong on the entry into Britain of Hong Kong residents whose status is uncertain after 1 July; and if he will make a statement. [12158]

Mr. Kirkhope: My right hon. and learned Friend last met the Governor of Hong Kong on 9 January, for discussion of current issues of mutual concern.

Woodhill Prison

Mr. Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy in respect of building a top-security unit at Woodhill prison, Milton Keynes; how much has been budgeted for the prison unit and for fixtures and fittings; and if he will make a statement. [11187]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 21 January 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. David Porter, dated 27 January 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the building of a top security unit at Woodhill prison.

On 15 January I announced that category A prisoners would be held in a smaller number of more secure prisons to meet the recommendations of Sir John Woodcock and General Sir John Learmont. Woodhill is one of these prisons and will in the future hold a larger number of category A prisoners.

The Prison Service also has examined the options for improving the management of disruptive prisoners. We have concluded that this can be accomplished most effectively by the establishment of a co-ordinated series of five close supervision units (CSUs) each holding small numbers of prisoners with varying regimes ranging from the strict through to the more structured regimes. The three CSUs at Woodhill will be part of this co-ordianted series.

The latest estimate of the capital cost of the programme of work for the CSUs at Woodhill is £3.2m. The fixtures and fittings will be standard Prison Service issue and association areas will also have standard furnishing and equipment.

Prison Births

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women prisoners have given birth while serving prison sentences in prisons other than Holloway for the last three years for which figures are available. [11775]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Jean Corston, dated 27 January 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of women prisoners who have given birth while serving prison sentences in prisons other than Holloway.

Information collected about births to prisoners does not distinguish between sentenced and unsentenced women. The figures

for births to women in prisons other than Holloway are set out in the table below:

Total births to prisoners in prisons and NHS hospitals (excluding Holloway)

Year	Total live births	Total delivery-prison	Total delivery-hospital
1993–94	31	1	30
1994–95	32	0	32
1995–96	32	0	32

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Departmental Publications

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the *(a)* White Papers, *(b)* Green Papers, *(c)* consultation papers, *(d)* draft regulations and *(e)* circulars, for which his Department has been responsible issued in 1996 which his Department assesses could give rise, (i) directly and (ii) indirectly, to significant environmental effects. [12699]

Mr. Streeter: My Department issued no White Papers, Green Papers, consultation papers, draft regulations or circulars last year which have been assessed as giving rise either directly or indirectly to significant environmental effects.

Magistrates Courts

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the number of magistrates courts in operation in Wales, indicating *(a)* the number of cases heard by each court, *(b)* the cost of providing the service and *(c)* the catchment area served by population and maximum travel distance, on 31 December for each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [12866]

Mr. Streeter: The information requested is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

On 14 October 1996, *Official Report*, columns *655–56*, in answer to a question from the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger), I said that there were 63 magistrates courts in Wales. Researches for this question have revealed that the correct number is 57. I have written to the hon. Member to set the record straight and have placed a copy of the letter in the library.

ENVIRONMENT

Personalised Number Plates (Executive Agencies)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many personalised number plates there are in the ownership of the executive agencies operated by his Department and if he will list them. [11422]

Sir Paul Beresford: This is an operational matter for the agencies, and the chief executives have been asked to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. G. Courtney to Mr. Brian H. Donohoe, dated 23 January 1997:

The Secretary of State for the Environment has asked me to reply on behalf of the Building Research Establishment Executive Agency to your question on personalised number plates.

There are no personalised number plates in the ownership of the Building Research Establishment.

Letter from M. C. Buck to Mr. Brian H. Donohoe, dated 24 January 1997:

I would refer to the above Parliamentary Question concerning how many personalised number plates there are in the ownership of executive agencies within the Department of the Environment.

Please be advised that there are nil within the ownership of The Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre.

Letter from C. J. Shepley to Mr. Brian H. Donohoe, dated 21 January 1997:

I have been asked by Sir Paul Beresford to reply to your question about how many personalised number plates there are in the ownership of executive agencies.

The Planning Inspectorate has no official cars and no personalised number plates.

Cold Weather (Energy Efficiency)

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what plans he has to improve the energy conservation values of the housing stock in England; [12292]

(2) what plans he has to introduce measures to reduce the number of extra deaths caused by cold weather. [12293]

Mr. Clappison: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave during an Adjournment debate on 22 January 1997, *Official Report*, columns *916–20*.

Minerals Local Plans

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what calculations underlie the quotas produced by county councils for the minerals local plans. [12208]

Sir Paul Beresford: The regional guidelines for aggregates provision in England, which have been appointed to minerals planning authorities for incorporation into development plans, are set out in "Minerals Planning Guidance Note 6"—MPG6—issued in April 1994. The overall provision is based on long-term projections of aggregate demand, which were in turn derived from projections of construction activity, which take account of the relationship between economic activity and construction investment. The consultants' reports on the projections were placed in the Library of the House at the time, and are summarised in annexe C of MPG6. Taking account of the lowest growth scenario in the projections, the Government took the view that demand for aggregates in England over the period 1992 to 2006 is likely to be in the order of 4.2 billion tonnes. The Department further assumed that, in line with the policies set out in the MPG, approximately 1,165 million tonnes of aggregates supply would come from sources other than primary land-based production in England—details are given in annexe A of MPG6. The guidelines therefore advise that planning authorities in England should make provision for some 3.1 billion tonnes of primary aggregates over the period 1992 to 2006.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to review the quotas for the county councils' minerals local plans. [12209]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Department of the Environment is undertaking a research project to examine the overall approach to aggregates planning, including the operation of the quantified guidelines and the projections on which they are based. The next review of MPG6, which will be the subject of wide consultation, will be started when the results of the research are available, early in 1998.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what contribution he estimates the private finance initiative will make to the capital programme of local authorities in the next financial year. [12592]

Sir Paul Beresford: We have announced support for up to £50 million of PFI investment in 1996–97, and £200 million in 1997–98. The public private partnerships programme has recently announced a series of PFI pathfinder projects which are expected to be signed in forthcoming months.

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he plans to announce the outcome of consultation on the local government finance settlement; and if he will make a statement. [13213]

Mr. Gummer: I am today laying before the House the "Local Government Finance Report (England) 1997–98", the "Limitation of Council Tax and Precepts (Relevant Notional Amounts) Report (England 1997–98", and the "Special Grant Report (No. 23)". These reports establish the amounts of revenue support grant and non-domestic rates to be paid to local authorities in 1997–98, and the basis of their distribution, specify the amounts which are to be used as the basis of comparison for measuring increases in certain local authorities' budgets in 1997–98 for the purposes of capping, and provide for a special standard spending assessment reduction grant to be paid to certain authorities for 1997–98. Drafts of these reports were issued for consultation on 27 November 1996. The Department received written representations from 210 authorities and my Ministers met 79 delegations from local councils.

I have considered the views of local authorities and others who have commented on my initial proposals. The local government finance settlement represents a reasonable and balanced distribution of resources in the context of what the country can afford as a whole.

Within the total resources, priority has been given to education, police and the fire service. It is now up to local authorities to prove they can maintain and improve their delivery of key services, and use the flexibility we have given them through capping to adapt to local circumstances.

I shall be sending copies of these report to all authorities, together with tables showing each authority's standard spending assessment and its entitlement to RSG, NDR and special grant. I have placed copies of the reports and the tables in the Library and the Vote Office.

Fish-eating Birds

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by what means his Department intends to ensure the Government's research into fish-eating birds is made available to anglers over the next two years; and what factors underlay the methods of dissemination chosen. [12639]

Mr. Clappison: It is the intention of the Department of the Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to publish the results of the research into fish-eating birds.

Preliminary findings are disseminated to bodies representing fishery interests at annual seminars. The seminars allow interested parties to be informed of the progress of the research, and ask questions of the researchers. Seminars were held in December 1995 and December 1996.

Aggregate Extraction Licences

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) pursuant to his letter G/PSO/23151/96, what review he is undertaking with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food of licences for the extraction of aggregates from the sea bed; and what is the time scale; [12182]

(2) pursuant to the letter from the Prime Minister G/PSO/23151/96, what is the allocation of responsibilities for the extraction of aggregates from the sea bed and sediment movements and constant erosion between *(a)* the Department of the Environment, *(b)* the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, *(c)* the Scottish Office and *(d)* the Welsh Office. [12183]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Crown Estate, as landowner, issues licences for aggregates dredging. A prerequisite to the issue of a licence is a favourable Government view issued by the Department of the Environment, or in Wales the Welsh Office, which co-ordinates and considers the views of Government Departments, including the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and responses to public consultation on the proposals, before issuing of GV. Applications must be accompanied by a report on the potential impact of the proposed dredging on the coastline. If there is a risk of an adverse impact the application is taken no further. Applications are also accompanied by an assessment of the impact on the marine environment—including fish—and on commercial fishing operations. This is considered by MAFF, which is responsible for marine environmental protection, before it passes its views on the application to DOE.

In Scotland, similar arrangements are operated by the Scottish Office Development Department which co-ordinates the GV and seeks comments on issues relating to marine environmental protection from the Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department.

Neither DOE nor MAFF is undertaking a review of licences. These are issued by the Crown Estate. The DOE has, however, undertaken a review of the GV procedures and the Government have announced their intention to introduce a statutory procedure in place of the GV procedure. In the meantime, until a suitable legislative opportunity arises, the Government will be introducing

similar, interim, informal procedures following discussion with interested parties in England and Wales. A similar review of the GV procedure is currently being undertaken by the Scottish Office, which expects to reach a conclusion shortly.

Bathing Water Directives

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the time scale for the implementation, by the United Kingdom, of recommendations contained in the EC bathing water directive. [12497]

Mr. Clappison: The bathing water directive provides for a 10-year time scale for compliance following its notification in 1976. However, the majority of United Kingdom bathing waters were not identified until 1987. The £2,000 million programme of bathing water improvements, which is now substantially complete, is intended to achieve the required standards as quickly as possible. Significant progress has been made with compliance against the coliform bacteria standards, rising from 66 per cent. in 1988 to 90 per cent. last year.

Sanitary Products

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to issue guidelines to producers of sanitary products in respect of labelling relating to their proper disposal. [12490]

Mr. Clappison: Guidance on how to dispose of sanitary products will be included in the revised version of "Waste Management Paper 25 (Clinical Waste)". The Environment Agency, which is responsible for drawing up this paper, is expected to consult industry on it in summer 1997. This consultation will include manufacturers of sanitary products.

Many existing manufacturers have already revised the disposal instructions on their products either to recommend waste bins as an appropriate alternative disposal option to flushing or to advise positively against flushing.

Revenue Support Grant (Manchester)

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the steps taken to ensure the accuracy of the statistics for income support claimants and their dependants used for calculating revenue support grant settlements for the city of Manchester. [12576]

Sir Paul Beresford: The data used on income support claimants are as estimated by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security. My Department is discussing with the Department of Social Security the representations made by Manchester city council about these data. There have also been direct discussions between officers of the city council and the Department of Social Security.

Song Birds

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he is taking to protect song birds. [12498]

Mr. Clappison: The biodiversity steering group report, published in December 1995, highlighted the issue of declining song bird populations as a priority issue. The report contained costed action plans to stabilise and prevent further declines in the populations of the song thrush and skylark as well as costed habitat action plans for cereal field margins, lowland wet grassland and other important bird habitats. The targets and action plans have been endorsed by the Government and further costed action plans are in preparation for a number of other song bird species.

Departmental Publications

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the *(a)* White Papers, *(b)* Green Papers, *(c)* consultation papers, *(d)* draft regulations and *(e)* circulars, for which his Department has been responsible issued in 1996 which his Department assesses could give rise, (i) directly and (ii) indirectly, to significant environmental effects. [12704]

Mr. Clappison: The Department produces a great many circulars, regulations and consultation papers; many, to a greater or lesser extent, have environmental effects. Central records are not kept of the information in the way requested. Therefore, this information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Asbestos

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of *(a)* the quantity of (i) white asbestos and (ii) brown and blue asbestos, removed from structures in each of the last 10 years and *(b)* the quantity which remains in structures. [12680]

Mr. Clappison: No estimates of the quantity of asbestos removed from or remaining within structures have been made by my Department.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many deaths have resulted from exposure to asbestos in the workplace in each of the last 10 years; [12682]

(2) how many deaths resulted from non-occupational exposure to asbestos in each of the last 10 years; and what estimate he has made of the number of deaths from non-occupational exposure to asbestos in each of the next three decades; [12671]

(3) what estimate he has made of the number of deaths which will result from occupational exposure to asbestos in each of the next three decades; [12683]

(4) how many deaths from occupational exposure to asbestos there were in each of the last 10 years, categorised according to type of occupation. [12687]

Sir Paul Beresford: Exposure to asbestos can cause three serious diseases—mesothelioma, asbestosis and lung cancer. The table shows the total number of deaths with a cause of death mentioning mesothelioma or asbestosis in each of the years from 1985 to 1994 for males and females combined. These are the latest data available.

Most cases of mesothelioma are believed to be caused by asbestos exposure, although there is also believed to be a background rate of mesothelioma deaths which may

account for about 100 cases annually in this country. This figure is expected to remain static over the next three decades. The remaining cases of mesothelioma can be assumed to be due to asbestos exposure, and most of this exposure to have been occupational.

	Mesothelioma	*Asbestosis (without mesothelioma)*
1985	617	140
1986	704	166
1987	814	143
1988	872	151
1989	909	155
1990	885	164
1991	1,011	163
1992	1,082	150
1993	1,139	172
1994	1,235	174

The data currently available on deaths from mesothelioma suggest that the number of deaths in men in 10 years, time could range between 1,000 and 2,100; in 20 years, time between 1,300 and 3,000 and in 30 years, time between 1,000 and 3,200. These projections are based on a paper, "The continuing increase in mesothelioma mortality in Britain", which was published in *The Lancet* on 3 March 1995. This paper discusses the uncertainties attached to the projections, which increase considerably beyond about 2010. The projections are confined to men because there are too few deaths among women to provide stable projections of future mortality. There were 152 female mesothelioma deaths in 1994.

No projections have been made of how the numbers of asbestosis cases may increase, but the long latency of the asbestos-related diseases, which is anything from 15 to 60 years, means that these deaths are occurring from exposures that generally took place long ago.

From the available data it is not possible to attribute individual cases of mesothelioma reliably to exposure within a particular occupation. For a discussion of occupational patterns for mesothelioma I refer the hon. Member to chapter 9 of the "Occupational Health Decennial Supplement" published in 1995 by the then Office of Population Censuses and Surveys and the Health and Safety Executive, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Deaths from asbestos-related lung cancer are indistinguishable from those caused by other factors, including smoking. Currently there are estimated to be one or two deaths from asbestos-related lung cancer for each death from mesothelioma. The falling prevalence of smoking is likely to reduce this ratio in future because the effects of asbestos and tobacco multiply each other.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the regulation of white asbestos in products imported into the United Kingdom. [12686]

Sir Paul Beresford: The range of asbestos products which may be manufactured, imported, supplied and used in the United Kingdom is restricted by the provisions of an EU directive (91/659/EEC), which bans certain uses and a range of products containing white asbestos. This directive is implemented in the United Kingdom by the Asbestos (Prohibitions) Regulations 1992 in Great Britain, the Asbestos (Prohibitions) Regulations 1993 for Northern Ireland and the Asbestos Products (Safety) Regulations 1985, as amended in 1987.

Care Leavers

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many and what percentage of identified young vulnerable people leaving care are *(a)* eligible for and *(b)* granted (i) temporary and (ii) permanent housing; and if he will make a statement. [12809]

Mr. Clappison: During the 12 months to 30 September 1996, 3,540 households containing a vulnerable young person were accepted as statutorily homeless by local housing authorities in England. Information is not held centrally either about the number of young care leavers in this category or about the type of accommodation provided. Under part VII of the Housing Act 1996, which took effect from 20 January 1997, an authority has a duty to secure suitable accommodation for at least two years for applicants who meet the statutory homelessness criteria, unless suitable alternative accommodation is available in the authority's area. Such people will also be entitled to appear on the authority's housing register, and be considered for long-term housing.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Desertification

25. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent measures he has taken to help countries counter desertification. [11140]

Dr. Liam Fox: The United Kingdom has currently committed this financial year about £57 million in bilateral assistance for projects relevant to desertification. The United Kingdom ratified the UN desertification convention on 18 October 1996 and continues to play a leading role in negotiations to finalise financial and institutional arrangements for implementation of the convention.

Rwanda and Burundi

30. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contributions the Government are making towards population and reproductive health projects for the refugees in Rwanda and Burundi. [11145]

Dr. Liam Fox: Since 1993 we have provided £175 million bilaterally and through the EU to assist the populations of these two countries. Programmes supported include the provision of basic health care services which often encompass population and reproductive health activities.

European Union

31. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further measures his Department proposes to assist the development of those central European countries that are applicants for EU membership. [11146]

Dr. Liam Fox: Through the know-how fund we are providing a wide range of training and consultancy in European integration issues to the associated countries. Additionally, we also contribute to the cost of EC PHARE—Poland and Hungary Assistance for Economic Restructuring—programmes in this area.

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 14 January, *Official Report*, column *443*, if he will make a statement on the factors underlying his Department's assessment of the benefits accruing from an extension of the second phase of the Indonesian national police training project. [12642]

Dr. Liam Fox: Particular account was taken of the conclusions of a monitoring report of January 1994. This noted

"positive signs that the concept of public service and higher quality standards are beginning to take root in the INP",

although these were still limited to police regions in which project activity had been taking place.

The report also noted, with regard to the training of the consultancy unit, that

"the continuing development of their practical experience and the development of regional counterparts in a support function is beginning to indicate the emergence of a powerful and potentially critical service to INP, functioning at strategic, functional and regional levels."

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 14 January, *Official Report*, column *208*, what steps his Department has taken to ensure that the strategic plans produced under the national police management training project in Indonesia exclude East Timor. [12606]

Dr. Fox: The application of management skills acquired under this project, including production of any strategic plans, is a matter for the Indonesian police authorities.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 14 January, *Official Report*, column *207*, what specific measures his Department took to promote community policing through the national police management training project in Indonesia. [12605]

Dr. Fox: The methodology of the trainers and the nature of the training itself were designed to expose Indonesian police personnel, both in the central consultancy unit and in the regional commands, to the concept and ethos of community policing, in particular through the setting of improved standards of service to the public.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list those bodies in Lewisham, East to which national lottery awards have been made; and what sum was involved in each case. [12364]

Mr. Sproat: There have been four awards totalling £739,488 to projects in Lewisham, East. The awards are as follows:

Body	*Award date*	*Recipient*	*Award amount*
Sports	31 January 1996	London Borough Lewisham (Malory School)	725,500.00
Charity	11 August 1996	Tideway Adventurers	6,468.00
Charity	11 August 1996	St. Margaret Parent and Toddler Playgroup	1,520.00
Charity	23 October 1995	Newstead Road Playgroup	6,000.00
Total			739,488.00

Football Grounds

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of the work still to be completed by Premier League and Football League clubs to bring their grounds up to the safety standards required in the report of Lord Justice Taylor; and what estimates she has made of the cost of this work. [12358]

Mr. Sproat: Premier League and division one clubs were required to meet the all-seater recommendations in the Taylor report by August 1994. The great majority of clubs meet these requirements. Those few that do not have either been granted an extension to the deadline, on account of their having been recently promoted, or they are relocating to new stadia.

Clubs in divisions two and three of the Football League are not required to go all-seated, but will have to meet certain minimum safety standards for retained standing terraces by August 1999. I understand that the Football Trust is carrying out a survey to establish the costs of remaining safety work.

Performing Arts

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to give early notification to local authorities planning their discretionary awards budgets of changes to methods of supporting students undertaking performing arts courses through lottery funds. [12426]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 23 January 1997]:* Plans for an interim scheme to help more students take up places at accredited dance and drama training schools in England were announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in October last year. The scheme will be administered by the Arts Council of England which is in the process of consulting on the details of its operation. As part of this consultation, a copy of the Arts Council's draft proposals has been sent to each local education authority. The Arts Council, in consultation with the Council for Local Education Authorities, hopes to be in a position to inform local education authorities of the final details of the scheme by the end of February.

Museum Councils

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) when the timetable will be

published for the Government's review of area museum councils, as set out in section 7.4 of "Treasures in Trust"; [10507]

(2) when she will make available the terms of reference referred to in section 7.4 of "Treasures in Trust", regarding the review of area museum councils. [10508]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I am pleased to announce that Mr. Tony Pender has been appointed to lead the review of area museum councils in England. He will act as chairman of the working party on the review, whose members were announced on 18 December 1996, *Official Report,* columns *592-93.*

Mr. Pender has been asked to let my Department have the conclusions of his review by 7 April. Its broad terms of reference are to conduct a comprehensive review of the area museum councils, having regard to changes in circumstances since their creation, the contents of "Treasures in Trust" and possible future developments. The review will involve wide consultation but the details of the conduct and timetable of the review will be for the working party to decide.

English Tourist Board

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she expects the review of the Crown classification grading scheme by the English tourist board to be completed. [12637]

Mr. Sproat: In recent months the English tourist board has been working in partnership with the Wales and Scottish tourist boards and with the motoring organisations to design and agree a harmonised scheme for the rating of serviced accommodation in Great Britain. This is a complex task. I hope the ETB will be in a position to make an announcement soon.

Foundation for Sport and the Arts

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what reports she has received on prospects for the continuing operation of the Foundation for Sport and the Arts. [12388]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 23 January 1997]:* The football pools companies have informed me of their intention to cease their voluntary contributions to the Foundation for Sport and the Arts. My officials are meeting the Pools Promoters Association shortly to discuss the continuing operation of the foundation.

National Academy of Sport

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what estimate she has made of the costs incurred by the 26 consortia that bid for the site of the National Academy of Sport. [12360]

Mr. Sproat: None. It was up to each bidder to decide how much to spend on its bid.

EU Funding

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful attempts have been made by United Kingdom organisations in the last four years to obtain funds from the EU's (i) Media, (ii) Raphael, (iii) Ariadne and (iv) Kaleidoscope schemes; and what funds have already been allocated to the United Kingdom under each of these schemes. [12345]

Mr. Sproat: Media II, the European Community's initiative to enhance the strength of member states' national audiovisual industries, began in 1996. Under the 1996 programme, 86 proposals from the United Kingdom have been successful. Information regarding the funds allocated, and the number of unsuccessful applications, is not available from the Commission.

Raphael, the European Community support programme in the field of cultural heritage, has yet to be formally adopted by the European Community as an official support programme. A pilot programme was, however, run by the European Commission during 1996. Under this pilot 43 applications were received in which a UK organisation was the lead partner. Of these, 13 were accepted and awarded a total of 760,291 ecu—£560,562.55. In addition, 43 other UK organisations have benefited from funding under the pilot year in view of their participation in projects in which an organisation from another EC member state was the lead partner. Details of the amount of funding received by UK organisations is not held centrally.

Ariadne is the European Community's proposed support programme in the field of books and reading. Like Raphael, it has yet to be officially adopted by the European Community. A pilot programme was run by the European Commission during 1996. Four UK-led partnerships applied for funding under the pilot programme, of which three were successful and received a total of 68,838.40 ecu—£50,754.55. A further 12 UK organisations were cited as co-organisers of successful projects which received a total of 494,136.48 ecu—£364,326.82. It is not possible to specify the precise amounts which will be received by the UK organisations.

One of the benefits to the UK of the Ariadne programme is the translation of England-language literary works and their dissemination throughout the European Community. Of the 40 projects submitted for consideration under the 1996 pilot which involved English-language works for translation, 21 were successful in receiving funding support.

Kaleidoscope is the European Community cultural support programme and was officially adopted as such in 1996. In this first year, 62 applications were made by UK-led partnerships. Of these, 10 applications were successful and received a total of 425,764.46 ecu—£313,916.13. A further 31 UK organisations were cited as co-organisers of successful projects, which received a total of 1,186,262.80 ecu—£874,631.56. Again, the precise allocation of funding to the UK organisations is not known.

Tourism (Consultants)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list those independent consultants or firms that have been awarded contracts to carry our tourism-related work for each of the last four years, specifying which body was responsible for the appointments, the dates of appointment, the name of the consultant or firm, the value of the contract and the subject of the consultants' work. [12357]

Mr. Sproat: The following table lists the contracts awarded by tourism division in my Department, by the British Tourist Authority and by the English tourist board, since the beginning of financial year 1993–94 and including the present one, for work relating to the development of tourism programmes:

Name of consultant	*Appointing body*	*Date of appointment*	*Contract value*	*Subject of consultants work*
University of Newcastle	DNH	May 1993	£2,240 plus VAT	Updating the estimates of day visitors to local areas
Coopers and Lybrand	ETB	August 1993	£11,500 plus VAT plus expenses	Review of Regional Tourist Board computer requirements
Touche Ross and Co.	BTA	November 1993	£25,000 plus VAT—partly funded by industry partners	To study the impact of VAT levels on UK tourism competitiveness
John Brown and Company	ETB	October 1993	£5,000 plus VAT	Study of the provision of tourist information in London
David Smart and Associates	ETB	September 1993	£3,600 plus expenses	Consultancy work in connection with the Welcome Host programme
Roger Quinton Associates	ETB/Association of District Councils	October 1993	£5,850 plus VAT plus expenses	Study on quality management issues and best practice in Tourist Information Centres
Touche Ross and Co.	ETB	May 1993	£3,675 plus VAT	Review of Tourist Resource Information Processing System Project Manager
McKinsey and Co.	BTA	April 1994	£39,450 plus expenses plus VAT	Measuring the impact of tourist spending by international tourists to Britain
McKinsey and Co.	DNH/BTA/ETB	August 1994	£150,000 plus VAT plus expenses	Development of a strategy for tourism in the UK
McKinsey and Co.	ETB	February 1994	£16,000 plus VAT	Design and Implementation of Tourism Development Fund
Coopers and Lybrand	BTA	July 1994	£5,000 plus VAT	Enhancement of resource allocation model
Coopers and Lybrand	BTA	September 1994	£11,500 plus VAT	Amendment of resource allocation software
Professor Stephen Wanhill—University of Wales	ETB	June 1994	£1,868 plus VAT	Review of United Kingdom Tourism Survey (UKTS) to test validity of sample
Roberts Miller Associates	ETB	July 1994	£5,000 plus VAT plus expenses	Review of UKTS to test value for money and potential for commercial development
Touche Ross and Co.	BTA/ETB	March 1994	£70,000 plus VAT	Study of Britain's tourism strengths and weaknesses
Career Concepts Limited	ETB	April 1994	£8,000 plus VAT	Consultancy work in connection with Welcome Host
KPMG Management Consulting	BTA/ETB	January 1994	£85,842 plus VAT plus expenses	Study of BTA, ETB and RTB information needs and IT strategy
KPMG Peat Marwick	BTA/ETB	June 1994	£20,000	Implementation of IT strategy
McKinsey and Co.	ETB	February 1994	£15,000 plus VAT plus expenses	Design of a market development strategy
Digiverter Limited	BTA	February 1994	£3,200 plus expenses plus VAT	Work on BTA resource allocation programme
KPMG Management Consulting	ETB	March 1994	£51,036 plus VAT	Crown Accommodation Classification and Grading Scheme Study
Pieda plc	ETB	March 1994	£41,101 plus VAT	TIC Networking Study
The Tourism company	The Countryside Commission (on behalf of itself, DNH, ETB and the Rural Development Commission	November 1994	£31,372.50 including VAT	To produce a guide to action based sustainable tourism
Coopers and Lybrand	BTA/ETB	September 1995	£8,000 plus VAT	Review of income tax status of self employed contractors/consultants
MVA	DNH/ETB	April 1995	£136,270.59 including VAT	Research into consumer needs and expectations about serviced accommodation as part of Crown Scheme review
KPMG	DNH	April 1995	£170,713.96 including VAT	Benchmarking Survey of small hotels
MVA	DNH	October 1995	£4,830 plus VAT	Benchmarking Survey—Regression Analysis of data
Coopers and Lybrand	BTA	September 1995	£39,000 plus VAT	VAT review
Coopers and Lybrand	ETB	July 1995	£39,000 plus VAT	Crown Scheme review—study of economic impact of change to accommodation providers
Team Saatchi	ETB	June 1996	£32,000 plus VAT	Proposals for future image and presentation of accommodation schemes plus design work
Coopers and Lybrand	DNH	February 1996	£187,177.50 including VAT	To undertake a study of the use of human resources in the tourism industry
Tourism Research Group, Exeter University	DNH/Government Office for the South West	October 1996	£9,200 plus VAT	Report on the competitiveness of the South West tourist industry
University of Newcastle	DNH	January 1996	£29,600 including VAT	Updating day visitor estimates for local areas

Name of consultant	Appointing body	Date of appointment	Contract value	Subject of consultants work
MVA	DNH	September 1996	£49,720 plus VAT	Study of budget accommodation in London
Binder Hamlyn	BTA	January 1996	£25,000 plus VAT	Phase 1 of a review of the tax status of BTA overseas offices
Business Strategies Limited	DNH	May 1996	£5,170 including VAT	To provide advice on an internal review of tourism expenditure
Binder Hamlyn	BTA	April 1996	£50,000 plus VAT	Phase 2 of review of tax status of overseas offices
Robin Verney	BTA/ETB	January 1996	£9,000 plus VAT	Review of pub... information service and BTA/ETB telephone system
Binder Hamlyn	BTA	September 1996	£5,000 plus VAT	Further work on review of tax status of overseas offices
Robin Verney	BTA/ETB	May 1996	£4,000 plus VAT	Further work on review of public information system and BTA/ETB telephone system
SQW/System Three	ETB	May 1996	£40,600 plus VAT	Phase 1 Domestic Market Study
The Qualitative Consultancy	ETB/DNH	November 1996	£43,700 plus expenses plus VAT	Qualitative research into domestic market taking
MVA	ETB	August 1996	£15,200 plus VAT	Further consumer research for the Crown Scheme review
Gary Moss, J Walter Thompson	DNH	November 1996	£7,500 including VAT	To provide technical advice on the ETB/DNH domestic market study
University of North London	DNH, ETB, WTB, STB, NITB	June 1996	£24,675 plus VAT	Modelling local areas tourism statistics
Saxton Bamfylde Int. plc	DNH	March 1996	£36,049 including VAT	Search for BTA/ETB chairman

In addition, the ETB, in partnership with the Scottish, Wales and Northern Ireland tourist boards awards a contract to undertake the United Kingdom tourism survey. As this contract is for on-going work and is put out for competitive tender at regular intervals, it is not normal commercial practice to make public the value of the contract.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Economic Growth

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will fund research into the role of competitive markets in fostering economic growth. [11113]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Open competitive markets enhance business efficiency and consumer choice, and it is for this reason that competition lies at the heart of the Government's economic policies. Relevant research, bearing on the relationship between competitive markets and economic growth, is being supported by the Economic and Social Research Council and is also undertaken by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Business Breakfasts

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) on 16 December, *Official Report*, column *427*, if he will list *(a)* the total cost to date of business breakfasts, *(b)* the projected total cost until the end of the breakfasts planned, *(c)* the budget for the breakfasts and *(d)* the departmental budget from which this money is drawn. [13001]

Mr. Lang: The 11 events held so far are expected to cost approximately £51,500. The final cost of the programme will depend on the number of events. No budget has been specifically set aside for business breakfasts. The costs are being paid by the Government offices concerned: these are underwritten by the DTI's running cost provision.

White Asbestos

Mr. Ainger: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many products containing white asbestos are imported into the United Kingdom in each of the last 10 years. [12685]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Data on the number of goods containing white asbestos that were imported into the United Kingdom in each of the last 10 years are not available.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much white asbestos was imported into the United Kingdom in bulk form in each of the last 10 years. [12684]

Mr. Taylor: Data on UK imports of white asbestos are given in the table:

UK imports of white asbestos

	Quantity (metric tonnes)	Value (£000)
1986	26,766	7,863
1987	23,865	6,188
1988	24,266	5,417
1989	19,702	5,757
1990	16,022	5,196
1991	11,248	3,272
1992	10,269	3,569
1993	9,681	3,715
1994	11,466	3,987
1995	10,164	3,958
January to August 1996	4,776	2,060

Source:
Overseas trade statistics of the United Kingdom with the World (including data for countries with the European Community), HM Customs and Excise.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the level of white asbestos in products manufactured in the United Kingdom. [12681]

Mr. Taylor: This information is not available from official statistics.

Information Technology

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received about his "IT for All" initiative. [11129]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Government have received many practical proposals for this initiative from the organisations that have successfully applied to become partners. Many of the partners have also committed significant financial support and other resources to the project. They have welcomed "IT for All" as a valuable addition to the range of programmes already included in the Government's information society initiative.

Other companies and voluntary groups are coming forward to take part.

Wind Farm Schemes

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what was the projected output of the wind farm schemes funded through the fossil fuel levy for each year from 1991 to 1995; and what has been the actual output; [12117]

(2) what has the cost been of the wind farm programme funded through the fossil fuel levy; and what assessment he has made of the cost-effectiveness of financial support for wind farms. [12119]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 22 January 1997]:* Figures from the Office of Electricity Regulation put the total cost to the fossil fuel levy of supporting all the renewable energy projects, from the beginning of the programme in 1990 up to March 1996, at £309 million. Of this, I estimate that about a quarter has been for wind farms.

The total annual turnover of the UK electricity supply industry is about £15 billion and the Government believe that, if their market enablement strategy using the non-fossil fuel obligation succeeds, wind energy could eventually capture 10 per cent. of this market. The reductions in the amounts paid for wind energy under successive NFFO rounds suggest that this strategy is indeed working.

The Government do not make output projections for wind farms, but I understand that, on the whole, wind farm projects are meeting the expectations of their owners. The actual outputs, in gigawatt hours, as reported by the Non-fossil Purchasing Agency, were as follows:

1991: 2

1992: 26

1993: 213

1994: 337

1995: 340.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Germany

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has collated on the steps the German Government have taken to secure compliance with the provisions of the Single European Act forbidding discrimination on grounds of nationality. [12307]

Mr. David Davis: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has collated no such information.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will collate information on the instances on which the German Government have not overturned decisions of German courts on the grounds of discrimination against other nationalities as required under the Single European Act. [12333]

Mr. Davis: Under the EC treaty, the issue of whether there would be a breach of the right to provide services or of the right of establishment is a matter for the European Commission which has the duty of ensuring that the provisions of the treaty and measures implementing it are applied.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek an assurance from the German Government that they will revoke the decisions of the German county court at Friedrichshafen in respect of the admissibility of evidence provided by a British lawyer on the English law of probate. [12332]

Mr. Davis: Revoking a decision of the county court is not a matter for the German Government. A court decision can usually be reversed or altered only by the same or another court within the same legal system, for example, on appeals in accordance with the rules of that system.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the German Government urging that their courts accept evidence from British lawyers on the powers granted under the law of probate in the United Kingdom in cases which relate to such matters in Germany. [12308]

Mr. Davis: The German courts are, like our own, independent of Government. It would be inappropriate for us to seek to persuade the German Government to influence the decisions of the German courts.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received about the German county court at Friedrichshafen's ruling on the acceptability of evidence as to the English law of probate. [12306]

Mr. Davis: None.

Antarctic Treaty

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many countries have ratified the Antarctic treaty; and when he expects the secretariat to be established. [12455]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Twenty-three countries have ratified the environmental protocol. Japan, Russia and the US have still to do so. On the issue of the Antarctic treaty secretariat, the consultative parties have yet to reach an agreement by consensus on its location and date of establishment.

European Commission (General Election)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the European Union Commission about interventions by *(a)* British-based and *(b)* non-British-based officials and Commissioners in the forthcoming general election in respect of (i) advancing or deferring Commission policies and (ii) rebutting criticisms of the Commission, the Union and its policies. [12476]

Mr. David Davis: None.

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his oral answer of 15 January, *Official Report*, column 321, if he will make a statement on the police studies course under the Chevening award scheme. [12635]

Mr. Hanley: One Indonesian police officer undertook an MA in police studies at Exeter university in 1992–93. The course was funded from this Department's Chevening awards scheme-diplomatic wing.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the business likely to come to the United Kingdom referred to in paragraph 2.5 of the National Audit Office report on "Aid to Indonesia" (HC 101 of Session 1996–97). [12593]

Mr. Hanley: Paragraph 2.5 of the National Audit Office report records the view expressed by the British embassy in Jakarta in September 1985 that failure to make a good aid offer quickly could affect a number of items of business likely to come to the United Kingdom. The embassy did not specify of which items of business it had in mind.

The conclusions in the NAO report found that there was no evidence that these representations had any influence on the Administration's decision to undertake the project referred to in paragraph 2.5 of the NAO report.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 13 January, *Official Report*, columns *33–34*, what was the value of the turnkey project near Jakarta. [12630]

Mr. Nelson: I have been asked to reply.

I understand from the company that the value is £12.25 million.

European Union

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his European counterparts about the next stages of European construction. [11109]

Mr. David Davis: Government Ministers regularly meet their European counterparts to discuss European issues.

Amsterdam Summit

Mr. Mackinlay: to ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his Department's role in co-ordinating the Government's policies in respect of the Amsterdam summit. [11121]

Mr. David Davis: This Department has overall responsibility for co-ordinating the Government's policy towards the European Union, including that towards the Amsterdam European Council.

Ministers for Children

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which *(a)* EU and *(b)* UN countries have a Minister for children. [12807]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: This information is not collected centrally. To answer the question would incur disproportionate cost.

European Single Currency

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the plans and competence of the European Commission to advance a publicity campaign for the European single currency within the United Kingdom, through the Committee of the Regions. [12959]

Mr. David Davis: The European Commission has confirmed that, in accordance with earlier agreements, it has no plans for a publicity campaign on the euro in the United Kingdom, either through the Committee of the Regions or by other means. Statements made in Brussels by the Commissioner responsible for information referred to plans for activities in the EU as a whole, and were not directed specifically at the UK.

DEFENCE

Mutual Defence Agreement

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the joint working groups at present operating as part of *(a)* the 1958 mutual defence agreement for co-operation on the uses of atomic energy for defence purposes, *(b)* the Polaris sales agreement and *(c)* the Trident sales agreement. [12372]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Joint working groups continue to be the focal points for technical exchanges under the 1958 mutual defence agreement. Subject areas are as follows:

Radiation simulation and kinetic effects technology
Energetic materials
Test monitoring
Nuclear materials
Warhead electrical components and technologies
Non-nuclear materials
Nuclear counter-terrorism technology
Facilities
Nuclear weapons engineering
Nuclear warhead physics
Computational technology
Aircraft, missile and space system hardening
Laboratory plasma physics
Manufacturing practices
Nuclear weapon accident response technology

Nuclear weapon code development

Nuclear weapon environment and damage effects.

Separate arrangements exist for exchanges under the Polaris sales agreement, as amended for Trident. The working groups concerned are the Trident working party group, the joint steering tasks group, the Trident joint re-entry systems working group and the joint systems performance and assessment group. I am withholding information related to the detailed activities of these groups under exemption 1 of the code of practice on access to Government information relating to defence, security and international affairs.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on relations between the United States and the United Kingdom Governments in respect of implementation of the 1958 mutual defence agreement for co-operation on the uses of atomic energy for defence purposes since the agreement was last amended. [12125]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Our arrangements with the United States under the 1958 agreement for co-operation on the uses of atomic energy for defence purposes continue to contribute to our mutual defence and security.

Sandia National Laboratories

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the services that Sandia National Laboratories provides in support of (i) the United Kingdom nuclear research programme and (ii) the United Kingdom Trident programme. [12374]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman), gave on 8 June 1995, *Official Report*, column *298*.

Atomic Weapons Establishment, Aldermaston

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all the facilities currently available or planned to be available at AWE Aldermaston for use as part of the above ground experiments programme; and what are the estimated annual running costs. [12120]

Mr. Arbuthnot: No new facilities have so far been constructed or approved for above ground experimental work at AWE Aldermaston. Existing facilities, many of which have other purposes, are used as required.

I am withholding details of those facilities and their estimated annual running costs for above ground experimental work under exemption 1 of the code of practice on access to Government information relating to defence, security and international relations.

Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the projects on which his Department is working jointly with Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. [12373]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Details of the areas of research involving the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory are as follows:

Radiation simulation and kinetic effects technology

Energetic materials

Test monitoring

Nuclear materials

Warhead electrical components and technologies

Non-nuclear materials

Nuclear counter-terrorism technology

Facilities

Nuclear weapons engineering

Nuclear warhead physics

Computational technology

Aircraft, missile and space system hardening

Laboratory plasma physics

Manufacturing practices

Nuclear weapon accident response technology

Nuclear weapon code development

Nuclear weapon environment and damage effects.

Laser Defence System

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the proposed United Kingdom–United States of America anti-ballistic laser defence system with particular reference to the implications for his Department. [12590]

Mr. Arbuthnot: No decision has been taken on the requirement for a national ballistic missile defence capability. We are aware that a ballistic missile defence system is being developed in the United States of America which uses an airborne laser. Currently, there are no proposals for this to become a joint programme involving the United Kingdom.

Arctic Convoys

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received in respect of Arctic convoy veterans. [12549]

Mr. Soames: My Department has recently received a number of letters seeking the institution of an Arctic campaign star to recognise service given on the Arctic convoys during the second world war. Replies have been sent to all these letters, explaining that service with the Arctic convoys has already been recognised by the award of the Atlantic star, and that there are no plans to institute any further medals for service given in the second world war.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will arrange for the striking of a medal for the merchant and Royal Navy seamen who took part in the second world war Arctic convoy systems; and if he will make a statement. [12548]

Mr. Soames: Service with the convoys to north Russia during the second world war was recognised by the award of the Atlantic star. There are no plans to institute any further medals for service given in the second world war.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will meet second world war Arctic convoy veterans of north-east Wales concerning their requests for an Arctic campaign star; and if he will make a statement. [12550]

Mr. Soames: My Department has no plans to hold any meetings with those who served on the convoys to north Russia during the second world war to discuss the

institution of an Arctic campaign star. Service with the convoys has already been recognised by the award of the Atlantic star.

Test Ban Treaty

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress towards the implementation of a comprehensive test ban treaty. [12589]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The comprehensive test ban treaty has so far been signed by 139 states. The first preparatory commission of signatory states to carry out the necessary preparations for the effective implementation of the treaty met in New York in November 1996 and will resume in Geneva in March. A provisional technical secretariat is being established to co-ordinate and support the process. Expert consultations on implementation of the verification arrangements are under way.

Service Redundancies

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the costs incurred by his Department as a result of redundancies in each of the three services in each of the last six years. [11456]

Mr. Soames: *[pursuant to his reply, 21 January 1997, c. 553]:* I regret that the estimate given for 1996–97 was incomplete. A table with the correct figures is provided:

£ million

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*[1]
RN	12	95	75	28	90
ARMY	209	328	281	16	16
RAF	11	86	97	143	275
Total	232	509	453	187	381

[1] Estimate.

These payments include special capital payments, and early payment of terminal grants, commuted pension payments and the first year's payment of immediate pensions.

The figures for 1996–97 are an estimate as the RAF redundancy programme will not be completed until the end of the year.

Departmental Publications

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the *(a)* White Papers, *(b)* Green Papers, *(c)* consultation papers, *(d)* draft regulations and *(e)* circulars, for which his Department has been responsible issued in 1996 which his Department assesses could give rise, (i) directly and (ii) indirectly to significant environmental effects. [12709]

Mr. Soames: The "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1996" contains an account of MOD environmental activities and my Department's environmental policy statement. My Department has not issued any other document of the type listed which has been assessed directly or indirectly to originate significant environmental effects.

Military Museums

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the revenue which the National Army museum in Chelsea would have obtained from an entry charge of £2 per visitor in 1996. [12871]

Mr. Soames: A sum of £256,878, but this figure takes no account of any reduction in visitor numbers that would have followed the introduction of admission charges, or visitors who may have been eligible for free admission.

Any decision to introduce admission charges is a matter for the council of the National Army museum.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the cost to *(a)* the Royal Signals museum and *(b)* Bournemouth university of their joint multi-media facility programme; and if he will make a statement. [12872]

Mr. Soames: The cost of the Royal Signals museum's participation in Bournemouth university's project, Electroscape, will be met from the museum trustees' non-public funds. There will be no cost to my Department. The cost to Bournemouth university is not a matter for my Department.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage reduction in the funding of regimental and corps museums is planned for the period from April 1998. [12873]

Mr. Soames: We have advised museum trustees that there will be a reduction of 12.7 per cent. in the contribution the MOD makes to the funding of regimental and corps museums from April 1998. We are currently consulting with them about how this should be achieved. Not all regimental and corps museums will be affected.

Abbey Wood, Bristol

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the outcome of the discussions between his Department and the shell and core contractors for the new MOD building at Abbey Wood, Bristol, following their claim for additional payments referred in his answer of 24 June 1996, *Official Report*, column *39*. [12958]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Following the completion of shell and core works, a new claim for additional payments and extensions of time was submitted by the Abbey Wood shell and core contractor in December 1996. This claim is currently being assessed and negotiations between the Department and its contractor continue.

Service Accommodation

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list estimate on a monthly basis for the cost to public funds of providing service accommodation for a *(a)* private, *(b)* corporal, *(c)* lance corporal, *(d)* sergeant and *(e)* staff sergeant in (i) the Regular Army and (ii) the Military Provost Guard Service. [11286]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 20 January 1997]:* I regret that the information requested is unavailable in the format requested. Houses are allocated to service personnel by size of family of family and not by rank and the requested figures for a breakdown by rank would not therefore be available.

The married quarters estate in England and Wales has recently been sold to Annington Homes; the MOD leases back the quarters required at the same cost whether they are occupied by Military Provost Guard Service or by full engagement regular service personnel. In addition, my Department pays the costs of maintenance, the upgrade programme, administration of the Defence Housing Executive and the inherent costs of asset ownership in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

MPGS soldiers will be allowed to occupy married and single accommodation on the same terms as full engagement regular service personnel for the duration of the pilot scheme, where this accommodation is available. The MPGS investment appraisal reflected this last factor.

TREASURY

Jersey (Financial Institutions)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to what extent the liabilities of the Jersey financial institutions are underwritten by *(a)* UK institutions and *(b)* the Bank of England; and if he will make a statement. [9730]

Mrs. Angela Knight: In general, the relationship between a parent institution and its subsidiaries is the same irrespective of where the subsidiaries are located. In the event of an insolvency, the extent to which a parent underwrites the liabilities of its subsidiaries is ultimately a matter for the courts.

The Bank of England does not underwrite the liabilities of Jersey financial institutions.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the responsibilities of *(a)* the Government and *(b)* the Bank of England in relation to the financial institutions and affairs of Jersey; and if he will make a statement. [9729]

Mrs. Knight: Jersey is internally self-governing and has its own legislature which is responsible for matters relating to financial institutions. The UK Government are responsible for Jersey's defence and external relations.

The Bank of England includes Jersey subsidiaries and branches of UK authorised institutions in its consolidated supervision of the UK parent.

Utility Bills

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 5 December 1996, *Official Report*, columns *745-46*, if he will estimate for the typical domestic customer the change in the combined gas, electricity and water bill between 1979 and 1996 in real terms. [11936]

Mr. Jack: The information requested is given in the table. The typical domestic customer's gas and electricity bills have fallen in real terms, including VAT. There has however been an increase in water bills, which reflects the industry's large capital investment and environmental programmes. Taking this into account, a typical combined bill rose by about £7.70 in 1990 prices.

	Electricity £	*Gas* £	*Water and sewerage* £	*Total* £
1979	272.9	277.1	93.4	643.4
1996	200.7	272.4	178.0	651.1
Change	–72.2	–4.7	+84.6	+7.7

Source:
Department of Trade and Industry, Department of the Environment, Office of Water Services

Electricity bills are based on a typical annual consumption of 3,300 kWh. The figures used are weighted averages for the UK, and include both VAT and the national grid discount.

Gas bills are based on an annual consumption of 17,600 kWh. The figures used are weighted averages for the UK, and include VAT.

Water and sewerage bills relate to 1979–80 and 1996. They are based on average unmeasured bills of customers of the water and sewerage companies in England and Wales.

All figures are in 1990 prices, and all have been deflated using the retail prices index deflator.

Value Added Tax

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals have been made by the European Commission since 1990 to extend the coverage of the United Kingdom's VAT system; what goods and services would have been affected; and what was the United Kingdom's Government response in each case. [11642]

Mr. Oppenheim: No proposals have been made by the European Commission specifically to extend the coverage of the United Kingdom's VAT system. However, since 1990 the Commission has put forward a number of proposals relating to the VAT system in the European Community as a whole. The policy implications, and the Government's position, in respect of all such proposals have been fully set out in the relevant explanatory memorandums, which have been deposited in the Library of the House.

Hypothermia

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the incidence of *(a)* hypothermia and *(b)* hypothermia-related illnesses in (i) December 1996 and (ii) January 1997. [11472]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Alan Simpson, dated 27 January 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the incidence of hypothermia and hypothermia-related illnesses in December 1996 and January 1997.

This information is not available for this period.

The latest figures for NHS hospital in-patient incidences of hypothermia in England are for 1994/95. 1,012 incidences of hypothermia as the primary diagnosis were recorded. This figure

shows each incidence of hypothermia presented to a consultant and may, therefore, double count people who see more than one consultant or see a consultant for more than one incidence of hypothermia. It also only shows hospital in-patient figures, so does not include people dealt with by GPs or in emergency departments.

This reply was drafted in conjunction with members of the Government Statistical Service in the Department of Health.

Taxation

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the combined impact on the overall level of taxation of the measures in the Finance Bill. [12394]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 23 January 1997]:* The measures in the Finance Bill will raise £390 million in 1997–98, compared to an indexed base. The Finance Bill excludes measures in the Budget that are passed by regulation or statutory instrument, such as measures on business rates and national insurance contributions. The effect of Budget measures, excluding pre-announced measures, is to cut taxes by £735 million in 1997–98, compared to an indexed base.

Green Book (Revision)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 29 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *438*, if he will give his current estimate of the date of publication of the revised edition of the Green Book. [11636]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 17 January 1997]:* The revised addition of the Green Book has a preliminary publication date of 24 February 1997. It is proposed to publish the book through the Stationery Office.

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 29 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *438*, if he will give the dates on which the relevant Treasury expenditure team *(a)* received the proposal for the Cardiff bay barrage for the purposes of the analysis using Green Book principles and *(b)* gave its agreement that the expenditure provided value for money. [11635]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 17 January 1997]:* An economic appraisal of the Cardiff bay barrage project was received by the Treasury from the Welsh Office in November 1987. The Treasury gave its approval for expenditure on the project in June 1988.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 29 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *438*, if he will place in the Library a copy of the Treasury's economic appraisal of the Cardiff bay barrage. [11634]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 17 January 1997]:* Responsibility for preparing economic appraisals of individual projects lies with the body that is funding the project. The Treasury did not therefore prepare an economic appraisal of the Cardiff bay barrage.

Exchange Rate Mechanism

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which inter-governmental agency will be responsible for drawing up the rules, and exercising authority in their interpretation and application, of the exchange rate mechanism that will be available for those members of the European Union that do not join the Euro-monetary system when it commences operation. [10695]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 13 January 1997]:* The European Council meeting at Dublin on 13 and 14 December confirmed that there will be a new, voluntary, exchange rate mechanism in stage 3 of economic and monetary union. The Government expect that European Council resolutions on a new ERM will now be drafted for final agreement by Heads of State or Government meeting at Amsterdam in June. The European Council endorsed the European Monetary Institute report "Monetary and Exchange rate policy cooperation between the Euro and other EU countries" which stated:

> "At the level of the central banks, the European Central Bank (ECB) General Council will monitor the functioning of the exchange rate mechanism and will serve as a forum for monetary and exchange rate policy coordination as well as for the administration of the intervention and financing mechanism." *(Presidency conclusions—Dublin, 13–14 December 1996 SN 401/96 (p.25 of annex))*

Under the treaty, all EU member states will be represented on the ECB general council.

The Prime Minister and I have made it clear that the United Kingdom will not join such a mechanism and the European Council conclusions made it clear that no member state would be obliged to join it.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Dover: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many jobless households there were in the *(a)* Chorley and *(b)* Sedgefield constituencies (i) in April 1992 and (ii) at the most recent date for which there are available statistics; and what was the number of children in these jobless households. [11788]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 20 January 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Den Dover dated 27 January 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the number of jobless households in the Chorley and Sedgefield constituencies; and the number of children in these jobless households.

The information requested is not available. County is the lowest level at which such figures are available from the Labour Force Survey.

Unemployment

Mr. Byers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for November *(a)* 1990 and *(b)* 1996 the number of under-25-year-olds who had been out of work for more than 12 months in (i) each region of England, (ii) Scotland, (iii) Wales, (iv) Northern Ireland and (v) the United Kingdom. [10909]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 15 January 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Stephen Byers, dated 27 January 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on long term unemployment amongst people aged under 25 years old.

Claimant count statistics by age and duration are available quarterly for the months of January, April, July and October. For other months data is restricted to those claimants whose records have been computerised. In each case the data is on the unadjusted basis and is therefore not seasonally adjusted and does not make allowances for discontinuities in the count.

The available information can be obtained from the Nomis database accessed by the House of Commons Library.

Drug Misuse (Deaths)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people *(a)* under 16 and *(b)* under 20 years died as a result of using (i) cocaine, (ii) heroin, (iii) Ecstasy and (iv) volatile substances, (1) nationally and (2) in the west midlands in each year since 1992; and if he will indicate the percentage change on the previous year. [11681]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 22 January 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 27 January 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on how many people have died as a result of using cocaine, heroin, ecstasy and volatile substances.

The numbers of deaths in England and Wales in 1992 of under 16 and under 20 year olds assigned to accidental and other poisoning where cocaine, heroin, ecstasy and volatile substances were mentioned are published in Table 11 of *Mortality statistics: injury and poisoning, England and Wales"*, series DH4, no. 18, a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library.

Similar data for the West Midlands and for England and Wales for 1993, 1994 and 1995 could be provided at disproportionate cost.

Treasury Building

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the final contract to be signed with Exchequer Partnerships plc for the development of the Treasury building. [12146]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 22 January 1997]:* The aim is to conclude the final contract, the development framework agreement, as soon as practicable.

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he proposes to make available about the plans for the Treasury building following the signing of the commercial heads of terms agreement with Exchequer Partnerships plc. [12148]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 22 January 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) on 16 January 1997, *Official Report*, column *382*.

WALES

Personalised Number Plates (Executive Agencies)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many personalised number plates there are in the ownership of the executive agencies operated by his Department; and if he will list them. [11409]

Mr. Hague: My Department has sole responsibility for one executive agency, which is Cadw. It has no personalised number plates.

Unemployment

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total number of unemployed people in Wales on the basis of *(a)* those who claim benefits and *(b)* those recorded in the labour force survey as desiring to work, at the latest available date in each case; and if he will indicate what factors underlie any differences between the two figures. [12024]

Mr. Hague: On 12 December 1996, there were 93,084 persons on the claimant unemployment count in Wales. The latest figure from the labour force survey is for autumn—September to November—1996, when an estimated 109,000 people in Wales were classified as International Labour Organisation unemployed. The above figures are not seasonally adjusted.

The first figure is from a monthly count of those claiming unemployment-related benefits. It is an administrative measure and records the number of claimants on one particular day each month. In contrast, the labour force survey measure is based on a sample survey of around 3,000 households in Wales each quarter. It uses the internationally standard ILO definition of unemployment. This classifies as unemployed those who were without a job at the time the survey was conducted and were available to start work in the next fortnight and had either actively looked for work in the last four weeks or had found a job and were waiting to start.

The ILO unemployed are not asked if they would like to have a job because, in order to be classified as unemployed, they will need already to have stated that they have looked, and are available, for work. Respondents are questioned only on whether they would like a job if they are economically inactive and have not looked for a job in the last four weeks. These people are not ILO unemployed.

The Office for National Statistics has published a booklet "How exactly is unemployment measured" which describes the claimant count and labour force survey measures of unemployment in more detail. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he is taking to *(a)* monitor and *(b)* deal with the problem of processing statutory

assessments of children with special educational needs within the legal deadline of six months with particular reference to dyslexia. [11576]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Local education authorities have a responsibility to comply with the time scales prescribed in regulations for the assessment of children with special educational needs, including those with dyslexia. Should the local education authority fail to meet the time scales, there is a right of complaint to my right hon. Friend. Health authorities and social services departments also have duties in relation to these statutory time scales.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he is taking to ensure implementation of the principle of partnership with parents of children with special needs from April. [11577]

Mr. Evans: The code of practice on the identification and assessment of special educational needs, to which all agencies involved with children with special educational needs have to have regard, stresses the principle of partnership with parents. In support of this, my right hon. Friend has, for a number of years, allocated grant to the special needs advisory project—SNAP—and, through the grants for educational support and training programme, has allocated grant to local education authorities to assist them in their duty of identifying a name person to help parents in the statementing process. The GEST funding is to continue in 1997–98 and the Welsh Office is considering an application from SNAP for further funding from April 1997.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many children in *(a)* Ynys Môn and *(b)* Wales are the subject of statements of special educational needs; and how many of these are estimated to be related to dyslexia or specific literacy difficulties. [11578]

Mr. Evans: At January 1996, according to returns to the schools census, 15,909 children in schools in Wales had statements of special educational needs, and of these 372 were in schools in Ynys Môn. Information is not available about the number of children with dyslexia or specific literacy difficulties, although they are likely to be included in the number identified as having specific learning difficulties: 2,529 children in schools in Wales had statements which recorded this category as their major difficulty; of these, 114 were in schools in Ynys Môn. Further data on children with statements of special educational needs are contained in the recently published Welsh Office volume "Welsh Education and Training Statistics Bulletin No. 3: Pupils with Statements of Special Educational Needs 1993–94—1995–96", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he proposes to ensure that an adequate number of teachers hold specialist qualifications in dyslexia in Ynys Môn. [11579]

Mr. Evans: It is for local education authorities and schools to ensure that suitable education is provided for children who are dyslexic. The Welsh Office provides funding through the grants for education support and training programme to local education authorities for the training of teachers of children with special educational needs, including specifically those with dyslexia.

Greenmeadow Inn, Machen

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what applications he has received for assistance from public funds for the demolition of the Greenmeadow inn, Waterloo, Machen, and for the subsequent redevelopment of the site; and if he will make a statement. [11930]

Mr. Hague: No application for financial assistance for demolition and redevelopment of this site has been made to my Department.

Departmental Publications

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the *(a)* White Papers, *(b)* Green Papers, *(c)* consultation papers, *(d)* draft regulations and *(e)* circulars, for which his Department has been responsible issued in 1996 which his Department assesses could give rise, (i) directly and (ii) indirectly, to significant environmental effects. [12715]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Welsh Office issues a great number of these documents and many could give rise, to a greater or lesser extent, to environmental effects. No central records are maintained of the environmental assessments undertaken by the Department, and listings could not be provided without incurring disproportionate costs. The main environmental initiatives under way or planned by the Welsh Office are described in "The Environment in Wales Fifth Report" published last November, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Nurses

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the pre-registration nurse education intake in each year from 1987–88 to 1995–96. [12689]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on the intake for nursing education is published by the Welsh National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health visiting in its annual report, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many nurses in Wales were aged *(a)* between 20 and 30, *(b)* between 31 and 40, *(c)* between 41 and 50, and *(d)* over 50 years in each year from 1987–88 to 1995–96. [12691]

Mr. Jones: The available information, which relates to all nursing and midwifery staff directly employed by the NHS in Wales excluding pre-registration learners, is given in the table.

Number of staff in post at 30 September[1]

	Age group (years)			
	20 to 29	*30 to 39*	*40 to 49*	*50 and over*
1987	8,700	7,200	7,400	5,400
1988	8,700	7,500	7,600	5,600
1989	8,500	8,000	7,700	5,700
1990	8,200	8,500	7,800	5,900
1991	7,400	9,200	7,900	6,200
1992	8,000	10,100	8,200	6,100
1993	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1994	7,400	11,400	8,500	6,000
1995	6,800	12,100	8,600	6,000
1996	6,500	12,600	8,900	6,100

n/a = Not available.

[1] Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred. Some nurses may be counted more than once—such as when they have more than one contract—and a small number of nurses on local payscales, who cannot be identified centrally as nursing and midwifery staff, may be excluded.

Bird Reserve, Gwent

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he received the application for an appeal against non-determination of the Land Authority for Wales' application for a bird reserve on the Gwent levels; and when he expects the appeal to begin. [13056]

Mr. Hague: The application for an appeal against non-determination of the Land Authority for Wales' application for a bird reserve on the Gwent levels was received in my Department on 17 January 1997, and is under consideration.

Meningitis

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the findings of *(a)* the Bro Taf health authority report and *(b)* the university report into the meningitis outbreak at the university of Wales in Cardiff. [13026]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Yes.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answers of 21 January, *Official Report*, columns *575-76*, on meningitis cases, how long it took to diagnose each case of type C meningitis in Wales in 1996. [13053]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is not held centrally.

Cardiff International Airport

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans his Department has to link Cardiff international airport via *(a)* a class 1 road and *(b)* a rail link to (i) the city of Cardiff and (ii) the M4. [12870]

Mr. Hague: None. These are matters for the responsible organisations.

The Vale of Glamorgan council is, with the support of transport grant from my Department, undertaking preparatory work on proposals to improve road links between the airport and Culverhouse Cross. I understand that Prism Rail plc, the new operator of the Cardiff Valley lines, will be examining the feasibility of a new rail link.

Health Authorities and Trusts

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of *(a)* the financial position of Welsh health authorities and trusts at the end of the third quarter of the financial year 1996–97 *(b)* the number of (i) authorities and (ii) trusts expected to be in deficit at the year end; and if he will make a statement on the arrangements for year end carrying over of deficits. [13057]

Mr. Hague: Health authorities are required to ensure that spending is contained within notified cash limits for the financial year. The table illustrates the health authority reported spend at the end of December against the latest notified cash limits for revenue, capital and GP expenses.

The third quarter trust monitoring returns are in the process of being validated and I shall write to the hon. Member with this information in due course.

As health authorities deal with cash figures the carrying over of deficits is not applicable.

All figures in £ millions

Health authority	*Latest notified allocation*	*Reported spend at end December*
North Wales	385.467	288.079
Dyfed Powys	300.088	218.545
Morgannwg	306.191	228.909
Bro Taf	448.235	337.339
Gwent	314.477	225.177

Audiometry Patients

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the average time audiometry patients in Wales waited to be treated by a consultant in each of the region's health authorities for each of the last five years for which figures are available; how many patients voluntarily removed themselves from the waiting lists before treatment was completed; and if he will make a statement. [12864]

Mr. Hague: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Mentally Handicapped People

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of registered mentally handicapped people in community care in each council area in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [12950]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Each local authority reports to the Welsh Office the total number on its register of people with learning disabilities and the number of these who are accommodated in community living arrangements. The latest figures are shown in the table.

Register of people with learning disabilities

	At 31 March 1996	
	Number of people on the register	*Of these, number accommodated in community living arrangements*
Blaenau Gwent	368	313
Bridgend	647	507
Caerphilly	n/a	n/a
Cardiff	866	631
Carmarthenshire	751	561
Ceredigion	366	299
Conwy[1]	205	144
Denbighshire	262	237
Flintshire	520	453
Gwynedd	534	445
Isle of Anglesey	n/a	n/a
Merthyr Tydfil	n/a	n/a
Monmouthshire	288	191
Neath Port Talbot	522	441
Newport	549	418
Pembrokeshire	386	261
Powys	n/a	n/a
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	949	749
Swansea	n/a	n/a
Torfaen	n/a	n/a
The Vale of Glamorgan	n/a	n/a
Wrexham	557	482

Source:
Form SSDA 901.

Notes:
[1] Including only those people in the area of the former district council of Colwyn - excludes those in the area of the former district council of Aberconwy.
n/a: the council has not yet reported the number on its register.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the expenditure on *(a)* building maintenance and *(b)* education of each authority indicating (i) grant and (ii) private finance initiative funding received for each of the last five financial years; and if he will make a statement. [12867]

Mr. Hague: The latest available complete information is outturn expenditure on education from 1990–91 to 1994–95 as reported to the Welsh Office by county councils. The information provided is split between revenue expenditure—tables 1 and 2—and capital expenditure—table 3. No information is available relating to capital expenditure on building maintenance. There were reductions in expenditure from 1992–93 to 1993–94 due to the transfer of responsibility for the funding for further education from local authorities to the Further Education Funding Council for Wales.

Central Government support for local authorities' revenue expenditure is provided mainly by way of revenue support grant and shares of redistributed non-domestic rates. This support is unhypothecated, therefore allocations in respect of individual functions or services such as education do not exist.

Additional support for revenue expenditure is provided by specific grants which are paid in relation to expenditure on a particular project or service. Details of those specific grants relating to education are given in table 4.

There were no PFI projects in the education sector for the given years.

Table 1: Local authority net current expenditure on building maintenance relating to education[1]

£ thousand

County council	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Clwyd	4,067	6,278	5,204	5,258	6,081
Dyfed	4,874	5,109	5,506	3,956	3,396
Gwent	6,020	6,974	7,805	7,269	7,739
Gwynedd	3,310	3,506	3,173	3,252	3,302
Mid Glamorgan	13,060	14,711	13,487	13,873	11,483
Powys	1,807	2,262	2,910	1,163	1,116
South Glamorgan	5,406	7,036	7,353	6,422	5,638
West Glamorgan	8,036	8,781	7,584	6,649	8,299
Total	46,580	54,657	53,022	47,842	47,054

[1] Excludes grant-maintained schools. Includes salaries of building maintenance workers and groundsmen, cost of materials, recharges by external agencies, charges from Direct Service Organisations, architects, engineers and surveyors and expenditure on energy conservation and on health and safety.

Also includes contract charges (including those relating to compulsory competitive tendering arrangements). Excludes salaries of caretakers and cleaners.

Table 2: Total local authority net current expenditure on education[1]

County council	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Clwyd	154,657	178,834	195,345	160,976	160,112
Dyfed	136,240	151,794	170,467	158,564	160,143
Gwent	170,821	193,197	207,286	193,322	190,771
Gwynedd	87,832	100,404	107,934	99,843	98,634
Mid Glamorgan	218,630	251,858	256,235	247,629	239,595
Powys	48,177	55,434	61,116	54,644	55,695
South Glamorgan	147,628	167,959	174,219	160,892	155,910
West Glamorgan	145,873	161,342	171,692	154,151	157,234
Total	1,109,858	1,260,822	1,344,294	1,230,021	1,218,094

[1] Excludes grant maintained schools and expenditure on school catering.

Table 3: Total local authority gross capital expenditure on education[1]

County council	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Clwyd	7,445	8,446	6,911	8,500	8,563
Dyfed	6,711	7,151	6,706	4,175	5,730
Gwent	9,597	6,727	10,704	5,946	6,405
Gwynedd	2,678	3,403	3,069	2,041	2,172
Mid Glamorgan	8,555	9,014	7,825	4,677	8,036
Powys	2,340	3,393	5,359	3,575	2,971
South Glamorgan	7,869	11,723	10,243	6,781	10,325
West Glamorgan	6,649	6,362	6,941	4,942	8,130
Total	51,844	56,219	57,758	40,637	52,332

[1] Excludes grant maintained schools.

Table 4: Specific government revenue grants to local education authorities[1]

£ thousand

County council	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Clwyd	15,095	21,937	25,494	25,866	21,979
Dyfed	15,657	21,578	25,794	26,129	22,885
Gwent	16,335	23,517	28,682	28,454	24,030
Gwynedd	11,047	15,830	17,098	17,559	15,286
Mid Glamorgan	15,888	24,160	27,515	28,868	17,837
Powys	4,488	6,690	8,042	7,782	6,734
South Glamorgan	16,385	23,526	28,608	29,460	25,002
West Glamorgan	14,920	20,666	23,508	23,210	19,994
Total	109,815	157,904	184,741	187,328	153,747

[1] Includes mandatory student awards, grants for education support and training, Welsh language education, education of travel and displaced persons, education of commonwealth immigrants, Training Agency and work related further education.

Welsh Medium Schools

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many primary schools in Wales provide education through the medium of Welsh; what was the average class size in these schools on 31 December for each of the last five years; what was the average cost of teaching staff provision in these schools in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [12868]

Mr. Hague: At January 1996, 561 primary schools had classes where at least part of the curriculum was taught through the medium of Welsh. The average class size in those schools was 23.6 pupils. The average class size in schools similarly defined in January 1995 was 23.5 and in January 1994 23.1. Figures could be provided for previous years only at disproportionate cost. No average teaching staff cost figures are available.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Clergy (Pensions)

38. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what assessment the Church Commissioners have made of the relationship between the contributions made by retired clergy during their working ministership and the level of pension they are now receiving. [11153]

Mr. Alison: The Church's pension scheme for retired clergy, deaconesses and licensed layworkers is non-contributory for those members of the scheme in pensionable service. Pensions and retirement lump sums are currently paid from the commissioners' investment income, and based on the length of qualifying pensionable service completed. In 1996–97, the full service pension—based on a full 37 years' service—was £8,533. For those with less than the full 37 years' service, the pension entitlement is reduced proportionately.

Investments

39. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what

representations the Church Commissioners have made to their bankers to practise ethical investments. [11154]

Mr. Alison: The commissioners would expect their bankers to operate responsibly in areas such as corporate governance, employment, the environment and the community.

Vicarages and Palaces (Security)

40. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, pursuant to his answer of 9 December, *Official Report,* column *55,* if he will make a statement on the progress of the Church Commissioners' review of advice to dioceses on security measures for parsonage homes and suffragan bishops' homes. [11155]

Mr. Alison: The advice which the commissioners have under review at present specifically concerns parsonage houses, as part of a wider review of their parsonages design guide. To this end, they have visited houses in the dioceses of Chichester, Guildford and Oxford and have in hand visits to the dioceses of Manchester and Southwark. They will also have discussions on security with crime prevention officers. Suffragan bishops houses' are the which responsibility of dioceses which no doubt bear in mind the security measures introduced by the commissioners into See houses and which are recommended in the parsonages design guide.

Episcopal Residences

41. **Mr. Bernard Jenkin:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what is the value of episcopal residences owned by the Church Commissioners; and what these figures represent as a proportion of the Church Commissioners' total assets. [11156]

Mr. Alison: Some See houses, which by their nature are unlikely to be sold, are valued at a nominal figure. Other See houses are valued on the basis of their council tax bandings. On this basis as at 31 December 1995, the last date for which figures are currently available, the value of diocesan bishops' houses owned by the commissioners, including staff accommodation, was £16 million. This represented 0.6 per cent. of the commissioners' total assets.

Archbishops Commission

42. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what action he has taken regarding the recommendations arising from the Archbishops Commission set up in 1994; and if he will make a statement. [11157]

Mr. Alison: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) on 11 December 1995, *Official Report,* column *501.*

The commissioners continue to take a constructive part in developing proposals for improving the machinery of the established Church at national level. Key elements from the commissioners' perspective are their answerability both to Synod and to Parliament and the integrity of the commissioners' historic trusts.

Poverty

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what was the financial provision for the Church Commission on poverty in the last available year. [11151]

Mr. Alison: Most of the commissioners' expenditure goes on the support of a nationwide ministry, which includes the most deprived areas of the country. In 1996 this support included £22 million on allocations for stipends and housing outgoings which was specifically targeted on the needier dioceses.

Set-aside Arrangements

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what acreage of land owned by the Church Commissioners is covered by set-aside arrangements. [11152]

Mr. Alison: The commissioners do not hold statistics on their land covered by set-aside arrangements, since this is a matter for each tenant.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Pesca Scheme

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful attempts have been made in the last four years by United Kingdom organisations to obtain funds from the EU's Pesca scheme; and what funds have been allocated to the United Kingdom under this scheme. [12352]

Mr. Baldry: The Pesca scheme was launched in 1996. To date, there have been 71 applications for Pesca funding in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, of which four projects have been approved and six have been rejected. Decisions on the remaining applications will be taken early in the year.

Similar information is not available for Scotland as the Scottish Office does not hold a list of projects submitted under Pesca. Pesca is delivered in eligible areas in Scotland through local Pesca groups. The Scottish Office will collate detailed annual reports from the LPGs for transmission to the European Commission in June 1997.

Some 43 mecu—£36 million—has been allocated to the UK Pesca fishing dependent areas and this funding is due to be committed between 1996 and 1999.

Beef Steers (Prices)

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the average price per kilo of beef steers sold in markets around Britain for each month from January 1995 to the present. [12771]

Mr. Baldry: The following table is based on weighted average weekly prices for steers sold per kilogramme

liveweight, from selected auction markets in Great Britain.

Month	*1995*	*1996*
January	121	117
February	121	120
March	122	113
April	124	104
May	122	102
June	126	104
July	122	103
August	121	97
September	126	97
October	127	98
November	127	108
December	121	109

Source:
MLC

Fisheries

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the benefits accruing to the United Kingdom arising from the allocation of United Kingdom funding to help the European Union secure fishing rights in waters off *(a)* Morocco, *(b)* Mauritania, *(c)* Guinea, *(d)* the Seychelles, *(e)* Angola and *(f)* Sao Tome. [12657]

Mr. Baldry: Some European Community fisheries agreements with third countries benefit mainly southern member states. Thus except for Mauritania, where one UK vessel fished in 1996, the UK does not benefit directly from the fisheries agreements between the EU and third countries listed. However, other fisheries agreements bring far greater benefits to the United Kingdom. The Government are concerned to achieve value for money from the agreements as a whole.

Beef Exports

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of beef exports from the United Kingdom during 1995–96 in cash terms derived from *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Northern Ireland. [12824]

Mr. Baldry: The information requested is not available.

Avropacia

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from Roche Products Ltd. on Avropacia; and if he will make a statement. [12181]

Mrs. Browning: Officials of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate have had regular contact with Dr. A. J. Mudd, technical manager of Roche Products Ltd. and I have met Dr. Mudd twice.

Avoparcin has been used as a dietary enhancer in the European Community for over 20 years. It has been assessed on a number of occasions by the UK's independent scientific Veterinary Products Committee and by the EU Commission's Scientific Committee on Animal Nutrition. In 1995 Denmark and Germany introduced unilateral bans on its use in animal feed as a result of work by the Danish Veterinary Laboratory which purported to establish a link between the use of Avoparcin in animal feed and resistance to vancomycin in the treatment of humans. Danish and German data were examined by the SCAN, which agreed that the data identified the existence of what might, with the benefit of further studies, prove to be a hazard but concluded that the data failed to establish any risk associated with that potential hazard. The VPC agreed. The UK therefore opposed a ban on use but fully supported the EU Commission's proposal to set up a programme to examine the problem of the development of antibiotic resistance in humans and animals, which we take very seriously. The proposed ban was approved by qualified majority in standing committee in Brussels on 19 December with the UK voting against and, subject to formal adoption of the amending directive by the European Commission, the ban will enter into force on 1 April 1997.

Departmental Publications

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the *(a)* White Papers, *(b)* Green Papers, *(c)* consultation papers, *(d)* draft regulations and *(e)* circulars, for which his Department has been responsible issued in 1996 which his Department assesses could give rise, (i) directly and (ii) indirectly, to significant environmental effects. [12712]

Mr. Boswell: The Department issues a wide range of documents concerning departmental policies, which have varying environmental effects. However, we do not keep central records in the form requested and the information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Training

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many action for community employment workers are employed *(a)* by each district council and *(b)* in charity shops; how many action for community employment employers there are; and what was the average number of employees per scheme in 1995 and 1996; [11699]

(2) if he will list the *(a)* annual costs, *(b)* staff numbers and *(c)* trainee throughput of each training centre in Northern Ireland, indicating the overall cost per trainee for each centre. [11698]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Ian Walters. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Ian Walters to Mr. Robert McCartney, dated 24 January 1997:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me, as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency, to reply to your questions about the Agency's Training Centres and the Action for Community Employment (ACE) scheme.

Training Centres (11698)

You requested information on Training Centres and the most recent available is set out below.

Training Centre annual costs for 1995–96

	£
Ballymena	1,763,966
Dundonald	1,322,484
Felden	1,393,863
Lisburn	1,086,375
Boucher Road	1,093,757
Newry	1,397,222
Craigavon	1,097,476
Omagh	1,091,301
Enniskillen	831,419
Springtown	1,233,025
Maydown	806,751

In line with the practice in all Training Organisations, the Training Centres' annual costs shown above do not include training allowances. In addition, the Agency has a provision for capital equipment which is administered centrally.

Training Centres normally provide 12 months in-Centre training followed by a period of monitored training and work experience with employers. For completeness therefore, the average numbers of trainees occupying training places are best presented as follows:

Training Centre	*Average occupancy*	*In-Centre*	*In placements*
Ballymena	464	219	245
Dundonald	392	154	238
Felden	481	210	271
Lisburn	384	126	258
Boucher Road	229	135	94
Newry	470	150	320
Craigavon	390	156	234
Omagh	348	126	222
Enniskillen	233	110	123
Springtown	300	170	130
Maydown	287	109	178

I should mention that Boucher Road Training Centre closed in September 1996.

The current numbers of staff at each Training Centre are:

Training Centre	*Number of staff*
Ballymena	40
Dundonald	40
Felden	41.5
Lisburn	42.5
Newry	46
Craigavon	27
Omagh	30
Enniskillen	22
Springtown	43
Maydown	21

The average cost of each training place in 1995–96 was £5,237. The information you requested on trainee throughput is not held in a form which would allow for a full reply to your question. That information could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost. Trainees are continually recruited to the Centres for varying lengths of time and of course there is therefore a continual outflow. On average, the Centres recruit approximately 2,000 trainees per annum and a similar number leave the system, either on completion of training or prematurely.

ACE (11699)

Nine of the District Councils employ the following numbers of ACE workers:

District Councils	*Places filled at 17 December 1996*
Antrim Borough Council	1
Armagh District	13
Banbridge District Council	1
Lisburn Borough Council	6
North Down Borough Council	12
Dungannon District Council	15
Limavady Borough Council	17
Omagh District Council	27
Strabane District Council	16

The current number of ACE employees in charity shops is 115.

The Agency generally holds information about ACE for financial years. At the end of December 1996, the 229 ACE providers' individual occupancy averaged 32, amounting to a total average occupancy in the current financial year to date of 7,294. In 1995/96 there were 237 ACE providers who maintained a total average occupancy of 7,757 employees, giving an average of 33 employees with each provider. In 1994/95, 248 ACE providers had a total average occupancy of 9,562, with an average of 39 employees each.

I hope you find this information useful.

Police Authority for Northern Ireland

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the cost to the Police Authority for Northern Ireland for each year since 1 January 1993, of *(a)* fair employment settlements, *(b)* tribunal costs, *(c)* legal fees and *(d)* police officers' time on *(a)* to *(c)*. [11697]

Sir John Wheeler: The costs associated with fair employment cases arising from actions taken by civilian employees against the Police Authority for Northern Ireland, which have been settled or heard during the period 1 January 1993 to date, are set out in the table.

	Settlement £	*Legal costs* £
1993	3,000	1,880
1994	—	—
1995	19,000	3,642
1996	22,639	[1]—

[1] Not yet quantified.

No costs in respect of tribunals or police officers' time were incurred.

Information in respect of actions taken by police officers against the Chief Constable is held in such a way that it has not been possible to disaggregate the fair employment cases from other cases. To do so accurately would be possible only at disproportionate cost.

Police Complaints

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many complaints of discriminatory conduct towards police officers were made in 1996 against RUC personnel of assistant chief constable rank and above; and what was the outcome of the complaints. [11696]

Sir John Wheeler: I understand that, in 1996, the Police Authority appointed a senior officer from another police force to investigate three complaints which had been made against two senior RUC officers by a serving police officer.

The investigation substantiated two of the three complaints, but the authority found there were no grounds for recommending formal discipline against any senior officer. A number of recommendations were made to the RUC to put right certain shortcomings identified by the investigating officer.

Public Entertainments Licences (Drug Misuse) Bill

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to extend the provisions of the Public Entertainments Licences (Drug Misuse) Bill to Northern Ireland. [12865]

Mr. Moss: The Department is keeping abreast of legislative developments in this area in Great Britain and will take these into account during the current review of entertainments licences conditions.

Magheramorne Landfill Project

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the potential for conflict of interest arising from the appointment on short-term contract to the Department of the Environment, Northern Ireland, of the representative of the applicant at the public inquiry into the Magheramorne landfill project. [12953]

Mr. Moss: The person concerned was appointed by the Environment and Heritage Service through the Government Purchasing Agency to prepare the specification for a waste strategy for Northern Ireland and was deemed to be the best person for the job. However, because the Department recognised a potential conflict of interest, steps have been taken to ensure that the consultant will not be involved in any way with the Department's consideration of the report of the planning appeals commission into the Magheramorne landfill project, nor will he have access to any papers relating to the project.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the officer on short-term contract to the Department of the Environment, Northern Ireland, will provide advice through permanent officials to the Environment Minister when he considers the outcome of the public inquiry into the Magheramorne landfill project. [12955]

Mr. Moss: The consultant will not be providing advice through permanent officials to the Environment Minister when he considers the outcome of the public inquiry into the Magheramorne landfill project. He has not and will not be involved in any aspect of the Magheramorne landfill project while contracted with Environment and Heritage Service.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the role within the Department of the Environment, Northern Ireland, waste management and contaminated land section and the water quality unit, Northern Ireland, of the officer on short-term contract since August 1996 who acted on behalf of the applicant during the public inquiry in respect of the Magheramorne landfill project. [12952]

Mr. Moss: The consultant has been engaged on a short-term contract by the Environment and Heritage Service to advise the service's waste management and contaminated land unit. He is engaged on work involved in the preparation of a Northern Ireland waste strategy and the auditing of operational landfill sites in consultation with the district councils, and has no involvement with the service's water quality unit.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what access the officer appointed on short-term contract to the Department of the Environment, Northern Ireland, has to information related to consent to discharge from the Magheramorne landfill project. [12954]

Mr. Moss: The officer engaged by the Environment and Heritage Service is not involved in water quality issues and has had no involvement with the Water Act consent consideration.

TRANSPORT

Parking Penalties

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what regulations and operational guidelines govern the issuing of penalties in respect of *(a)* private car parks and *(b)* wheel clamping. [12559]

Mr. Watts: The charges levied and the terms and conditions of use that apply in private car parks are a contractual matter between owner and user.

Wheel clamping on the public highway by the police is authorised under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. The charges for release are stipulated in the Vehicles (Charges for Release from Immobilisation Devices) Regulations 1992. Wheel clamping of vehicles in on-street parking places by local authority parking attendants is authorised under the Road Traffic Act 1991. Operational guidelines are contained in local authority circular 5/92 in respect of London and local authority circular 1/95 in respect of authorities elsewhere.

Wheel clamping on private land is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. No regulations exist, but case law has helped to establish what might be regarded as reasonable practice.

Roads Programme

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to publish the study undertaken by his Department into the total cumulative environmental impact of the national roads programme. [12456]

Mr. Watts: The Department of Transport commissioned the Transport Research Laboratory to produce a study on the assessment of the total and cumulative environmental effects of the trunk road programme. TRL has completed its study and it is now finalising its report for publication in due course.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the *(a)* first year and *(b)* full-year costs of reducing vehicle excise duty to £10 per annum for vehicles of engine size of 1500 cc and below. [12750]

Mr. Bowis: The most recent data for 1995, from vehicle licensing statistics, show around 9.29 million vehicles with an engine size of 1500 cc or below in the private and light goods vehicle tax class. Reducing the vehicle excise duty for these vehicles from £145 to £10 implies a revenue loss of around £1.25 billion. The losses in future years would depend upon the growth in the vehicle stock and the behavioural response to the change in the structure of vehicle excise duty. There would also be significant administrative and enforcement costs associated with implementing such a change in the tax system.

A74

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the answer from the Minister of State, Scottish Office, of 22 January, *Official Report,* column *608,* what assessment he has made of the merits of including the construction of the A74 from the Scottish border to junction 44 on the M6 in the M6—design, build, finance and operate—contract; and when he expects construction to begin. [13002]

Mr. Watts: The bid from the private sector for constructing the improvements to the A74 between Carlisle and Guardsmill as part of the M6 DBFO is being assessed for value for money and affordability.

Local Roads and Transport (Capital Allocation)

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 13 December 1996, *Official Report,* column *365,* if he will list for each eligible local authority in England *(a)* the spending approvals and *(b)* the transport supplementary grant awards made for local transport capital expenditure for 1997–98 for (i) major highway schemes, eligible for TSG, (ii) major highway schemes, not TSG eligible, (iii) structural maintenance on carriageways, (iv) structural maintenance on bridges, (v) major public transport projects, (vi) minor works: packages, (vii) minor works: non-packages and (viii) minor works: local safety schemes and for each authority the total amounts. [12487]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 24 January 1997]:* Department of Transport support for local authority capital expenditure on transport infrastructure is mainly given as transport supplementary grant, grant under section 56 of the Transport Act 1968, or credit approvals—annual capital guideline and supplementary credit approval.

TSG is given for major highway schemes on roads of more than local importance, structural maintenance on the carriageways of principal roads, and assessment, strengthening, and structure maintenance of bridges and highway structures. It is payable at a rate of 50 per cent. of accepted expenditure. Credit approvals are given to fund the other 50 per cent. Credit approvals are also allocated in association with section 56 grant. Additionally, they may be applied to schemes and programmes where grant is not suitable.

Allocations for minor works in 1997–98 are restricted to transport packages, and local safety schemes.

Relevant details are set out in the table:

All figures in £000

	Highway schemes		*Structural maintenance*			*Public transport*	*Packages*	*Local safety*[1]	*Totals*
	TSG eligible	*Non TSG funding*	*Bridges*		*Principle roads*				
	Accepted for grant[2]	*SCA*[3]	*Accepted for grant*	*SCA*	*Accepted for grant*[2]	*S56 SCA/ACG*[4]	*SCA*	*SCA*	
City of London	0	39	0	0	0	0	0	0	39
Barking/Dagenham	0	191	0	0	76	0	0	326	593
Barnet	0	384	0	0	224	0	0	553	1,161
Bexley	2,415	532	0	0	885	0	0	376	4,208
Brent	0	491	0	0	220	0	0	652	1,363
Bromley	0	9,357	0	0	510	0	0	250	10,117
Camden	0	295	0	0	650	0	0	421	1,366
Croydon	0	760	0	0	805	0	0	651	2,216
Ealing	0	872	0	0	183	0	0	275	1,330
Enfield	194	315	0	0	547	0	0	651	1,707
Greenwich	7,871	290	0	0	449	0	0	326	8,936
Hackney	0	228	0	0	200	0	0	549	977
Hammersmith and Fulham	0	2,045	0	0	560	0	0	301	2,906
Haringey	0	320	0	0	176	0	0	335	831
Harrow	2,600	284	0	0	226	0	0	300	3,410
Havering	0	329	0	0	81	0	0	246	656
Hillingdon	244	297	0	0	393	0	0	326	1,260
Hounslow	550	306	0	0	438	0	0	544	1,838
Islington	0	383	0	0	450	0	0	375	1,208
Kensington and Chelsea	750	920	0	0	227	0	0	200	2,097
Kingston	550	4,201	0	0	472	0	0	325	5,548
Lambeth	0	346	0	0	766	0	0	250	1,362

All figures in £000

	Highway schemes		*Structural maintenance*			*Public transport*	*Packages*	*Local safety*[1]	*Totals*
	TSG eligible Accepted for grant[2]	*Non TSG funding SCA*[3]	*Bridges Accepted for grant*	*SCA*	*Principle roads Accepted for grant*[2]	*S56 SCA/ACG*[4]	*SCA*	*SCA*	
Lewisham	0	389	0	0	563	0	0	350	1,302
Merton	0	302	0	0	200	0	0	526	1,028
Newham	350	1,868	0	0	633	0	0	476	3,327
Redbridge	0	315	0	0	308	0	0	325	948
Richmond	0	1,724	0	0	220	0	0	161	2,105
Southwark	0	303	0	0	650	0	0	391	1,344
Sutton	0	287	0	0	214	0	0	180	681
Tower Hamlets	0	447	0	0	0	0	0	301	748
Waltham Forest	0	492	0	0	150	0	0	250	892
Wandsworth	0	1,274	0	0	330	0	0	391	1,995
Westminster	750	607	0	22,000	194	0	0	360	23,911
Isle of Wight	0	0	160	0	500	0	0	364	1,024
Bath/North east Somerset	0	0	1,242	0	344	0	325	100	2,011
Bristol	0	1,750	1,857	0	227	0	500	240	4,574
North Somerset	0	794	353	0	315	0	250	140	1,852
South Gloucestershire	0	1,000	342	0	302	0	425	135	2,204
Hartlepool	0	2,500	45	0	190	0	150	70	2,955
Middlesbrough	0	0	590	0	170	0	310	220	1,290
Redcar/Cleveland	2,708	0	580	0	542	0	424	140	4,394
Stockton	913	0	552	0	351	0	366	120	2,302
East Riding of York	0	0	262	0	1,322	0	0	240	1,824
Hull	1,126	400	403	0	201	0	1,200	381	3,711
North east Lincolnshire	6,020	0	230	0	515	0	0	284	7,049
North Lincolnshire	0	0	448	0	425	0	0	146	1,019
York	977	0	309	0	126	0	600	200	2,212
Luton	0	0	350	0	98	2,300	0	404	3,152
Milton Keynes	0	0	174	0	172	0	0	60	406
Derby	0	0	236	0	94	0	470	180	980
Bournemouth	0	0	204	0	74	0	200	86	564
Poole	0	0	80	0	84	0	275	0	439
Darlington	0	0	220	0	130	0	0	90	440
Brighton and Hove	0	750	445	0	211	0	850	350	2,606
Portsmouth	0	0	57	0	191	0	0	27	275
Southampton	0	600	196	0	208	0	417	250	1,671
Leicester City	0	0	491	0	149	0	2,256	301	3,197
Rutland	0	0	54	0	86	0	0	29	169
Stoke on Trent	0	0	702	0	800	0	676	395	2,573
Thamesdown	0	0	311	0	143	0	300	200	954
Bolton	0	0	899	0	364	0	360	270	1,893
Bury	0	0	750	0	474	0	373	260	1,857
Manchester	972	0	1,491	0	843	0	1,134	871	5,311
Oldham	1,000	0	1,630	0	470	0	360	501	3,961
Rochdale	0	0	790	0	361	0	486	275	1,912
Salford	4,621	0	602	0	627	0	423	650	6,923
Stockport	0	800	1,217	0	616	0	360	290	3,283
Tameside	0	0	615	0	539	0	333	320	1,807
Trafford	10,747	0	863	0	198	0	257	309	12,374
Wigan	0	0	501	0	501	0	414	215	1,631
Knowsley	1,800	0	128	0	522	0	936	298	3,684
Liverpool	0	0	914	0	408	0	1,524	655	3,501
St Helens	0	0	327	0	199	0	346	125	1,197
Sefton	220	0	605	0	540	0	957	225	2,547
Wirral	270	0	300	0	204	0	928	433	2,135
Barnsley	8,000	0	853	0	717	0	0	325	9,895
Doncaster	1,104	0	879	0	449	0	0	0,300	2,732
Rotherham	0	0	217	0	425	0	0	185	827
Sheffield	1,000	1500	2,698	0	1,724	0	0	410	7,332
Gateshead	0	0	736	0	192	0	601	325	1,854
Newcastle Upon Tyne	5,000	0	1,105	0	903	0	595	280	7,883
North Tyneside	0	0	342	0	516	0	512	170	1,540
South Tyneside	0	0	665	0	153	0	570	310	1,698

All figures in £000

	Highway schemes		Structural maintenance			Public transport	Packages	Local safety[1]	Totals
	TSG eligible Accepted for grant[2]	Non TSG funding SCA[3]	Bridges Accepted for grant	SCA	Principle roads Accepted for grant[2]	S56 SCA/ACG[4]	SCA	SCA	
Sunderland	0	0	400	0	449	0	746	375	1,970
Birmingham	2,300	0	1,013	0	843	0	3,427	1,356	8,939
Coventry	3,800	0	480	0	262	0	586	218	5,346
Dudley	6,500	0	700	0	300	0	1,193	379	9,075
Sandwell	1,450	0	1,533	0	649	0	1,012	329	4,973
Solihull	650	0	155	0	133	0	495	426	1,859
Walsall	0	0	589	0	511	0	966	325	2,391
Wolverhampton	3,500	0	1,331	0	528	0	828	372	6,559
Bradford	0	0	1,409	0	5,249	0	1,488	791	8,937
Calderdale	0	0	239	0	1,023	0	1,139	277	2,678
Kirklees	0	0	385	0	2,755	0	930	520	4,590
Leeds	7,355	1500	1,194	0	1,121	0	3,464	656	15,290
Wakefield	237	0	310	0	895	0	729	375	2,546
Bedfordshire	0	750	1,233	0	459	0	800	450	3,692
Berkshire	0	856	950	0	400	0	800	825	3,831
Bucks	8,903	400	766	0	533	0	450	679	11,731
Cambs	3,110	0	1,652	0	1,100	0	1,500	1,180	8,542
Cheshire	7,000	2500	0	2070	3,114	0	450	775	15,909
Cornwall	4,100	0	1,901	0	947	0	300	575	7,823
Cumbria	860	0	1,120	0	818	0	450	500	3,748
Derbyshire	210	0	1,162	0	644	0	130	840	2,986
Devon	0	0	1,412	0	2,064	0	1,700	860	6,036
Dorset	150	0	596	0	260	0	0	180	1,186
Durham	0	0	3,315	0	955	0	200	280	4,750
East Sussex	6,575	195	650	0	951	0	150	526	9,047
Essex	0	201	1,889	0	1,637	0	1,300	1,588	6,615
Gloucestershire	1,750	0	1,460	0	720	0	600	1,615	6,145
Hampshire	5,644	3302	815	0	1,657	0	983	1,472	13,873
Hereford and Worcestershire	6,450	0	826	0	1,436	0	0	325	9,037
Hertfordshire	2,400	0	1,065	0	1,243	0	800	1,042	6,550
Kent	72,834	0	2,160	0	2,335	0	850	1,425	79,604
Lancashire	3,549	0	2,396	0	1,862	240	1,100	1,859	11,006
Leicestershire	0	500	561	0	733	200	394	434	2,822
Lincolnshire	5,090	0	1,171	0	869	0	300	477	7,907
Norfolk	0	903	2,627	0	1,983	0	1,300	900	7,713
Northants	339	0	800	0	1,018	0	450	850	3,457
Northumberland	3,650	0	1,060	0	1,974	0	0	453	7,137
North Yorkshire	0	700	2,153	0	1,573	0	300	1,110	5,826
Nottinghamshire	2,262	80	1,114	0	1,858	0	1,300	870	7,484
Oxfordshire	1,214	0	866	0	885	0	1,100	518	4,583
Shropshire	0	0	1,657	0	1,395	0	750	405	4,207
Somerset	2,985	138	1,603	0	1,582	0	50	500	6,858
Staffordshire	9,400	0	3,014	0	2,332	0	324	494	15,564
Suffolk	0	476	1,150	0	1,241	0	1,200	872	4,939
Surrey	3,500	1,142	1,999	0	2,581	0	850	1,771	11,843
Warwickshire	0	0	1,229	0	879	0	250	940	3,298
West Sussex	427	0	417	0	614	0	350	654	2,462
Wiltshire	0	0	1,383	0	715	0	0	270	2,368
Greater Manchester PTE	0	0	0	0	0	0	4,500	0	4,500
Merseyside PTE	0	0	0	0	0	3,140	5,109	0	8,249
South Yorkshire PTE	0	0	0	0	0	100	5,500	0	5,600
Tyne and Wear PTE	0	0	0	0	0	680	1,226	0	1,906
West Midlands PTE	0	0	0	0	0	25,000	2,990	0	27,990
West Yorkshire PTE	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

[1] Includes £6,000 TSG to Gloucestershire County Council for Safe Town initiative.

[2] 50 per cent. TSG, 50 per cent. Credit Approvals (ACG and SCA).

[3] Includes non-major schemes;

£15 million of S56 grant to West Midlands PTE remainder Credit Approvals (ACG and SCA).

SCOTLAND

Medical Consultants

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many consultants there were in public health medicine in each health board in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985, *(c)* 1990 and *(d)* 1996. [12048]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is set out in the tables.

Consultants in public health medicine in Scotland by health board

Number

	1980	*1985*	*1990*	*1996*
Argyll and Clyde	12	9	7	6
Ayrshire and Arran	7	7	6	6
Borders	2	2	2	2
Dumfries and Galloway	3	1	1	2
Fife	7	6	5	2
Forth Valley	5	3	5	4
Grampian	15	12	12	13
Greater Glasgow	26	23	17	16
Highland	6	5	4	3
Lanarkshire	9	10	6	6
Lothian	31	23	21	11
Orkney	0	0	0	0
Shetland	0	0	0	0
Tayside	15	15	17	6
Western Isles	0	0	0	1
Common Services Agency	10	10	11	11
Total	148	126	114	89

Whole time equivalent

	1980	*1985*	*1990*	*1996*
Argyll and Clyde	12.0	9.0	6.6	6.0
Ayrshire and Arran	6.5	7.0	6.0	5.6
Borders	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
Dumfries and Galloway	3.0	1.0	1.0	2.0
Fife	7.0	6.0	5.0	2.0
Forth Valley	5.0	3.0	4.1	4.0
Grampian	13.9	10.9	10.4	9.8
Greater Glasgow	23.4	21.5	14.8	13.1
Highland	6.0	5.0	4.0	2.8
Lanarkshire	9.0	10.0	6.0	6.0
Lothian	28.8	20.0	18.5	9.9
Orkney	0	0	0	0
Shetland	0	0	0	0
Tayside	14.3	13.5	14.2	5.6
Western Isles	0	0	0	0.1
Common Services Agency	9.5	10.0	10.2	11.0
Total	140.4	119.0	102.8	79.9

1. Includes district medical officer in 1980.
2. Excludes directors of public health medicine (formerly CAMOs).
3. Data for 1996 are provisional.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much has been paid in information technology allowances to general practitioner fundholders in each of the last five years. [12044]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: All GPs are reimbursed a proportion of the costs incurred through purchase, lease, upgrading and maintenance of computer systems. Information relating to the reimbursement of GP fundholders specifically is not separately identified centrally.

Powered Wheelchairs

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many indoor or outdoor powered wheelchairs have been provided by the NHS in Scotland; and how many wheelchairs have been provided in each health board area, in each financial year since 1992–93 and for the 1996–97 financial year so far. [11922]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is not possible to provide the information in the form requested but the table sets out the total number of powered indoor-outdoor wheelchairs issued by each providing centre in each financial year since 1992–93.

Provision of powered indoor-outdoor wheelchairs

	Aberdeen	*Dundee*	*Edinburgh*	*Glasgow*	*Inverness*	*Total*
1992–93	0	2	29	35	0	66
1993–94	30	33	27	206	15	311
1994–95	46	62	29	438	14	589
1995–96	44	82	71	208	44	437
1996–97[1]	52	59	38	197	25	371

[1] For nine months from April to end December 1996.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much funding the Scottish Office has made available in each financial year since 1993 to provide indoor or outdoor powered wheelchairs. [11923]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In February 1992 special funding was made available from the Scottish Office for the provision of powered indoor-outdoor wheelchairs. The information is as follows:

1993–94: £900,000

1994–95: £929,000

1995–96: £956,000

The scheme remains in place but since April 1996 funding is included within the general allocations to health boards for the provision of artificial limb and appliance centre services. The detailed information is no longer available centrally.

Acute Beds

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many acute beds there were in each health board area in Scotland in each year since 1989–90. [12047]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is in the table.

Average available staffed beds in acute specialities[1] as at 31 March

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Argyll and Clyde	1,346	1,315	1,286	1,248	1,204	1,188	1,140
Ayrshire and Arran	1,157	1,138	1,152	1,136	1,107	1,075	971
Borders	347	349	354	354	348	335	336
Dumfries and Galloway	444	447	435	419	406	405	416
Fife	876	863	851	800	791	774	754
Forth Valley	637	625	605	600	588	592	573
Grampian	1,653	1,618	1,640	1,918	1,885	1,843	1,804
Greater Glasgow	4,773	4,615	4,194	4,036	3,899	3,651	3,581
Highland	734	736	740	743	729	724	796
Lanarkshire	1,698	1,691	1,665	1,632	1,592	1,550	1,526
Lothian	3,043	2,855	2,659	2,577	2,455	2,397	2,300
Orkney	62	62	62	62	97	91	85
Shetland	63	53	49	46	46	46	46
Tayside	1,878	1,862	1,801	1,748	1,622	1,589	1,540
Western Isles	86	87	85	97	103	100	95
Scotland	18,798	18,317	17,580	17,414	16,873	16,360	15,963

[1] Includes acute, supra-area and special categories specialty groups. Excludes obstetrics.

Overseas Travel (Diseases)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many laboratory-confirmed cases of disease acquired in tropical countries there were in Scotland in each year from 1991 to 1995; and when he expects the comparable figures for 1996 to be available. [12138]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is in tables. The first table gives the total figures for Scotland 1991 to 1996. The second table gives the information by health board for 1996.

Table 1: Laboratory-confirmed cases[1] of disease acquired (or likely to have been acquired) in tropical countries, in Scotland, 1991–1996

	Number
1991	100
1992	95
1993	88
1994	112
1995	155
1996	130

Table 2: Laboratory-confirmed cases[1] of disease acquired (or likely to have been acquired) in tropical countries, by health board, 1996.

	1996
Argyll and Clyde	3
Ayrshire and Arran	0
Borders	0
Dumfries and Galloway	4
Fife	8
Forth Valley	3
Grampian	17
Greater Glasgow	35
Highland	1
Lanarkshire	1
Lothian	52
Orkney	0
Shetland	0
Tayside	6
Western Isles	0

[1] From Scottish centre for infection and environmental health. Figures relate to the health board to which notification was made, which may differ from the patient's health board of residence.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 11 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *285*, what factors underlay the rate of confirmed diseases acquired from tropical countries relative to population in the Grampian health board area; and what studies have been undertaken to explain this situation. [12137]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The figures given in the answer to the hon. Member's previous question reflect the numbers of patients treated in each health board area. Some of these patients may be resident in other health board areas or may be resident abroad. It may not therefore be valid to make comparisons of incidence between health board areas on the basis of the boards' resident populations. We are not aware of any studies carried out on the number of cases notified to Grampian health board, but the Scottish centre for infection and environmental health continues to monitor the position across Scotland.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 11 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *285*, concerning tropical diseases, what diseases are covered by the figures given in his answer. [12139]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Included in the figures given in my answer to the hon. Member's previous question were all diseases which are exclusively tropical—ascaris, ancylostoma, shistosoma, strongyloides and trichuris among the worm infections, and plasmodium (malaria) in the protozal infections. Also included were other organisms which were known to have been acquired abroad, but which may also be acquired within the United Kingdom, namely, blastocystis, cyclospora, endolimax, entamoeba among the protozoa, and taenia in the worm category, and also salmonella typhi and salmonella paratyphi, which cause typhoid and paratyphoid respectively.

Self-governing Schools

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 10 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *154*, if he will make a further statement on the tendering exercise resulting in the appointment of Ian Dutton as a consultant on

self-governing matters; in what manner tenders were invited for this work; how many and which companies applied for the work; what is the *(a)* value of and *(b)* duration of the contract under which Mr. Dutton is employed; and what assessment he has made of the extent to which his Department's tendering guidelines were complied with. [12140]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: In June 1996 Thomson Partners, a recruitment agency engaged by the Scottish Office, submitted a list of nine possible candidates for this consultancy. Departmental officials interviewed six of those candidates, including Mr. Dutton in August 1996. Four candidates were subsequently invited by officials to tender in writing, on the basis of a one-year contract, renewable by mutual agreement, on a part-time equivalent to a maximum of three days per week. Each was invited to identify a fee as a daily rate, and to submit a plan for the work involved and proposed working methods and priorities.

Mr. Dutton was subsequently appointed on 7 October 1996 on a one-year contract, extendable subject to ministerial approval. Standard Scottish Office terms and conditions for consultancy services apply, together with Scottish Office subsistence rates.

Specialist staff were involved at all stages of this process, and I am satisfied that in all respects the Scottish Office followed the appropriate procedures in this appointment.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will indicate for each health board area in Scotland in 1996 *(a)* the number of cases of food poisoning and *(b)* the population resident in the health board areas. [12142]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is in the tables. The first table indicates notifications of cases of food poisoning to the Common Services Agency for the Scottish health service.

Notifications of food poisoning[1], by health board area; year ending 31 December 1996

	Number
Argyll and Clyde	742
Ayrshire and Arran	401
Borders	286
Dumfries and Galloway	300
Fife	661
Forth Valley	520
Grampian	1,558
Greater Glasgow	1,378
Highland	370
Lanarkshire	1,194
Lothian	1,981
Orkney	32
Shetland	60
Tayside	600
Western Isles	43
Scotland	10,126

[1] Provisional notifications, subject to amendment where a revised diagnosis is subsequently received.

Estimated population resident in health board areas; as at 30th June 1995[1]

	Number
Argyll and Clyde	432,800
Ayrshire and Arran	377,200
Borders	106,200
Dumfries and Galloway	147,900
Fife	351,600
Forth Valley	273,900
Grampian	532,800
Greater Glasgow	912,500
Highland	208,300
Lanarkshire	561,200
Lothian	764,600
Orkney	19,870
Shetland	23,090
Tayside	395,600
Western Isles	29,040
Scotland	5,136,600

[1] *Source*:
General Registers' Office (Scotland).

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 6 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *798*, if he will indicate for each health board area in Scotland for each year from 1986 to 1996 the incidence of food poisoning relative to population. [12143]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information in the table shows the rate of food poisoning notifications per 100,000 population by health board over the period. Notifications reflect the health board area of treatment rather than of residence.

Notifications of Food Poisoning[1,2]—rate per 100,000 population[3]; by health board area; years ending 31 December 1986–1996

	1986	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Argyll and Clyde	98	72	90	103	87	49	38	75	131	146	171
Ayrshire and Arran	44	68	32	48	75	60	92	109	102	118	106
Borders	66	71	129	138	180	219	195	166	223	224	269
Dumfries and Galloway	202	214	176	198	169	127	158	212	229	232	203
Fife	77	81	164	151	158	168	151	156	159	180	188
Forth Valley	75	98	118	110	123	133	177	134	180	150	190
Grampian	133	157	180	213	259	230	310	218	207	332	292
Greater Glasgow	61	58	71	68	81	84	109	80	128	142	151
Highland	82	96	103	170	181	138	164	165	159	157	178
Lanarkshire	50	69	87	93	101	99	140	132	154	170	213
Lothian	162	167	167	158	158	161	206	185	202	213	259

Notifications of Food Poisoning[1,2]—rate per 100,000 population[3]; by health board area; years ending 31 December 1986–1996

	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Orkney	0	5	0	10	5	0	91	147	40	75	161
Shetland	67	107	121	122	89	80	168	201	197	108	260
Tayside	73	88	100	115	131	119	136	144	159	139	152
Western Isles	68	30	36	90	181	75	95	88	123	100	148
Scotland	91	99	113	121	132	124	154	140	162	181	197

Notes:
[1] For 1986–1995 confirmed notifications, adjusted for cases where a revised diagnosis is subsequent received. For 1996 provisional notifications, subject to amendment where a revised diagnosis is subsequently received.
[2] Campylobacters included from 1990 onwards.
[3] Rate based on estimated population resident in health board areas, as at 30 June each year. 1996 rates based on 30 June 1995 population, the latest available.
Source:
Common Services Agency.

Road Building

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 2 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *551*, on the Scottish Office's roads programme, when he expects to be able to announce the programme; and if he will include in his announcement a list of the parliamentary constituencies in which the proposed works lie. [12130]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office roads programme, in terms of new starts of schemes costing above £3 million, for 1996–97 and 1997 to 2000 is in the table. The table includes details of the parliamentary constituencies within which the projects lie.

Year	*Scheme*	*Parliamentary constituencies*
Current:	M6 DBFO	Dumfries/Clydesdale
1996–1997	M8 Newbridge Interchange	Livingston
	A9 Logie Easter	Ross, Cromarty and Skye
	M90 Halbeath Interchange	Dunfermline East
	A96 Blackburn/Kintore Bypass	Gordon
	A830 Loch nan Uamh–Polnish Bridge	Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber
1997–2000	M8 DBFO	Monklands west/Monklands east/Motherwell north
	A828 Creagan Bridge	Argyll and Bute
	A75 The Glen	Galloway and Upper Nithsdale
	A1 Haddington–Dunbar	East Lothian
	M80 DBFO	Monklands west/Cumbernauld and Kilsyth/Falkirk west
	M77 Floak–Fenwick	Kilmarnock and Loudoun

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 2 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *551*, if he will list the parliamentary constituencies within which the roads projects undertaken by his Department over the past five years lie. [12131]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The motorways and trunk roads projects which were completed by the Scottish Office national roads directorate between 1991–92 and 1995–96, including the name of the parliamentary constituency in which each project, or the greater part of its length, lies, are in the table:

Motorways and trunk roads completed 1991–92 to 1995–96.

Year	*Scheme completed*	*Parliamentary constituency*
1991–92	A87 Dornie Bypass	Ross, Cromarty and Skye
	A9 Dornoch Firth Bridge	Ross, Cromarty and Skye/Caithness and Sutherland
	A77 Bennane Hill Bypass	Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley
	A82 Luss Bypass	Dumbarton
	A75 Carrutherstown-Hetland	Dumfries
	M74 Millbank-Nether Abington	Clydesdale
	A7 Dalkeith Bypass	Midlothian
	A76 Cumnock/Auchinleck Bypass	Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley
	M74 Maryville—West of Fullerton Road (Advance Works)	Glasgow Shettleston/Hamilton/ Motherwell north
1992–93	M80 Stepps Bypass	Monklands west/Glasgow Springburn
	M74 Gretna-Kirkpatrick Fleming	Dumfries
	A1 Tower-Dunglass	Roxburgh and Berwickshire
	A96 Nairn Railway Bridge	Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber
	M74 Elvanfoot-Paddy's Rickle Bridge	Clydesdale
	A9 Greenloaning—Blackford	Perth and Kinross
1993–94	M8 St. James Interchange	Paisley north
	A92 Bankhead Interchange	Central Fife
	A929 Tarbrax-Forfar	North Tayside
	M74 Nether Abington—Elvanfoot	Clydesdale
	A96 Bucksburn Diversion	Aberdeen north
	A1(T) Marshall Meadows Improvement Extension	Roxburgh and Berwickshire
	A9 Broombill—Logie Easter	Ross, Cromarty and Skye
	A94 Brechin Bypass (Dualling)	Angus east
1994–95	M74 Maryville—West Of Fullarton Road	Glasgow Shettleston/Hamilton/ Motherwell north
	M74 Muirhouse—Water Of Milk	Dumfries
	M74 Dinwoodie Green—Muirhouse	Dunfries
	M74 Water Of Milk—Ecclefechan	Dumfries
	M74 Eaglefield—Kirkpatrick Fleming	Dumfries
	A830 Eaglesfield—Kirkpatrick Fleming	Dumfries
	A803 Morar Bypass	Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber
	M74 Cleuchbrae-Dinwoodie Green	Dumfries
	M74 Ecclefechan-Eaglesfield Ph 1	Dumfries

Motorways and trunk roads completed 1991–92 to 1995–96.

Year	*Scheme completed*	*Parliamentary constituency*
1995–96	M8 Newbridge-Edinburgh	Livingston/Edinburgh Pentlands
	A87 Skye Bridge Approach Roads	Ross, Cromarty and Skye
	A96 Lhanbryde Bypass	Moray
	M74 Eaglesfield-Ecclefechan Ph 2	Dumfries

Fishing

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the proportion of the Scottish catch of spring fish taken by rod; and what proposals he has to limit the rod catch to conserve stocks. [12168]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: As netting catches of salmon and netting effort have declined over the years the proportion taken by anglers has increased and now represents about 80 per cent. of the overall catch of spring salmon. Any recommendations on the exploitation of spring fish contained in Lord Nickson's task force report, which is due shortly, will be considered fully.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the amount of grant-aided expenditure to each local authority for 1996–97 to support the provision of valuation for non-domestic rating. [11310]

Mr. Kynoch: The lands valuation grant-aided expenditure assessment is distributed in proportion to the number of non-domestic rateable subjects. The relevant GAE figures for each local authority for 1996–97 are shown in the table.

	Grant aided expenditure £000
Aberdeen City	573
Aberdeenshire	659
Angus	310
Argyll and Bute	460
Scottish Borders	406
Clackmannanshire	91
West Dunbartonshire	181
Dumfries and Galloway	540
Dundee City	401
East Ayrshire	275
East Dunbartonshire	148
East Lothian	184
East Renfrewshire	110
Edinburgh	1,186
Falkirk	314
Fife	837
Glasgow	1,748
Highland	947
Inverclyde	159
Midlothian	134
Moray	329
North Ayrshire	327
North Lanarkshire	552
Orkney	107
Perthshire and Kinross	450
Renfrewshire	345
Shetland Islands	126
South Ayrshire	303
South Lanarkshire	578
Stirling	278
West Lothian	274
Western Isles	133

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the amount of grant-aided expenditure to each local authority for 1997–98 to support the provision of valuation for non-domestic rating, valuation for council tax and electoral registration services. [11311]

Mr. Kynoch: The valuation for council tax and electoral registration grant aided expenditure assessments are each distributed in proportion to the number of dwellings valued for council tax. The lands valuation GAE is distributed in proportion to the number of non-domestic rateable subjects. The relevant GAE figures for each local authority for 1997–98 are shown in the table.

GAE (£000)

	Valuation for council tax	*Electoral registration*	*Lands valuation*
Aberdeen City	371	140	545
Aberdeenshire	339	128	636
Angus	179	67	287
Argyll and Bute	160	60	424
Clackmannanshire	76	29	84
Dumfries and Galloway	243	91	520
Dundee City	265	100	368
East Ayrshire	189	71	242
East Dunbartonshire	155	58	132
East Lothian	139	52	174
East Renfrewshire	126	48	107
Edinburgh	761	286	1,109
Falkirk	226	85	297
Fife	560	211	749
Glasgow	1,057	398	1,597
Highland	350	132	956
Inverclyde	143	54	154
Midlothian	118	44	125
Moray	137	52	318
North Ayrshire	222	84	293
North Lanarkshire	482	181	532
Orkney	34	13	100
Perthshire and Kinross	218	82	415
Renfrewshire	286	108	329
Scottish Borders	181	68	390
Shetland Islands	36	13	109
South Ayrshire	180	68	270
South Lanarkshire	460	173	556
Stirling	128	48	263
West Dunbartonshire	157	59	159
West Lothian	224	84	260
Western Isles	49	18	130

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made for his consideration of the Lockerbie case of the acquittal of Juval Avir; and what notification he has received from the US authorities in respect of Juval Avir's previous employment by international intelligence services. [11309]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Juval Aviv was acquitted after trial in the United States of defrauding the General Electric Capital Corporation in 1991. The jury's verdict in that matter has no bearing on the validity of the case against the two Libyan accused in respect of the Lockerbie bombing. It is our understanding that in 1990

the adviser for countering terrorism to the Prime Minister of Israel stated in response to an inquiry from the United States President commission on aviation security and terrorism that

"Juval Aviv does not work and has never worked for the Intelligence Community of the State of Israel. Furthermore, he has never been attached or connected to it."

BSE

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his latest estimate for the number of selective cull subjects which may already have been slaughtered under the over-30-months scheme; and if he will make a statement. [12462]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 2 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *568*, to his earlier question on this subject. The position remains the same.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he intends to put forward to the European Commission on the staged removal of the export ban to ensure that *(a)* Scottish beef herds and *(b)* Northern Irish beef herds are included in the first wave of exemptions; and if he will make a statement. [12577]

Mr. Robertson: Proposals for a UK certified herds scheme will be presented to the European Commission shortly. The proposals are intended to facilitate exports of beef and beef products from animals in the UK whose movements are fully documented and which could be certified as having no association with BSE.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the results of his Department's study of maternal transmission of BSE will be published; and if he will make a statement. [12578]

Mr. Robertson: Interim findings of the long-running study on maternal transmission were released in August last year. These are now being given further consideration in view of subsequent evidence and it is expected that the final results will be made available soon.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if *(a)* hill livestock compensatory allowances, *(b)* beef and *(c)* suckler cow premium payments will be paid to those producers who will no longer be able to meet the animal retention conditions of those schemes due to the requirements of the over-30-months scheme or the selective cull; and if he will make a statement. [12644]

Mr. Robertson: We are consulting with the European Commission on the position of animals slaughtered under the selective cull while in a retention period for the schemes listed. The normal retention period rules apply to animals entering the over-30-months scheme.

Land Court

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will introduce amendments to crofting law to require applications to the land court for the resumption of tenanted land to receive the same publicity as applications to the Crofters Commission to decroft vacant or untenanted croft land; and if he will make a statement. [13028]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Before approving an application for the resumption of tenanted land from crofting tenure, the Scottish land court must be satisfied that the land is required for a "reasonable purpose" as defined by the Crofters (Scotland) Act 1993. The land court may make such inquiries as it considers necessary before coming to a decision on any application.

Although the procedures differ somewhat from those specified for the consideration of decrofting applications by the Crofters Commission, they do, nevertheless, provide protection against land being unnecessarily removed from crofting tenure. My right hon. Friend has no plans to amend the Crofters (Scotland) Act 1993.

Public Bodies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what European legislation non-departmental public bodies have to abide by in awarding contracts; and what redress is available when these guidelines have not been met in the award of a contract. [12156]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 23 January 1997]:* In circumstances where non-departmental public bodies are contracting authorities, they are, when awarding contracts, subject to the general provisions in the treaty of Rome—for instance, non-discrimination—and the EC procurement directives covering supplies, services, works and the associated remedies. These directives have been converted into the following UK regulations—the Public Supply Contracts Regulations 1995, the Public Services Contracts Regulations 1993 and the Public Works Contracts Regulations 1991.

The remedies directive, EC/89/665, requires that member states provide for national means of redress. In the UK this has been achieved through provisions in the UK regulations referred to above, which give aggrieved providers the right to bring an action in the High Court, or Court of Session in Scotland.

The European Commission also has powers under the treaty of Rome and EC/89/665 to challenge a contracting authority's actions in respect of the award of a contract in the event of a provider raising a complaint with it. The treaty of Rome also allows the Commission various other legal means by which an award procedure may be challenged.

District Councils (Rent Arrears)

Mr. George Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each district council area, up to 31 March 1996 *(a)* the number of council tenants, *(b)* the number of tenants in arrears, *(c)* the percentage of tenants in arrears, *(d)* the total amount of arrears and *(e)* the total amount of arrears as a percentage of (i) net and (ii) gross rental income. [12742]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 24 January 1997]:* The available information, which is given in the following table, is derived from the returns submitted by local authorities to the Scottish Office.

Authority	Estimated stock as at 31 March 1996 (including voids)	Number of households in rent arrears	Total rent arrears as at 31 March 1996 (£)	Total arrears as a percentage of gross rental income from houses in 1995–96
Berwickshire	0	0	0	0
Ettrick and Lauderdale	3,437	1,114	111,248	2.6
Roxburgh	4,390	938	67,187	1.0
Tweeddale	1,173	264	18,261	1.3
Clackmannan	6,942	1,833	418,578	4.1
Falkirk	23,666	3,476	789,943	2.6
Stirling	9,181	1,991	823,500	5.7
Annandale and Eskdale	4,000	915	124,346	2.0
Nithsdale	5,900	1,901	263,297	3.2
Stewartry	1,960	447	51,021	1.7
Wigtown	3,454	1,114	128,023	2.2
Dunfermline	15,300	5,082	550,170	2.6
Kirkcaldy	23,171	8,468	1,800,599	6.1
North East Fife	5,150	807	90,621	1.3
City of Aberdeen	30,768	8,693	1,425,733	3.8
Banff and Buchan	9,349	2,068	171,881	1.5
Gordon	4,914	603	132,054	1.7
Kincardine and Deeside	3,251	739	127,706	2.6
Moray	8,054	1,150	92,707	0.9
Badenoch and Strathspey	895	209	38,331	2.7
Caithness	3,383	1,303	115,377	2.1
Inverness	5,848	1,293	133,166	1.3
Lochaber	2,220	236	48,987	1.3
Nairn	791	244	25,624	1.5
Ross and Cromarty	5,264	2,113	226,621	2.5
Skye and Lochalsh	781	143	28,250	2.0
Sutherland	1,543	193	21,974	0.8
East Lothian	11,174	4,529	620,837	4.4
City of Edinburgh	33,875	18,515	1,654,289	2.5
Midlothian	8,664	2,568	188,842	2.2
West Lothian	15,840	7,761	703,700	3.6
Argyll and Bute	6,231	1,974	167,710	1.6
Bearsden and Milngavie	1,378	336	118,366	5.5
Clydebank	7,893	2,932	444,099	3.6
Clydesdale	7,555	2,572	460,367	4.5
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	3,103	1,418	275,632	6.3
Cumnock and Doon Valley	7,859	2,954	412,000	3.9
Cunninghame	17,335	6,914	760,696	3.1
Dumbarton	9,256	3,305	898,718	5.8
East Kilbride	8,705	1,432	253,311	4.2
Eastwood	1,612	294	37,496	1.9
City of Glasgow	120,000	64,902	10,717,000	5.1
Hamilton	16,200	3,646	360,473	1.6
Inverclyde	14,344	5,377	939,885	4.5
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	13,084	4,071	256,530	1.8
Kyle and Carrick	12,000	4,687	730,302	4.0
Monklands	21,020	8,958	1,059,182	3.5
Motherwell	29,575	9,407	732,403	1.8
Renfrew	27,544	7,549	1,367,302	3.7
Strathkelvin	7,433	1,475	470,318	4.3
Angus	10,756	1,122	92,589	0.8
City of Dundee	24,965	8,645	1,529,860	3.5
Perth and Kinross	10,966	2,193	227,748	1.6
Orkney Islands	1,113	287	50,676	2.7
Shetland Islands	2,502	813	181,195	4.3
Comhairle nan Eilean	2,134	573	124,856	3.2
Scotland	638,901	228,546	33,661,587	3.6

Returns are not yet available for Kincardine and Deeside DC, East Lothian DC, Cumbernauld and Kilsyth DC, Kilmarnock and Loudoun DC and Strathkelvin DC. For these authorities the rent arrears figures for 31 March 1995 have been used.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Assisted Places Scheme

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children *(a)* are currently assisted under the assistance places scheme and *(b)* have been assisted under the scheme since it began; and what assessment she has made of the educational attainment of children assisted to date. [12610]

Mrs. Gillan: The number of children holding assisted places in England in the current academic year 1996–97 is estimated to be some 34,000. Over 80,000 children have been helped since the scheme's inception in 1981.

The Department's annual surveys point to outstanding achievements by assisted pupils in GCSE and A-level examinations. Last year, assisted pupils recorded pass rates of nearly 97 per cent. at GCSE grades A* to C and over 95 per cent. at A-level; some pupils achieved 100 per cent. pass rates. Over 92 per cent. of assisted pupils went on to university and other institutions of further and higher education. In addition, recent independent research has shown that assisted pupils do better than those of similar ability in maintained schools. They take more A and AS levels and get better grades per subject.

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the average parental income of children currently assisted under the assisted places scheme. [12609]

Mrs. Gillan: The average family income under the scheme is England in academic year 1995–96, the latest for which information is complete, was £10,820.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her estimate of the Government's planned expenditure on the assisted places scheme for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02. [12743]

Mrs. Gillan: Planned expenditure on the scheme in England in 1997–98 is £140.5 million. Figures for 1998–99 and 1999–2000 will be published in the education and employment departmental report in March. Expenditure plans for 2000–01 and later years have not yet been made. Questions on the assisted places scheme in Scotland and Wales are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales.

Teachers (Early Retirement)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to alter the deadline for teachers seeking premature retirement before the implementation of proposed changes to the teachers' superannuation scheme; and if she will make a statement. [12660]

Mrs. Gillan: Under the Government's proposals, all teachers actually retiring prematurely before 1 April would fall under the current regulations. The Government do not impose a deadline by which teachers must seek premature retirement.

Teachers (Northamptonshire)

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many full-time equivalent teachers were employed in Northamptonshire in *(a)* local education authority schools, *(b)* grant-maintained schools and *(c)* city technology colleges in the (i) nursery, (ii) primary and (iii) secondary sectors in (1) January 1996 and (2) January 1997. [12629]

Mr. Forth: The available information is in the following table.

Number of teachers in LEA maintained and grant-maintained schools[1] and city technology colleges[2] in Northamptonshire local education authority area

Position as at January 1996

	Number
LEA maintained	
Nursery	18.8
Primary	2,087.5
Secondary	2,076.2
Grant maintained	
Primary	151.8
Secondary	617.2
City Technology Colleges	68.0

[1] Full-time equivalent number of qualified teachers.
[2] Includes all teaching staff.

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list in respect of her initiative for education paid for by vouchers for children under the normal school starting age *(a)* the additional extra resources to be made available as announced at the introduction of the scheme, *(b)* subsequent variations and *(c)* the approximate breakdown into amounts spent so far. [12411]

Mr. Robin Square: The estimated budget for the first year of full implementation of the nursery education voucher scheme was £750 million. It illustrated the order of magnitude of the sums involved. The budget has been revised using more up-to-date data on the number of four-year-olds in school.

The following table shows the estimated budget and the actual budget for 1997–98:

£ million

	Estimated	*Actual*
SSA deduction	565	529
Additional voucher money	165	125
Inspection and administration	20	20

As of mid-November, around £7.7 million had been paid in respect of vouchers redeemed in phase 1. The voucher scheme begins nationwide in April this year.

GCSE Grades

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list *(a)* by local education authority in England and *(b)* in total, the number and percentage of 16-year-olds who left school with fewer than five GCSEs at grades A to C broken down by gender in the last five years for which figures are available. [12187]

Mrs. Gillan: The information requested is not available for 16-year-olds who left school. However, the following table shows the number and percentage of all 15-year-olds—at start of the year—in maintained schools in England who achieved fewer than five GCSEs at grades A* to C, whether they left school or not.

Number and percentage of 15-year-olds in maintained schools in England with fewer than 5 GCSE passes at grades A–C*

LEA	Boys 1991–92		Girls 1991–92		Boys 1992–93		Girls 1992–93	
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
Camden	480	72.5	594	60.7	441	69.8	548	57.6
Greenwich	955	81.7	858	71.7	873	78.1	819	70.1
Hackney	525	85.6	598	76.7	416	80.2	561	73.6
Hammersmith and Fulham	395	73.8	349	72.3	378	74.6	331	69.4
Islington	585	81.9	388	78.4	565	80.9	377	78.7
Kensington and Chelsea	206	68.2	221	75.7	211	68.7	169	69.8
Lambeth	458	88.4	543	76.9	447	85.8	511	73.7
Lewisham	813	79.4	636	69.7	744	80.3	605	68.7
Southwark	784	87.8	678	81.7	679	83.8	646	79.8
Tower Hamlets	903	85.8	758	81.9	864	83.5	758	78.5
Wandsworth	629	77.4	492	69.8	595	75.5	431	67.6
Westminster	500	81.7	407	70.2	466	77.5	410	69.3
Barking and Dagenham	705	86.7	642	82.1	682	84.0	515	76.3
Barnet	937	63.1	712	51.0	893	63.2	647	45.8
Bexley	935	71.4	687	59.2	764	65.8	640	56.2
Brent	702	75.9	569	66.1	657	72.8	548	62.1
Bromley	763	61.8	599	49.5	752	58.1	654	51.5
Croydon	1,002	70.3	754	53.7	1,033	70.0	739	53.8
Ealing	892	76.6	745	69.6	843	76.4	747	68.0
Enfield	1,022	70.8	836	64.1	898	67.1	775	58.6
Haringey	668	80.7	488	70.4	646	80.0	484	69.8
Harrow	538	58.2	458	49.6	579	61.7	435	48.9
Havering	902	65.5	803	57.7	856	62.2	713	54.8
Hillingdon	815	71.1	615	58.0	744	67.9	619	58.8
Hounslow	708	70.0	622	60.2	735	70.4	601	58.7
Kingston upon Thames	347	59.0	307	48.7	276	51.2	259	44.2
Merton	539	69.9	425	63.2	467	71.1	408	61.6
Newham	970	82.9	888	75.8	968	83.8	782	71.8
Redbridge	828	67.3	620	57.4	757	63.7	616	55.0
Richmond upon Thames	408	62.6	320	52.1	417	60.2	328	50.2
Sutton	500	57.5	418	51.2	441	50.2	413	49.5
Waltham Forest	822	78.3	659	69.7	770	74.5	592	62.7
Birmingham	4,486	77.4	3,901	72.3	4,262	76.2	3,534	69.7
Coventry	1,127	71.1	992	63.3	1,142	71.4	896	61.4
Dudley	1,205	68.1	979	61.4	1,100	66.9	839	56.5
Sandwell	1,398	80.3	1,232	75.8	1,266	81.4	1,193	74.4
Solihull	808	64.1	638	52.3	757	61.2	577	50.2
Walsall	1,226	72.0	1,043	64.9	1,190	74.1	965	65.3
Wolverhampton	1,135	79.4	953	71.0	1,005	76.1	876	64.8
Knowsley	771	85.0	703	82.2	711	86.1	576	80.2
Liverpool	2,048	81.7	1,834	75.3	1,752	76.6	1,717	73.8
St. Helens	837	73.8	693	64.9	732	70.7	639	64.0
Sefton	1,047	67.9	922	58.4	958	61.5	748	50.1
Wirral	1,215	65.6	1,047	61.0	1,039	63.4	964	57.8
Bolton	1,150	70.1	864	58.7	955	66.0	818	58.3
Bury	598	64.2	534	55.1	556	61.2	391	45.8
Manchester	1,823	84.8	1,511	77.6	1,665	83.2	1,459	75.6
Oldham	1,109	78.5	918	67.2	1,022	72.7	801	61.7
Rochdale	922	78.0	788	69.9	831	73.5	691	66.3
Salford	898	76.6	789	72.8	766	75.1	690	65.8
Stockport	954	63.7	786	54.8	811	58.0	648	50.1
Tameside	996	74.2	762	65.4	862	71.7	722	64.6
Trafford	635	69.5	562	57.6	593	65.0	506	53.3
Wigan	1,225	66.9	993	54.4	1,138	64.4	906	52.5
Barnsley	1,019	82.2	777	69.0	850	78.3	779	72.7
Doncaster	1,377	76.3	1,159	68.1	1,174	73.0	1,011	63.4
Rotherham	1,148	73.3	1,023	67.1	1,033	70.1	884	61.5
Sheffield	1,946	74.5	1,591	66.8	1,803	71.9	1,369	60.5
Bradford	2,289	80.4	1,966	73.9	2,260	78.0	1,824	71.0
Calderdale	796	72.8	686	61.4	747	73.2	625	59.8
Kirklees	1,640	72.6	1,357	64.1	1,461	70.8	1,119	58.0
Leeds	2,894	73.9	2,299	63.1	2,461	70.8	2,140	61.8
Wakefield	1,386	77.5	1,121	66.6	1,242	71.8	1,004	65.4
Gateshead	778	76.0	736	67.3	688	69.8	590	62.6
Newcastle upon Tyne	983	75.3	945	71.0	914	72.0	793	67.1
North Tyneside	650	68.6	637	62.1	648	67.2	536	58.0
South Tyneside	631	72.8	567	67.3	577	73.0	489	63.3
Sunderland	1,314	76.4	1,186	67.4	1,189	74.6	1,063	64.3
Avon	3,323	68.6	2,617	58.7	3,156	68.2	2,501	57.1
Bedfordshire	2,121	69.8	1,663	60.0	1,909	65.5	1,649	58.3
Berkshire	2,624	64.3	1,976	53.3	2,304	60.2	1,890	51.5
Buckinghamshire	2,101	59.8	1,698	50.0	2,026	58.0	1,683	48.4

Number and percentage of 15-year-olds in maintained schools in England with fewer than 5 GCSE passes at grades A–C*

LEA	Boys 1991–92		Girls 1991–92		Boys 1992–93		Girls 1992–93	
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
Cambridgeshire	2,388	65.4	1,884	55.3	2,236	64.6	1,759	53.0
Cheshire	3,538	63.6	2,884	53.9	3,172	60.8	2,582	50.2
Cleveland	2,596	73.7	2,263	66.5	2,361	72.5	2,110	65.0
Cornwall	1,695	68.0	1,408	55.9	1,589	64.0	1,262	52.4
Cumbria	1,769	67.0	1,499	58.0	1,668	63.7	1,367	55.1
Derbyshire	3,581	67.8	2,969	59.7	3,398	67.5	2,680	56.6
Devon	3,414	67.3	2,850	57.0	3,201	65.1	2,566	53.7
Dorset	2,051	63.4	1,713	55.0	1,899	60.4	1,503	50.6
Durham	2,430	71.8	2,073	64.4	2,209	70.6	1,870	60.7
East Sussex	1,904	65.5	1,497	53.9	1,774	62.0	1,425	53.4
Essex	5,894	67.9	4,864	58.3	5,537	65.6	4,486	56.0
Gloucestershire	1,783	62.8	1,423	51.4	1,603	60.3	1,290	49.9
Hampshire	5,129	65.4	4,308	55.7	4,998	64.5	3,850	52.0
Hereford and Worcester	2,481	68.6	2,000	55.6	2,314	64.6	1,836	54.3
Hertfordshire	3,376	61.8	2,667	50.7	3,206	60.9	2,530	49.1
Humberside	3,854	73.0	3,329	65.3	3,710	72.2	3,054	65.0
Isle of Wight	434	67.6	404	63.5	446	69.6	358	59.8
Isles of Scilly	6	46.2	6	40.0	2	22.2	2	28.6
Kent	5,819	67.5	4,806	58.3	5,369	65.2	4,574	56.7
Lancashire	5,364	67.8	4,499	59.0	4,847	65.3	3,931	55.7
Leicestershire	3,595	71.2	2,918	62.0	3,351	67.1	2,623	57.3
Lincolnshire	2,241	67.6	1,872	59.1	2,071	65.2	1,735	56.9
Norfolk	2,706	69.4	2,300	59.6	2,592	66.5	2,030	55.8
North Yorkshire	2,301	62.2	1,877	52.0	2,058	57.9	1,672	47.3
Northamptonshire	2,334	68.4	2,014	59.2	2,175	67.0	1,814	57.0
Northumberland	1,281	68.6	958	55.2	1,142	63.4	875	54.2
Nottinghamshire	4,184	74.3	3,551	65.9	3,779	71.0	3,140	62.6
Oxfordshire	1,765	63.2	1,393	53.8	1,625	60.1	1,274	50.0
Shropshire	1,629	65.8	1,241	54.5	1,411	61.7	1,093	51.6
Somerset	1,535	64.3	1,155	49.9	1,486	62.7	1,036	48.8
Staffordshire	4,297	71.8	3,428	61.5	3,808	69.2	3,040	57.6
Suffolk	2,283	66.8	1,748	54.8	2,074	63.1	1,633	49.9
Surrey	2,559	60.0	2,091	51.2	2,386	58.1	1,847	47.7
Warwickshire	1,801	68.4	1,459	57.4	1,677	66.0	1,318	54.1
West Sussex	2,089	59.6	1,612	47.8	2,031	58.2	1,604	47.3
Wiltshire	1,842	65.4	1,568	54.4	1,773	62.5	1,430	52.0
Total England	176,817	69.6	146,668	60.3	163.390	67.2	133,985	57.5

LEA	Boys 1993–94		Girls 1993–94		Boys 1994–95		Girls 1994–95	
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
Camden	446	66.3	552	54.9	446	62.9	551	55.4
Greenwich	886	78.1	793	68.0	944	74.2	892	69.2
Hackney	476	82.4	547	73.3	484	85.1	562	69.8
Hammersmith and Fulham	378	70.5	336	65.5	403	73.0	312	62.8
Islington	531	79.7	348	75.8	611	84.5	441	80.2
Kensington and Chelsea	168	60.6	172	71.1	151	58.5	165	69.6
Lambeth	434	85.6	502	72.4	436	82.0	508	72.9
Lewisham	755	76.9	593	68.4	794	76.8	619	64.8
Southwark	723	83.3	699	80.1	715	83.7	590	71.7
Tower Hamlets	781	84.3	670	78.1	828	80.5	739	75.9
Wandsworth	616	76.8	393	63.2	642	75.5	468	63.6
Westminster	462	81.6	420	68.6	458	79.0	414	64.2
Barking and Dagenham	630	76.1	487	68.2	662	74.8	568	69.8
Barnet	881	56.7	554	40.2	828	53.2	626	41.3
Bexley	771	62.9	681	56.5	781	62.9	623	50.8
Brent	608	67.5	529	62.5	703	71.4	565	58.3
Bromley	736	54.6	583	46.7	791	56.4	718	49.0
Croydon	1,083	71.3	771	53.8	1,106	69.4	890	56.9
Ealing	852	72.2	733	63.2	878	74.0	742	59.5
Enfield	904	63.0	769	56.0	1,035	66.0	818	55.1
Haringey	556	76.8	514	66.7	698	78.6	521	65.7
Harrow	553	56.9	452	46.3	561	52.2	424	42.5
Havering	827	61.4	665	53.3	874	61.2	768	54.5
Hillingdon	785	68.9	607	55.5	781	66.8	740	57.9
Hounslow	777	64.8	631	54.5	904	67.3	644	53.9
Kingston upon Thames	300	52.5	267	43.7	319	49.8	286	39.7
Merton	482	71.1	422	62.2	510	65.5	395	56.1
Newham	920	81.8	841	72.4	1,035	81.0	917	71.5

LEA	Boys 1993–94		Girls 1993–94		Boys 1994–95		Girls 1994–95	
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
Redbridge	725	59.6	521	46.8	750	57.9	624	51.8
Richmond upon Thames	372	54.5	326	45.6	427	58.4	308	44.9
Sutton	439	50.4	377	43.8	475	48.9	398	45.1
Waltham Forest	786	74.6	646	64.8	851	73.2	669	60.9
Birmingham	4,070	74.1	3,369	65.0	4,181	72.2	3,565	65.2
Coventry	1,073	70.4	906	61.0	1,224	71.0	997	60.8
Dudley	1,125	62.8	839	53.8	1,151	63.1	923	53.3
Sandwell	1,278	76.9	1,029	68.1	1,398	76.6	1,213	69.4
Solihull	729	57.4	563	46.4	793	57.8	696	46.9
Walsall	1,180	72.0	961	63.0	1,302	73.4	1,074	63.7
Wolverhampton	1,023	76.2	857	64.4	1,091	73.7	929	64.3
Knowsley	646	82.0	604	75.5	766	82.5	701	78.9
Liverpool	1,853	77.7	1,764	72.3	2,154	77.3	1,841	70.2
St. Helens	710	67.6	599	61.2	785	67.3	593	56.9
Sefton	951	58.5	794	51.1	1,050	61.4	878	51.1
Wirral	1,090	63.2	972	57.4	1,172	59.3	1,032	54.5
Bolton	981	62.8	759	53.1	1,054	63.4	804	53.3
Bury	509	56.8	477	52.0	615	57.7	499	51.4
Manchester	1,575	80.8	1,375	72.7	1,650	81.0	1,449	73.9
Oldham	1,042	72.9	904	62.9	1,192	73.7	933	62.1
Rochdale	825	74.2	644	60.9	891	72.0	725	62.1
Salford	782	73.4	705	68.2	905	76.4	775	67.7
Stockport	770	55.2	679	47.6	885	56.7	649	47.7
Tameside	859	71.2	727	60.4	943	69.9	818	63.3
Trafford	587	62.6	486	49.4	609	57.5	537	48.6
Wigan	1,094	62.1	955	54.5	1,264	63.0	1,000	52.0
Barnsley	889	75.7	721	64.5	956	76.6	831	65.5
Doncaster	1,247	71.2	987	61.0	1,311	71.7	1,021	64.8
Rotherham	1,068	68.9	911	61.4	1,124	68.2	986	59.5
Sheffield	1,669	68.6	1,434	60.2	1,796	68.3	1,485	58.8
Bradford	2,234	77.8	1,830	68.6	2,360	76.1	1,923	67.4
Calderdale	728	67.5	584	58.6	823	66.0	673	59.4
Kirklees	1,420	66.6	1,157	58.5	1,608	68.4	1,231	56.2
Leeds	2,466	68.6	2,098	58.9	2,728	69.4	2,170	58.6
Wakefield	1,124	68.5	935	60.1	1,243	69.3	1,113	60.4
Gateshead	738	71.4	579	60.9	775	65.8	707	61.4
Newcastle upon Tyne	930	72.5	787	66.5	1,016	72.6	950	70.5
North Tyneside	599	61.1	518	56.4	732	63.3	587	55.9
South Tyneside	583	68.3	488	60.4	686	71.2	585	60.8
Sunderland	1,304	74.1	1,162	65.8	1,472	74.5	1,192	63.0
Avon	3,056	64.7	2,442	54.8	3,205	63.4	2,589	54.0
Bedfordshire	1,892	63.5	1,638	55.8	2,171	65.2	1,791	56.1
Berkshire	2,204	56.0	1,825	47.4	2,421	55.6	1,943	47.5
Buckinghamshire	2,046	55.4	1,530	45.3	2,192	55.7	1,733	45.9
Cambridgeshire	2,156	62.1	1,683	51.1	2,263	59.4	1,856	51.3
Cheshire	3,013	57.2	2,558	48.8	3,448	58.7	2,736	47.7
Cleveland	2,377	68.8	2,029	61.4	2,625	70.0	2,325	62.7
Cornwall	1,512	59.5	1,165	48.2	1,590	58.0	1,300	49.3
Cumbria	1,722	62.3	1,272	50.4	1,654	60.8	1,372	52.1
Derbyshire	3,167	63.6	2,632	54.4	3,662	64.9	2,846	55.0
Devon	3,082	61.5	2,569	52.5	3,517	62.2	2,667	50.9
Dorset	1,812	55.4	1,435	45.8	2,021	56.4	1,484	45.4
Durham	2,255	69.2	1,990	61.6	2,694	70.9	2,109	59.9
East Sussex	1,826	60.6	1,466	52.5	2,095	62.2	1,662	53.6
Essex	5,346	63.9	4,328	53.1	5,583	62.2	4,461	52.0
Gloucestershire	1,540	58.0	1,335	49.4	1,636	54.9	1,354	46.2
Hampshire	4,730	60.8	3,876	50.6	4,872	59.7	3,906	48.2
Hereford and Worcester	2,182	61.7	1,785	50.6	2,380	61.5	1,998	52.5
Hertfordshire	3,069	58.4	2,450	46.4	3,396	57.9	2,623	46.0
Humberside	3,620	71.8	2,861	60.3	3,899	70.4	3,272	61.8
Isle of Wight	429	63.5	347	55.3	460	62.8	365	58.8
Isles of Scilly	6	42.9	2	18.2	5	62.5	5	38.5
Kent	5,394	63.7	4,397	55.2	5,702	62.7	4,702	53.3
Lancashire	4,739	62.3	3,950	55.3	5,102	62.5	4,243	53.9
Leicestershire	3,181	66.2	2,642	55.2	3,499	65.0	2,829	55.3
Lincolnshire	1,962	60.7	1,704	53.9	2,044	59.0	1,770	51.3
Norfolk	2,516	65.2	2,057	54.4	2,592	62.8	2,006	50.6
North Yorkshire	2,048	55.6	1,669	46.2	2,235	54.4	1,786	45.0
Northamptonshire	2,225	65.1	1,841	56.8	2,342	64.7	1,960	55.1
Northumberland	1,164	63.7	941	53.5	1,278	61.9	1,028	52.3
Nottinghamshire	3,723	68.7	3,256	62.0	3,914	68.5	3,298	59.4
Oxfordshire	1,643	58.8	1,245	48.2	1,752	60.5	1,364	47.7
Shropshire	1,403	59.1	973	45.5	1,531	59.8	1,210	48.8

LEA	Boys 1993–94 Number	Boys 1993–94 Per cent.	Girls 1993–94 Number	Girls 1993–94 Per cent.	Boys 1994–95 Number	Boys 1994–95 Per cent.	Girls 1994–95 Number	Girls 1994–95 Per cent.
Somerset	1,363	57.2	1,055	47.6	1,422	57.3	1,099	47.0
Staffordshire	3,805	67.1	3,032	56.4	4,039	65.6	3,398	56.8
Suffolk	1,973	60.8	1,576	50.8	2,134	59.2	1,711	49.0
Surrey	2,369	56.7	1,938	47.5	2,612	55.7	2,010	45.5
Warwickshire	1,612	62.6	1,267	51.8	1,645	61.8	1,348	50.5
West Sussex	1,982	55.2	1,479	43.6	2,097	54.2	1,669	43.8
Wiltshire	1,691	59.3	1,346	49.4	1,786	57.0	1,381	45.9
Total England	160,229	64.7	132,146	55.4	173.101	64.3	141,799	54.7

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list *(a)* the total expenditure so far incurred in publicity and information relating to the voucher scheme for educating the under fives and *(b)* the amount spent in respect of each principal objective of such expenditure, indicating the body which has spent the money. [12413]

Mr. Robin Squire: The total expenditure to date for publicity and information relating to the voucher scheme within the present financial year in both phase 1 and phase 2 is £1.8 million. This contrasts with a budgeted figure of £674 million in respect of nursery education in the first year of the scheme. All expenditure has been by the Department. There is only one principal objective for the total expenditure—to inform parents and providers about the scheme.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will undertake an appraisal of the principal aspects of the scheme of vouchers for payment for pre-school education that she has introduced in London and Norfolk. [12412]

Mr. Squire: The Department published a report on operation of phase 1 of the nursery voucher scheme in November 1996. Copies of the report, and of a follow-up memorandum on voucher issue and redemption in the autumn terms 1996, have been placed in the Library. Chapter 11 of the report outlines our plans for assessment of the scheme over the longer term.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list, for each local education authority in England and in total, the adjusted education standard spending assessments for 1996–97 and the provisional standard spending assessment levels for 1997–98. [12188]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following table sets out the information requested. Adjustments for the 1996–97 standard spending assessments take account of the introduction of nursery vouchers across the country from 1 April 1997.

£ million

LEA	Adjusted SSA 1996–97	SSAs 1997–98
City of London	0.738	0.856
Camden	76.999	79.938
Greenwich	111.371	112.457
Hackney	89.827	94.082
Hammersmith and Fulham	54.739	56.242
Islington	79.021	81.252
Kensington and Chelsea	34.047	34.802
Lambeth	98.533	98.380
Lewisham	106.232	110.469
Southwark	106.259	108.177
Tower Hamlets	119.896	125.685
Wandsworth	86.140	89.152
Westminster	57.966	59.849
Barking and Dagenham	67.384	72.029
Barnet	113.822	119.078
Bexley	86.189	90.700
Brent	106.608	110.282
Bromley	101.720	108.955
Croydon	114.466	119.578
Ealing	108.249	112.138
Enfield	114.572	120.858
Haringey	90.524	95.922
Harrow	70.981	72.170
Havering	84.857	87.142
Hillingdon	90.396	94.496
Hounslow	92.081	95.836
Kingston upon Thames	45.475	47.242
Merton	55.923	58.274
Newham	126.419	133.837
Redbridge	95.697	100.938
Richmond upon Thames	44.405	46.660
Sutton	65.762	68.664
Waltham Forest	94.350	96.482
Birmingham	433.730	443.493
Coventry	115.977	119.759
Dudley	100.409	103.494
Sandwell	113.478	117.895
Solihull	70.223	74.689
Walsall	104.689	108.890
Wolverhampton	96.273	97.814
Knowsley	70.448	74.498
Liverpool	202.685	210.237
St. Helens	64.302	67.072
Sefton	103.343	106.722
Wirral	128.277	129.871
Bolton	97.188	101.620
Bury	59.278	61.414
Manchester	181.779	181.079
Oldham	91.472	95.222
Rochdale	79.646	83.450
Salford	79.090	82.219
Stockport	86.478	89.660
Tameside	77.360	82.106
Trafford	74.367	78.508
Wigan	106.317	109.464
Barnsley	73.835	76.128
Doncaster	115.355	118.743
Rotherham	98.937	101.960
Sheffield	164.717	168.752

£ million

LEA	Adjusted SSA 1996–97	SSAs 1997–98
Bradford	202.716	208.547
Calderdale	74.477	76.846
Kirklees	136.436	142.943
Lees	243.198	254.113
Wakefield	107.264	111.540
Gateshead	68.383	69.348
Newcastle upon Tyne	96.193	97.852
North Tyneside	66.130	67.864
South Tyneside	56.837	59.553
Sunderland	110.629	113.781
Isle of Scilly	1.221	1.144
Berkshire	275.314	283.861
Cambridgeshire	230.037	235.069
Cheshire	339.235	351.731
Cornwall	160.323	166.765
Cumbria	164.856	170.412
Devon	339.475	352.336
Essex	554.906	571.952
Gloucestershire	178.831	186.578
Hereford and Worcester	224.940	230.843
Hertfordshire	375.146	386.851
Isle of Wight Council	44.225	46.332
Kent	567.869	588.263
Lancashire	493.657	512.237
Lincolnshire	206.774	215.175
Norfolk	243.665	251.023
Northamptonshire	214.993	222.695
Northumberland	109.808	114.431
Nottinghamshire	353.624	364.534
Oxfordshire	187.971	194.610
Shropshire	141.676	146.968
Somerset	146.486	150.758
Suffolk	212.022	220.902
Surrey	298.697	312.125
Warwickshire	158.640	162.615
West Sussex	231.994	238.032
Bath and North-east Somerset	52,939	54.395
City of Bristol	115.110	117.183
North Somerset	57.043	59.661
South Gloucestershire	76.084	79.684
Hartlepool	35.592	36.658
Middlesbrough	59.252	60.571
Redcar and Cleveland	57.566	58.049
Stockton on Tees	69.027	71.334
City of Kingston upon Hull	99.172	101.544
East Riding of Yorkshire	99.703	103.936
North east Lincolnshire	62.665	64.416
North Lincolnshire	54.453	56.494
North Yorkshire	180.572	187.933
York	51.020	52.199
1997 Bedfordshire	136.841	141.956
Luton	76.239	78.070
1997 Buckinghamshire	166.396	170.643
Milton Keynes	80.098	83.340
1997 Derbyshire	228.231	236.436
Derby	80.232	84.216
1997 Dorset	112.932	116.954
Poole	42.429	44.142
Bournemouth	47.899	49.550
1997 Durham	175.723	178.158
Darlington	33.150	34.151
1997 East Sussex	144.436	151.440
Brighton and Hove	69.300	71.771
1997 Hampshire	375.321	387.819
Portsmouth	61.876	62.496
Southampton	72.981	74.843
1997 Leicestershire	193.835	201.137
Leicester	120.849	121.072
Rutland	10.493	10.650
1997 Staffordshire	269.011	279.187
Stoke on Trent	84.229	87.004
1997 Wiltshire	133.070	138.424
Thamesdown	60.465	62.818
Total	17,246.183	17,838.306

To permit comparison, the 1996–97 figures for local authorities which will be re-organised from 1st April 1997 show what their education SSA would have been if they had been re-organised a year earlier.

Pupil Qualifications

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list *(a)* by local education authority in England and *(b)* in total, the number and percentage of 16-year-olds who left school with no formal qualifications, broken down by gender, for the past five years, including 1996. [12192]

Mrs. Gillan: The information requested is not available for 16-year-olds who left school. However, the following table shows the number and percentage of all 15-year-olds—at start of the year—in maintained schools in England who failed to achieve a pass at GCSE, although some of them might have achieved a vocational qualification, for each year since 1992. The information is not yet available for 1996.

Number and percentage of 15-year-olds in maintained schools in England with no GCSE passes

LEA	Boys 1991–92		Girls 1991–92		Boys 1992–93		Girls 1992–93	
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
Camden	125	18.9	98	10.0	91	14.4	80	8.4
Greenwich	229	19.6	142	11.9	154	13.8	132	11.3
Hackney	157	25.6	98	12.6	82	15.8	62	8.1
Hammersmith	109	20.4	61	12.6	49	9.7	59	12.4
Islington	168	23.5	119	24.0	127	18.2	86	18.0
Kensington and Chelsea	41	13.6	39	13.4	23	7.5	13	5.4
Lambeth	158	30.5	137	19.4	145	27.8	108	15.6
Lewisham	146	14.3	116	12.7	103	11.1	91	10.3
Southwark	187	20.9	152	18.3	113	14.0	91	11.2
Tower Hamlets	249	23.7	157	17.0	157	15.2	139	14.4
Wandsworth	107	13.2	76	10.8	108	13.7	55	8.6
Westminster	91	14.9	64	11.0	75	12.5	59	10.0
Barking	128	15.7	83	10.6	91	11.2	56	8.3
Barnet	177	11.9	108	7.7	123	8.7	82	5.8

Number and percentage of 15-year-olds in maintained schools in England with no GCSE passes

LEA	Boys 1991–92		Girls 1991–92		Boys 1992–93		Girls 1992–93	
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
Bexley	91	6.9	64	5.5	59	5.1	56	4.9
Brent	99	10.7	85	9.9	94	10.4	80	9.1
Bromley	136	11.0	61	5.0	71	5.5	56	4.4
Croydon	122	8.6	71	5.1	112	7.6	99	7.2
Ealing	174	14.9	106	9.9	130	11.8	126	11.5
Enfield	138	9.6	87	6.7	96	7.2	73	5.5
Haringey	177	21.4	107	15.4	157	19.5	72	10.4
Harrow	65	7.0	48	5.2	48	5.1	44	4.9
Havering	89	6.5	68	4.9	70	5.1	40	3.1
Hillingdon	114	9.9	63	5.9	79	7.2	60	5.7
Hounslow	128	12.7	70	6.8	112	10.7	87	8.5
Kingston upon Thames	53	9.0	26	4.1	49	9.1	30	5.1
Merton	81	10.5	64	9.5	59	9.0	57	8.6
Newham	227	19.4	173	14.8	159	13.8	112	10.3
Redbridge	110	8.9	66	6.1	78	6.6	63	5.6
Richmond upon Thames	54	8.3	48	7.8	44	6.3	32	4.9
Sutton	51	5.9	45	5.5	63	7.2	32	3.8
Waltham Forest	102	9.7	70	7.4	98	9.5	53	5.6
Birmingham	898	15.5	601	11.1	803	14.4	531	10.5
Coventry	152	9.6	105	6.7	150	9.4	120	8.2
Dudley	93	5.3	43	2.7	79	4.8	46	3.1
Sandwell	172	9.9	161	9.9	175	11.3	131	8.2
Solihull	55	4.4	30	2.5	57	4.6	27	2.3
Walsall	185	10.9	143	8.9	177	11.0	113	7.6
Wolverhampton	173	12.1	111	8.3	130	9.8	75	5.6
Knowsley	187	20.6	156	18.2	200	24.2	119	16.6
Liverpool	501	20.0	318	13.1	438	19.2	322	13.8
St. Helens	130	11.5	96	9.0	92	8.9	78	7.8
Sefton	156	10.1	90	5.7	155	9.9	97	6.5
Wirral	167	9.0	115	6.7	143	8.7	91	5.5
Bolton	172	10.5	124	8.4	135	9.3	121	8.6
Bury	65	7.0	55	5.7	39	4.3	21	2.5
Manchester	537	25.0	405	20.8	458	22.9	331	17.2
Oldham	221	15.7	143	10.5	183	13.0	108	8.3
Rochdale	231	19.5	133	11.8	145	12.8	112	10.7
Salford	143	12.2	110	10.2	154	15.1	111	10.6
Stockport	110	7.3	65	4.5	71	5.1	54	4.2
Tameside	136	10.1	73	6.3	97	8.1	61	5.5
Trafford	83	9.1	59	6.1	75	8.2	38	4.0
Wigan	134	7.3	86	4.7	99	5.6	80	4.6
Barnsley	130	10.5	104	9.2	115	10.6	84	7.8
Doncaster	221	12.3	161	9.5	178	11.1	113	7.1
Rotherham	120	7.7	96	6.3	92	6.2	85	5.9
Sheffield	378	14.5	217	9.1	282	11.2	170	7.5
Bradford	396	13.9	277	10.4	361	12.5	266	10.4
Calderdale	142	13.0	73	6.5	87	8.5	64	6.1
Kirklees	245	10.9	159	7.5	228	11.1	116	6.0
Leeds	497	12.7	293	8.0	397	11.4	295	8.5
Wakefield	179	10.0	131	7.8	164	9.5	98	6.4
Gateshead	109	10.6	90	8.2	125	12.7	81	8.6
Newcastle upon Tyne	199	15.2	167	12.5	189	14.9	153	13.0
North Tyneside	77	8.1	98	9.6	87	9.0	59	6.4
South Tyneside	81	9.3	43	5.1	59	7.5	49	6.3
Sunderland	178	10.3	97	5.5	171	10.7	122	7.4
Isles of Scilly	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Avon	431	8.9	219	4.9	352	7.6	200	4.6
Bedfordshire	196	6.5	119	4.3	171	5.9	128	4.5
Berkshire	325	8.0	190	5.1	223	5.8	175	4.8
Buckinghamshire	231	6.6	177	5.2	205	5.9	132	3.8
Cambridgeshire	283	7.7	166	4.9	248	7.2	171	5.2
Cheshire	408	7.3	291	5.4	319	6.1	205	4.0
Cleveland	456	13.0	303	8.9	382	11.7	297	9.1
Cornwall	138	5.5	98	3.9	114	4.6	73	3.0
Cumbria	220	8.3	145	5.6	176	6.7	110	4.4
Derbyshire	379	7.2	200	4.0	302	6.0	180	3.8
Devon	332	6.5	219	4.4	259	5.3	201	4.2
Dorset	154	4.8	118	3.8	161	5.1	102	3.4
Durham	292	8.6	196	6.1	258	8.2	179	5.8
East Sussex	241	8.3	103	3.7	218	7.6	142	5.3
Essex	636	7.3	444	5.3	580	6.9	414	5.2
Gloucestershire	140	4.9	138	5.0	145	5.5	83	3.2
Hampshire	579	7.4	425	5.5	484	6.2	300	4.1

Number and percentage of 15-year-olds in maintained schools in England with no GCSE passes

LEA	Boys 1991–92		Girls 1991–92		Boys 1992–93		Girls 1992–93	
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
Hereford and Worcester	270	7.5	186	5.2	228	6.4	144	4.3
Hertfordshire	460	8.4	236	4.5	362	6.9	234	4.5
Humberside	499	9.5	383	7.5	490	9.5	335	7.1
Isle of Wight	31	4.8	20	3.1	28	4.4	24	4.0
Kent	796	9.2	498	6.0	613	7.4	365	4.5
Lancashire	795	10.1	537	7.0	626	8.4	434	6.1
Leicestershire	422	8.4	312	6.6	335	6.7	248	5.4
Lincolnshire	241	7.3	146	4.6	247	7.8	116	3.8
Norfolk	276	7.1	230	6.0	245	6.3	188	5.2
North Yorkshire	216	5.8	140	3.9	143	4.0	117	3.3
Northamptonshire	198	5.8	161	4.7	190	5.9	116	3.6
Northumberland	143	7.7	76	4.4	132	7.3	66	4.1
Nottinghamshire	547	9.7	344	6.4	446	8.4	308	6.1
Oxfordshire	231	8.3	116	4.5	152	5.6	91	3.6
Shropshire	136	5.5	74	3.3	107	4.7	62	2.9
Somerset	130	5.4	84	3.6	94	4.0	46	2.2
Staffordshire	541	9.0	320	5.7	421	7.6	216	4.1
Suffolk	132	3.9	125	3.9	131	4.0	95	2.9
Surrey	283	6.6	190	4.6	243	5.9	159	4.1
Warwickshire	143	5.4	108	4.2	146	5.8	89	3.7
West Sussex	192	5.5	152	4.5	179	5.1	109	3.2
Wiltshire	120	4.3	115	4.0	106	3.7	91	3.3
Total England	23,979	69.6	16,104	60.3	19,870	67.2	13,572	57.5

LEA	Boys 1993–94		Girls 1993–94		Boys 1994–95		Girls 1994–95	
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
Camden	97	14.4	92	9.1	110	15.5	98	9.9
Greenwich	191	16.8	144	12.3	208	16.3	174	13.5
Hackney	88	15.2	64	8.6	67	11.8	53	6.6
Hammersmith	65	12.1	54	10.5	80	14.5	64	12.9
Islington	101	15.2	66	14.4	116	16.0	88	16.0
Kensington and Chelsea	34	12.3	30	12.4	19	7.4	30	12.7
Lambeth	117	23.1	75	10.8	77	14.5	73	10.5
Lewisham	98	10.0	70	8.1	97	9.4	74	7.7
Southwark	108	12.4	146	16.7	159	18.6	65	7.9
Tower Hamlets	132	14.3	80	9.3	151	14.7	86	8.8
Wandsworth	114	14.2	64	10.3	102	12.0	55	7.5
Westminster	82	14.5	65	10.6	93	16.0	78	12.1
Barking	103	12.4	62	8.7	129	14.6	78	9.6
Barnet	113	7.3	73	5.3	131	8.4	80	5.3
Bexley	82	6.7	74	6.1	66	5.3	65	5.3
Brent	77	8.5	46	5.4	94	9.5	59	6.1
Bromley	67	5.0	50	4.0	79	5.6	68	4.6
Croydon	148	9.7	106	7.4	159	10.0	112	7.2
Ealing	109	9.2	103	8.9	144	12.1	90	7.2
Enfield	97	6.8	81	5.9	122	7.8	104	7.0
Haringey	103	14.2	82	10.6	165	18.6	116	14.6
Harrow	63	6.5	38	3.9	71	6.6	55	5.5
Havering	106	7.9	58	4.6	89	6.2	56	4.0
Hillingdon	106	9.3	66	6.0	91	7.8	72	5.6
Hounslow	133	11.1	102	8.8	155	11.5	90	7.5
Kingston upon Thames	43	7.7	47	7.7	63	9.8	45	6.2
Merton	66	9.7	66	9.7	68	8.7	72	10.2
Newham	155	13.8	119	10.2	170	13.3	124	9.7
Redbridge	83	6.8	41	3.7	72	5.6	60	5.0
Richmond upon Thames	55	8.1	48	6.7	39	5.3	25	3.6
Sutton	51	5.9	46	5.3	56	5.8	52	5.9
Waltham Forest	132	12.5	59	5.9	133	11.4	87	7.9
Birmingham	823	15.0	572	11.0	847	14.6	606	11.1
Coventry	154	10.1	126	8.5	176	10.2	120	7.3
Dudley	143	8.0	72	4.6	168	9.2	115	6.6
Sandwell	202	12.2	145	9.6	214	11.7	182	10.4
Solihull	43	3.4	43	3.5	69	5.0	39	2.6
Walsall	179	10.9	133	8.7	228	12.9	144	8.5
Wolverhampton	178	13.3	117	8.8	202	13.6	171	11.8
Knowsley	179	22.7	142	17.8	193	20.8	149	16.8
Liverpool	432	18.1	356	14.6	502	18.0	371	14.1
St. Helens	95	9.0	79	8.1	110	9.4	73	7.0
Sefton	132	8.1	110	7.1	153	8.9	129	7.5

LEA	Boys 1993–94 Number	Boys 1993–94 Per cent.	Girls 1993–94 Number	Girls 1993–94 Per cent.	Boys 1994–95 Number	Boys 1994–95 Per cent.	Girls 1994–95 Number	Girls 1994–95 Per cent.
Wirral	184	10.7	147	8.7	170	8.6	115	6.1
Bolton	161	10.3	109	7.6	169	10.2	116	7.7
Bury	37	4.1	24	2.6	59	5.5	23	2.4
Manchester	426	21.8	327	17.3	443	21.7	322	16.4
Oldham	186	13.0	157	10.9	226	14.0	156	10.4
Rochdale	141	12.7	102	9.6	153	12.4	126	10.8
Salford	161	15.1	130	12.6	204	17.2	168	14.7
Stockport	90	6.5	70	4.9	114	7.3	58	4.3
Tameside	111	9.2	81	6.7	130	9.6	90	7.0
Trafford	90	9.6	64	6.5	73	6.9	56	5.1
Wigan	139	7.9	93	5.3	168	8.4	106	5.5
Barnsley	162	13.8	96	8.6	165	13.2	104	8.2
Doncaster	239	13.6	176	10.9	261	14.3	166	10.5
Rotherham	178	11.5	129	8.7	179	10.9	130	7.8
Sheffield	270	11.1	242	10.2	312	11.9	282	11.2
Bradford	339	11.8	281	10.5	411	13.2	307	10.8
Calderdale	112	10.4	84	8.4	131	10.5	84	7.4
Kirklees	247	11.6	142	7.2	286	12.2	189	8.6
Leeds	446	12.4	373	10.5	462	11.8	385	10.4
Wakefield	187	11.4	116	7.5	172	9.6	128	6.9
Gateshead	135	13.1	104	10.9	144	12.2	122	10.6
Newcastle upon Tyne	240	18.7	192	16.2	269	19.2	207	15.4
North Tyneside	81	8.3	84	9.1	116	10.0	87	8.3
South Tyneside	83	9.7	61	7.5	73	7.6	75	7.8
Sunderland	177	10.1	173	9.8	237	12.0	154	8.1
Isles of Scilly	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Avon	365	7.7	268	6.0	385	7.6	257	5.4
Bedfordshire	186	6.2	142	4.8	222	6.7	127	4.0
Berkshire	254	6.5	169	4.4	300	6.9	186	4.6
Buckinghamshire	227	6.2	134	4.0	276	7.0	179	4.7
Cambridgeshire	247	7.1	205	6.2	265	7.0	192	5.3
Cheshire	325	6.2	261	5.0	349	5.9	261	4.5
Cleveland	399	11.5	354	10.7	483	12.9	396	10.7
Cornwall	98	3.9	78	3.2	100	3.6	80	3.0
Cumbria	212	7.7	148	5.9	214	7.9	160	6.1
Derbyshire	345	6.9	258	5.3	422	7.5	272	5.3
Devon	275	5.5	226	4.6	328	5.8	238	4.5
Dorset	162	5.0	128	4.1	184	5.1	128	3.9
Durham	349	10.7	261	8.1	413	10.9	288	8.2
East Sussex	236	7.8	181	6.5	273	8.1	223	7.2
Essex	619	7.4	433	5.3	618	6.9	502	5.8
Gloucestershire	126	4.7	109	4.0	164	5.5	107	3.7
Hampshire	454	5.8	349	4.6	478	5.9	365	4.5
Hereford and Worcester	253	7.2	170	4.8	279	7.2	237	6.2
Hertfordshire	313	6.0	253	4.8	375	6.4	290	5.1
Humberside	583	11.6	408	8.6	599	10.8	464	8.8
Isle of Wight	35	5.2	25	4.0	43	5.9	35	5.6
Kent	635	7.5	410	5.1	663	7.3	489	5.5
Lancashire	627	8.2	527	7.4	713	8.7	550	7.0
Leicestershire	388	8.1	276	5.8	439	8.2	332	6.5
Lincolnshire	247	7.6	178	5.6	246	7.1	214	6.2
Norfolk	306	7.9	207	5.5	303	7.3	246	6.2
North Yorkshire	222	6.0	162	4.5	242	5.9	156	3.9
Northamptonshire	199	5.8	155	4.8	259	7.2	202	5.7
Northumberland	160	8.8	136	7.7	152	7.4	127	6.5
Nottinghamshire	555	10.2	410	7.8	629	11.0	473	8.5
Oxfordshire	241	8.6	119	4.6	266	9.2	154	5.4
Shropshire	111	4.7	67	3.1	162	6.3	111	4.5
Somerset	107	4.5	68	3.1	128	5.2	65	2.8
Staffordshire	510	9.0	339	6.3	518	8.4	372	6.2
Suffolk	133	4.1	100	3.2	153	4.2	129	3.7
Surrey	241	5.8	163	4.0	317	6.8	187	4.2
Warwickshire	191	7.4	100	4.1	182	6.8	130	4.9
West Sussex	204	5.7	150	4.4	209	5.4	167	4.4
Wiltshire	146	5.1	106	3.9	163	5.2	117	3.9
Total England	21,587	64.7	16,002	55.4	23,878	64.3	17,511	54.7

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the cost *(a)* nationally and *(b)* to each local education authority in England of the teachers' pay award in 1996–97; and what is the projected cost in 1997–98 of the overhang arising from the 1996–97 award. [12190]

Mrs. Gillan: The total estimated cost in England of the staged teachers' pay increase in 1996–97 is about £320 million in-year; in a full year the cost is about £395 million. The following table illustrates the cost of the award by updating the 1994–95 expenditure recorded by local education authorities in England for teaching staff salaries in nursery, primary, secondary and special schools by the teachers' pay awards of 2.7 per cent. in 1995–96 and the staged pay award of 3.75 per cent. in 1996–97.

The 1994–95 expenditure figures are the latest available for local education authority schools in England. The figures in the table take no account of changes in teacher numbers or other factors that affect the teachers' pay bill.

LEA expenditure on teachers' salaries

Pre-primary and primary, secondary and special schools	*1994–95 (actual)*	*1995–96 increase (2.7 per cent.)*	*1996–97 in-year increase (3.08 per cent.)*	*1997–98 overhang (0.67 per cent.)*
Corporation of London	393	11	12	3
Camden	32,223	870	1,019	229
Greenwich	56,617	1,529	1,791	402
Hackney	45,090	1,217	1,426	320
Hammersmith and Fulham	25,207	681	797	179
Islington	40,036	1,081	1,266	284
Kensington and Chelsea	15,782	426	499	112
Lambeth	37,816	1,021	1,196	268
Lewisham	44,662	1,206	1,413	317
Southwark	39,186	1,058	1,240	278
Tower Hamlets	63,388	1,711	2,005	450
Wandsworth	31,234	843	988	222
City of Westminster	29,708	802	940	211
Barking	37,019	1,000	1,171	263
Barnet	44,416	1,199	1,405	315
Bexley	40,251	1,087	1,273	285
Brent	31,552	852	998	224
Bromley	35,985	972	1,138	255
Croydon	45,875	1,239	1,451	325
Ealing	47,289	1,277	1,496	335
Enfield	52,740	1,424	1,668	374
Haringey	51,004	1,377	1,613	362
Harrow	40,355	1,090	1,276	286
Havering	42,868	1,157	1,356	304
Hillingdon	24,930	673	789	177
Hounslow	48,189	1,301	1,524	342
Kingston upon Thames	21,324	576	675	151
Merton	33,839	914	1,070	240
Newham	58,572	1,581	1,853	415
Redbridge	51,087	1,379	1,616	362
Richmond upon Thames	27,621	746	874	196
Sutton	23,904	645	756	170
Waltham Forest	46,124	1,245	1,459	327
Birmingham	214,746	5,798	6,793	1,523
Coventry	68,866	1,859	2,178	488
Dudley	54,361	1,468	1,720	386
Sandwell	64,958	1,754	2,055	461
Solihull	44,742	1,208	1,415	317
Walsall	55,545	1,500	1,757	394
Wolverhampton	53,410	1,442	1,689	379
Knowsley	35,699	964	1,129	253
Liverpool	106,253	2,869	3,361	754
St. Helens	39,322	1,062	1,244	279
Sefton	59,778	1,614	1,891	424
Wirral	71,507	1,931	2,262	507
Bolton	56,340	1,521	1,782	400
Bury	35,083	947	1,110	249
Manchester	92,989	2,511	2,941	660
Oldham	57,596	1,555	1,822	409
Rochdale	41,666	1,125	1,318	296
Salford	47,804	1,291	1,512	339
Stockport	54,540	1,473	1,725	387
Tameside	40,069	1,082	1,267	284

LEA expenditure on teachers' salaries

Pre-primary and primary, secondary and special schools	*1994–95 (actual)*	*1995–96 increase (2.7 per cent.)*	*1996–97 in-year increase (3.08 per cent.)*	*1997–98 overhang (0.67 per cent.)*
Trafford	37,242	1,006	1,178	264
Wigan	67,932	1,834	2,149	482
Barnsley	40,012	1,080	1,266	284
Doncaster	62,161	1,678	1,966	441
Rotherham	59,258	1,600	1,874	420
Sheffield	90,497	2,443	2,863	642
Bradford	110,134	2,974	3,484	781
Calderdale	33,238	897	1,051	236
Kirklees	82,310	2,222	2,604	584
Leeds	149,106	4,026	4,716	1,058
Wakefield	64,878	1,752	2,052	460
Gateshead	41,535	1,121	1,314	295
Newcastle upon Tyne	54,654	1,476	1,729	388
North Tyneside	41,483	1,120	1,312	294
South Tyneside	32,978	890	1,043	234
Sunderland	67,537	1,823	2,136	479
Isles of Scilly	629	17	20	4
Avon	183,629	4,958	5,808	1,302
Bedfordshire	108,401	2,927	3,429	769
Berkshire	138,048	3,727	4,367	979
Buckinghamshire	114,599	3,094	3,625	813
Cambridgeshire	102,380	2,764	3,238	726
Cheshire	191,969	5,183	6,072	1,362
Cleveland	129,969	3,509	4,111	922
Cornwall	90,436	2,442	2,861	641
Cumbria	79,891	2,157	2,527	567
Derbyshire	164,362	4,438	5,199	1,166
Devon	182,715	4,933	5,780	1,296
Dorset	99,255	2,680	3,140	704
Durham	124,043	3,349	3,924	880
East Sussex	122,727	3,314	3,882	870
Essex	178,638	4,823	5,651	1,267
Gloucestershire	65,870	1,778	2,084	467
Hampshire	259,587	7,009	8,211	1,841
Hereford and Worchester	130,669	3,528	4,133	927
Hertfordshire	182,811	4,936	5,783	1,297
Humberside	183,169	4,946	5,794	1,299
Isle of Wight	25,057	677	793	178
Kent	222,516	6,008	7,039	1,578
Lancashire	298,787	8,067	9,451	2,119
Leicestershire	191,891	5,181	6,070	1,361
Lincolnshire	86,035	2,323	2,721	610
Norfolk	129,122	3,486	4,084	916
North Yorkshire	143,156	3,865	4,528	1,015
Northamptonshire	111,016	2,997	3,512	787
Northumberland	64,837	1,751	2,051	460
Nottinghamshire	211,228	5,703	6,681	1,498
Oxfordshire	108,807	2,938	3,442	772
Shropshire	78,845	2,129	2,494	559
Somerset	86,201	2,327	2,727	611
Staffordshire	200,721	5,419	6,349	1,424
Suffolk	136,017	3,672	4,302	965
Surrey	143,047	3,862	4,525	1,015
Warwickshire	94,027	2,539	2,974	667
West Sussex	132,315	3,573	4,185	938
Wiltshire	85,078	2,297	2,691	603
Total	8,979,015	242,433	284,021	63,687

School Leavers

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many 16-year-olds left school before the end of the academic school year in 1996. [12061]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested was not collected centrally.

Liskeard School and Community College

Sir Robert Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many representations her Department has received in support of the Cornwall local education authority's bid for funding for capital work at Liskeard school and community college under the school's renewal challenge fund; and if she will make a statement. [12407]

Mrs. Gillan: The Department has received five letters from the hon. Member in support of Cornwall LEA's schools renewal challenge fund bid for capital work at Liskeard school and community college; the Department has received two representations from Mr. Warwick Lightfoot in support of Cornwall LEA's bid and numerous correspondence from the local community. The decisions on the SRCF bids will be announced shortly.

School Inspections

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the number of *(a)* reporting inspections and *(b)* inspection visits, on independent schools that have been undertaken by the Office for Standards in Education or Her Majesty's inspectorate for each year since 1990. [12499]

Mrs. Gillan: This is a matter for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

Departmental Publications

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the *(a)* White Papers, *(b)* Green Papers, *(c)* consultation papers, *(d)* draft regulations and *(e)* circulars, for which her Department has been responsible issued in 1996 which her Department assesses could give rise, (i) directly and (ii) indirectly, to significant environmental effects. [12708]

Mr. Robin Squire: This Department issued one booklet in 1996 which could give rise to significant environmental effects. This was entitled "Building Bulletin No. 83—School Environment Assessment Method". This was intended for local authorities and gave advice on how to carry out an audit to test the environmental friendliness of existing school buildings and recommended which materials to specify when commissioning new ones.

Care Leavers

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of care leavers (i) undertook and (ii) completed (1) GCSEs, (2) A-levels, (3) an undergraduate degree or equivalent and (4) postgraduate study in the last five years for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement. [12812]

Mrs. Gillan: This information is not collected centrally.

Income Support

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her estimate of the annual cost of restoring entitlement to income support to unemployed 16 and 17-year-olds; and what is her estimate of the present numbers of 16 and 17-year-olds who are not in education, training or employment. [12800]

Mr. Forth: The jobseeker's allowance has now replaced income support for unemployed men and women. Information is not available to calculate the cost of reintroducing JSA for unemployed 16 and 17-year-olds within normal estimating margins, due to behavioural factors. Illustrative costs, based on a range of assumptions are used instead.

Cost of introducing general entitlement to Jobseeker's Allowance to 16 and 17-year-olds

Assumptions	*Benefit costs 1997–98 £ million*
10 per cent. move from education to JSA	450
20 per cent. move from education to JSA	700
40 per cent. move from education to JSA	1,300

[1] Costs are derived from the movement of young people from education to JSA, plus the costs of those who are defined as unemployed (but not on benefits) under the International Labour Organisation definition.

[2] In addition to assumptions regarding the movement from education to JSA, it is assumed that (a) all 16 and 17-year-olds move into JSA from day one of the policy change; (b) 15 per cent. of the families of 16 and 17 year olds in education are on JSA (this assumption is the basis for an estimate of reduction in cost as a result of families losing entitlement to dependency and other family benefits); (c) half of the 16 and 17-year-olds who claim JSA move away from home and live independently and so receive Housing Benefit; (d) half of the 16-year- olds are the only children in their families.

[3] To ensure consistency, the number of 16 and 17-year-olds in education and other groups affected by this policy are all based on the Spring 1996 Labour Force Survey. Estimates of costs are rounded to the nearest £50 million.

Of the 1,401,000 16 and 17-year-olds in Great Britain in autumn 1996, 172,000—12 per cent.—were not in full-time education, training or employment. Ninety-one thousand of those were unemployed, and 81,000 were either unavailable for, or not seeking, work.

Labour market educational status of 16 to 17-year-olds, autumn 1996

GB, thousands

	All	*In full-time education*	*Not in full-time education*
All	1,401	940	462
In employment	679	389	290
ILO unemployed	181	90	91
Economically inactive	542	461	81

Source:

Labour Force Survey autumn 1996 "Rapid Release".

Notes:

1. The figure given in the answer is the number of 16 and 17 year olds who are not in full-time education, not in employment (full-time or part-time) and not on a government employment or training programme i.e. those who are not in full-time education and are either ILO unemployed or economically inactive. It includes a small number in part-time education as well as those who are sick, disabled or looking after the home/family. A fuller breakdown of young people's activities is in the table.

2. The figures are taken from the autumn 1996 Labour Force Survey (LFS) and were published by the Office for National Statistics in the LFS Rapid Release on 15 January.

3. All figures relate to young people who were 16 and 17 at the time of the survey.

4. The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is a sample survey of about 60,000 households in Great Britain conducted every quarter since spring 1992 and annually in the spring of each year between 1984 and 1991. As is the case with any sample survey, estimates from the LFS are subject to sampling variability.

Surplus Places

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what are the numbers and percentages of surplus places in each local education authority in England. [13261]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following tables set out the numbers of surplus places, by local authority area, and the proportion that these represent of total capacity, as at January 1996. The data are drawn from the returns made during 1996 by local education authorities in respect of their schools and by the Funding Agency for Schools in respect of grant-maintained schools in stage 2 and 3 authority areas: data on surplus places in the 359 grant-maintained schools in stage 1 authorities are not available.

These returns indicate that there were just over 815,000 surplus school places in January 1996, representing 11 per cent. of the total capacity of 7.6 million places. This represents a reduction overall of just under 68,000 places between 1995 and 1996—some 1 per cent. of total capacity.

This is encouraging. But the tables illustrate considerable variation in numerical and proportionate levels of surplus across the country. In some cases, combinations of pupil population growth and rationalisation are expected to reduce high levels of surplus to more acceptable levels.

Where there is no indication of significant reduction in high levels of surplus the Department will consult the authorities concerned about the extent to which any of that surplus is in practice removable. In the light of is consultation my right hon. Friend will decide whether surplus place removal targets should be set for any of those authorities.

Table 1: Surplus places by local authority area (excluding GM schools in stage 1 authorities) at January 1996

	Primary[1]		Secondary	
	Actual surplus Number	Actual surplus Percentage	Number	Percentage
Barking	1,259	8	472	5
Barnet	1,031	5	1,411	7[2]
Barnsley	1,538	7	2,486	16
Bath and North-east Somerset	1,082	8	1,017	10[2]
Bedfordshire	6,571	14	6,975	13[2]
Berkshire	4,087	7	6,256	12[2]
Bexley	1,146	6	853	6[2]
Birmingham	7,480	7	9,130	12[2]
Bolton	2,210	9	1,636	9[2]
Bradford	3,574	9	4,595	9[2]
Brent	1,833	9	1,046	7[1]
Bromley	1,073	5[2]	408	2[1]
Buckinghamshire	8,075	12	3,195	8[2]
Bury	465	3	552	5
Calderdale	2,471	13	1,342	9[2]
Cambridgeshire	5,671	9	2,117	5[2]
Camden	657	6	604	6[2]
Cheshire	12,616	13	8,156	12
City of Bristol	2,404	8	5,648	26
City of Kingston upon Hull	4,426	15	3,503	19
Cornwall	2,966	7	1,109	4
Corporation of London	12	6	0	0
Coventry	4,112	13	4,062	17
Croydon	1,907	7	1,473	9[2]
Cumbria	4,919	12	3,519	10[2]
Derbyshire	8,955	11	8,408	13[2]
Devon	8,372	9	3,283	6
Doncaster	6,522	20	5,545	21
Dorset	3,123	7	3,663	8[2]
Dudley	2,896	10	1,995	10[2]
Durham	7,484	13	5,511	13
Ealing	3,640	14	581	4[2]
East Riding of Yorkshire	3,477	13	2,211	10
East Sussex	5,288	9	3,316	9
Enfield	713	3	1,425	7[2]
Essex	12,321	9[2]	17,323	15[2]
Gateshead	3,675	18	2,611	18
Gloucestershire	5,135	10[2]	2,654	7[2]
Greenwich	2,279	11	2,879	18
Hackney	1,641	10	1,342	16
Hammersmith	1,515	16	1,371	19[2]
Hampshire	14,184	10	6,833	8[2]
Haringey	923	5	756	7
Harrow	830	4	602	7
Hartlepool	749	8	752	11
Havering	1,389	7	2,220	13[2]
Hereford and Worcester	5,429	10	6,160	12
Hertfordshire	10,030	11	11,969	15[2]
Hillingdon	1,423	7[2]	595	4[1]
Hounslow	1,522	8	657	4[2]
Isle of Wight	493	7	1,087	10
Isles of Scilly	103	41	125	53
Islington	1,655	10	1,327	15
Kensington	657	11	715	18[2]
Kent	10,716	8	13,432	12[2]
Kingston upon Thames	56	0	694	8[1]
Kirklees	2,637	7	2,588	10
Knowsley	3,301	17	1,187	12
Lambeth	4,085	19[2]	2,667	29[2]
Lancashire	11,235	9	8,380	10
Leeds	8,152	12	6,574	13
Leicestershire	7,563	9	9,332	14
Lewisham	1,125	6	2,016	16
Lincolnshire	6,826	[2]12	4,462	[2]10
Liverpool	8,142	16	6,827	[2]18
Manchester	6,909	15	7,736	26
Merton	653	5	1,142	[2]13
Middlesbrough	2,390	14	1,924	18
Newcastle upon Tyne	2,858	13	2,704	14
Newham	1,797	7	1,901	12
Norfolk	5,110	8	4,386	[2]10
North-east Lincolnshire	2,263	13	1,815	14
North Lincolnshire	1,816	12	1,514	13
North Somerset	882	6	1,061	8
North Tyneside	2,664	16	2,195	13
North Yorkshire	5,629	12	3,443	9
Northamptonshire	3,691	7	5,432	[2]11
Northumberland	4,893	21	3,292	10
Nottinghamshire	9,060	10	15,016	19
Oldham	2,274	10	968	6
Oxfordshire	6,420	13	5,340	13
Redbridge	407	2	564	4
Redcar and Cleveland	1,949	12	2,093	17
Richmond upon Thames	407	4	213	3
Rochdale	796	4	2,068	[2]14
Rotherham	2,352	9	2,203	11
Salford	2,775	12	2,227	16
Sandwell	1,559	6	2,886	15
Sefton	2,587	10	3,305	15
Sheffield	4,656	10	2,697	10
Shropshire	3,828	10	1,998	[2]7
Solihull	1,799	9	880	6
Somerset	2,018	5	2,304	8
South Gloucestershire	891	4	1,369	9
South Tyneside	1,437	9	1,840	16
Southwark	3,360	15	1,899	[2]17
St. Helens	1,651	10	1,998	15
Staffordshire	12,748	12	4,015	6
Stockport	2,316	9	1,499	9
Stockton on Tees	2,149	11	1,867	13
Suffolk	4,021	8	5,519	10
Sunderland	5,288	16	2,245	10
Surrey	8,534	11	3,488	[2]7
Sutton	394	3	480	[2]4

Table 1: Surplus places by local authority area (excluding GM schools in stage 1 authorities) at January 1996

	Primary[1]		Secondary	
	Actual surplus Number	Actual surplus Percentage	Number	Percentage
Tameside	1,611	7	1,143	[2]8
Tower Hamlets	2,131	10	1,456	11
Trafford	1,339	7	1,721	[2]12
Wakefield	3,416	11	4,041	17
Walsall	2,494	9	1,982	[3]9
Waltham Forest	1,210	6	1,097	[3]9
Wandsworth	2,513	15	1,361	[2]13
Warwickshire	7,255	14	5,616	[2]18
West Sussex	5,589	9	6,206	13
Westminster	501	6	853	11
Wigan	3,679	12	1,116	6
Wiltshire	6,104	12	4,589	[2]11
Wirral	4,390	13	3,359	[2]13
Wolverhampton	3,482	13	3,268	[2]17
York	2,125	14	1,490	14
Total	438,916	10	376,464	12

[1] Primary figures show surplus after taking account of any summer entry.

[2] Stage two for planning purposes.

[3] Stage three for planning purposes.

1. Stage 1 = less than 10 per cent. of pupils in the GM sector. Stage 2 = between 10 per cent. and 75 per cent. of pupils in the GM sector. Stage 3 = 75 per cent. or more pupils in the GM sector.

Table 2: Distribution of surplus between LEA and GM schools in stage 2 and 3 authorities, January 1996

	LEA		GM		Total	
	Surplus	Per cent.	Surplus	Per cent.	Surplus	Per cent.
Primary						
Bromley	922	4	151	6	1,073	5
Essex	10,975	9	1,346	6	12,321	9
Gloucestershire	4,694	11	441	7	5,135	10
Hillingdon	1,274	7	149	5	1,423	7
Lambeth	3,800	20	285	11	4,085	19
Lincolnshire	6,214	13	612	7	6,826	12
Secondary						
Barnet	1,059	10	352	4	1,411	7
Bedfordshire	6,734	16	241	2	6,975	13
Berkshire	4,299	10	1,957	17	6,256	12
Bexley	684	6	169	4	853	6
Birmingham	7,608	13	1,522	9	9,130	12
Bolton	1,329	9	307	10	1,636	9
Bradford	4,423	10	172	3	4,595	9
Brent	152	9	894	7	1,046	7
Bromley	0	0	408	2	408	2
Buckinghamshire	2,725	9	470	5	3,195	8
Calderdale	567	11	775	8	1,342	9
Cambridgeshire	1,318	5	799	5	2,117	5
Camden	604	7	0	0	604	6
Croydon	987	12	486	6	1,473	9
Cumbria	2,454	11	1,065	8	3,519	10
Derbyshire	6,816	15	1,592	8	8,408	13
Dorset	3,009	9	654	6	3,663	8
Dudley	1,730	11	265	5	1,995	10
Ealing	364	5	217	3	581	4
Enfield	1,330	9	95	2	1,425	7
Essex	7,448	21	9,875	13	17,323	15
Gloucestershire	1,245	11	1,409	6	2,654	7
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,371	23	0	0	1,371	19
Hampshire	5,663	8	1,170	7	6,833	8
Havering	2,104	16	116	3	2,220	13
Hertfordshire	9,125	17	2,844	11	11,969	15
Hillingdon	146	6	449	4	595	4
Hounslow	649	5	8	0	657	4
Kensington and Chelsea	701	22	14	2	715	18
Kent	6,735	13	6,697	11	13,432	12
Kingston upon Thames	415	8	279	9	694	8
Lambeth	1,741	40	926	19	2,667	29

Table 2: Distribution of surplus between LEA and GM schools in stage 2 and 3 authorities, January 1996

	LEA		GM		Total	
	Surplus	Per cent.	Surplus	Per cent.	Surplus	Per cent.
Lincolnshire	3,087	13	1,375	7	4,462	10
Liverpool	6,110	18	717	19	6,827	18
Merton	1,142	15	0	0	1,142	13
Norfolk	3,847	11	539	5	4,386	10
Northamptonshire	4,225	11	1,207	11	5,432	11
Rochdale	1,981	15	87	4	2,068	14
Shropshire	1,876	8	122	3	1,998	7
Southwark	1,771	21	128	5	1,899	17
Surrey	2,802	8	686	4	3,488	7
Sutton	205	4	275	4	480	4
Tameside	1,143	9	0	0	1,143	8
Trafford	1,503	16	218	5	1,721	12
Walsall	1,221	9	761	10	1,982	9
Waltham Forest	1,075	10	22	1	1,097	9
Wandsworth	575	20	786	10	1,361	13
Warwickshire	4,803	19	813	13	5,616	18
Wiltshire	3,149	13	1,440	9	4,589	11
Wirral	3,033	14	326	9	3,359	13
Wolverhampton	3,021	19	247	9	3,268	17

1. The GM column includes schools which became grant-maintained on or before 1 April 1996.

2. LEA and GM percentage columns show the actual number of surplus places as a proportion of total capacity within that sector.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefit Fraud Hotline

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many calls have been received by the benefit fraud hotline and how many *(a)* investigations and *(b)* convictions these calls have stimulated; and if he will make a statement. [9835]

Mr. Heald: The national benefit fraud hotline has received in excess of 125,000 calls up to 12 December 1996.

Preliminary results are only now emerging and show that cases referred for fraud investigation from these calls have so far resulted in 11,180 completed investigations for fraud, and 14,762 investigations in progress up to 30 November. Fraud investigations take some time to follow through, depending on the complexity of the investigation. Therefore in time the volume and rate of investigations completed will increase until a steady state is achieved.

Whilst a number of cases are being prepared for prosecution, as yet none has reached the stage of a court hearing.

Contributions Agency

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what factors underlay the decision of the Contributions Agency to set up a separate national inquiry centre to handle customer inquiries; [11901]

(2) if he will make a statement on the decision of the Contributions Agency to set up a separate national inquiry centre; [11902]

(3) what assessment he has made of the private finance initiative's ability to fund the buildings and equipment needed by the Contributions Agency's new national inquiry centre; [11903]

(4) if the work of the new national inquiry centre being set up by the Contributions Agency will be conducted by civil servants; [11904]

(5) what is the estimated public cost to the Contributions Agency for setting up the national inquiry centre to handle complaints. [11905]

Mr. Heald: The Contributions Agency is currently undertaking a study examining the feasibility of a national enquiry centre. This study is looking at a number of options.

As yet no decision has been made.

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans the Contributions Agency management board has put to him to privatise the network of field officers and inspectors. [11906]

Mr. Heald: As part of the competition strategy within the departmental change programme, the Contributions Agency is seeking to establish the most efficient and cost effective means of delivering its business. Work continues within the agency to identify which parts of the agency's work undertaken by its field operations should be submitted to competition. No decisions have been taken by the Contributions Agency management board in respect of field operations.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what targets the Contributions Agency has been set for each of the next three years for revenue collection; and how these differ from previous targets. [13033]

Mr. Heald: The Secretary of State's targets are agreed annually. Targets for 1997–98, including the Contributions Agency's revenue collection target, are currently being negotiated. The Contributions Agency will publish targets in its business plan in March, a copy of which will be available in the Library.

Social Fund

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the planned expenditure on the social fund for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000. [12753]

Mr. Roger Evans: Planned expenditure on the social fund will be made available in the social security departmental report, which will be published in March 1997.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the savings resulting from application of the shared residence requirement for housing benefit for those people aged under 25 years in the last year for which figures are available. [12805]

Mr. Roger Evans: Information on the actual savings resulting from the changes is not available. Estimated savings for the financial years 1996–97, 1997–98 and 1998–99 are £13 million, £57 million and £62 million respectively.

An exercise is currently under way to monitor the effect of and collect statistical data related to the changes to housing benefit for single childless claimants aged under 25, introduced in October 1996.

National Insurance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the additional revenue which would be raised by extending employers' national insurance contributions to all taxable benefits in kind if this includes provision for the avoidance of national insurance contributions on certain forms of bonus payments made by businesses; and if he will make a statement. [12799]

Mr. Heald: An estimated £250 million would be raised by extending employer national insurance contributions to all taxable benefits in kind. This figure is based on the estimated total of taxable benefits in kind reported to the Inland Revenue and is therefore inclusive of NICs on any bonuses paid in kind with the intention of avoiding NICs. Employers are not required to identify bonus payments separately from other payments.

Source:
Inland Revenue

Income Support

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the annual cost of restoring the full rate of income support to all persons in the 18 to 24-year-old age group. [12801]

Mr. Roger Evans: The estimated annual cost in 1996–97 of raising the income support rate for 18 to 24-year-olds to that payable for people aged 25 and above is £305 million.

Notes:

1. Estimates are based upon the 1995 "Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry" and the 1994–95 "Family Resources Survey" uprated to 1996–97 levels.

2. The estimated figure assumes jobseeker's allowance, housing benefit and council tax benefit levels are similarly increased.

3. Expenditure is rounded to the nearest £5 million.

Departmental Publications

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the *(a)* White Papers, *(b)* Green Papers, *(c)* consultation papers, *(d)* draft regulations and *(e)* circulars, for which his Department has been responsible issued in 1996 which his Department assesses could give rise, (i) directly and (ii) indirectly, to significant environmental effects. [12705]

Mr. Roger Evans: The impact on the environment of our core business has always been considered to be less than significant. This opinion has been supported by Department of the Environment consultants in phase 1 of its on-going review of the policy appraisal and environment initiative which has ranked the Department of Social Security in the low-impact category. Accordingly any White, Green or consultation papers, draft regulations and circulars issued by this Department in 1996 are not considered to have an impact, either directly or indirectly, on the environment to any material degree.

Habitual Residence Test

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the savings resulting from the habitual residence test in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99. [12804]

Mr. Roger Evans: The habitual residence test is expected to save £15 million across the income-related benefits in both 1997–98 and 1998–99.

Revenue Support Grant

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on what basis the figures for income support claimants and dependants were compiled which were used by the Department of the Environment for calculating revenue support grant; and what method was used to determine the local government area to which these were allocated. [12575]

Mr. Roger Evans: The figures were based on a 100 per cent. count of all income support claims registered on the income support computer system on a single day in August 1995. The local government area was determined mainly with reference to the postcode of each claimant according to the Office for National Statistics central postcode directory.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the annual savings accruing from the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000. [12802]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

We estimate that jobseeker's allowance will save £60 million in 1996–97 and £240 million in a full year of operation.

These figures are being adjusted in line with the latest economic assumptions which my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, set out in the Budget. I will write to the hon. Member with the adjusted figures in due course.

Benefits Agency (Computers)

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what advice he has received on the capability of the Benefits Agency computer system to achieve the data matching requirements of the Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill. [13025]

Mr. Heald: The technical solution for the generalised matching service enables data that have been extracted from any computer system to be loaded on to the database for matching purposes. In addition to existing resources, extra funding will be made available to the GMS to enable it to carry out the additional data-matching exercises envisaged under the provisions of the Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the difficulties experienced by caring parents refused application for family credit in consequence of a child maintenance assessment having been determined against the absent parent but never collected by the Child Support Agency; and if he will make a statement. [13027]

Mr. Roger Evans: Applications for family credit are not refused under these circumstances.

Prime Project

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what savings are projected from the Prime project in the Yorkshire area in the first two years of operation. [13030]

Mr. Roger Evans: It is not possible at this stage to reveal the detail of any potential savings in view of the commercial sensitivity of this information. The contract will not be awarded unless value for money has been demonstrated.

Prime Programme

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consultation process is planned to take place on the implementation of the Prime programme. [13034]

Mr. Evans: The Prime—private sector resource initiative for management of the estate—project is undertaking the procurement of a private sector provider of serviced accommodation to the Department of Social Security. The departmental trade union side was consulted on the decision to implement the project and on progress of the project since that date. Tender bids are due on 31 January, followed by a detailed evaluation and further negotiations. Contract awards will be subject to value for money being demonstrated. Consultation following the selection of a preferred supplier will be in line with agreed departmental procedures, as will any subsequent implementation.

Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received in respect of the consistency of the Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill with United Kingdom obligations under the European convention on human rights; and if he will make a statement. [11192]

Mr. Heald: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received no such representations. However, departmental officials met Liberty on 4 December when these issues were discussed. I am satisfied that the proposals in the Bill comply with European convention on human rights requirements.

Benefits Agency Medical Services

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 11 November, *Official Report*, column *88*, what was the outcome of his discussions with the NHS executive concerning the fees for access to medical records which may be charged to contractors who will be running the Benefits Agency medical services. [10972]

Mr. Burt: Discussion between departmental officials and the NHS executive have concluded that access to hospital records will continue to be provided free of charge to the successful contractor or contractors.

All Work Test

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* medical members of disability appeal tribunals and *(b)* doctors appointed to sit as medical assessors in appeals involving the all work test are employed by the Benefits Agency; and in what capacity. [11086]

Mr. Burt: No doctor who is currently employed by Benefits Agency medical services, in a full-time or part-time capacity, may be appointed as a medical member of a disability appeal tribunal or as a medical assessor.

Source:

Independent Tribunal Service.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received from the Data Protection Registrar concerning the protection for individuals in the provisions of the Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill; and if he will make a statement. [11347]

Mr. Heald: Department officials met the Data Protection Registrar during the development of the disclosure provisions in the Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill. The registrar wrote to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 10 January about the scope of the disclosure of information powers contained in the Bill, advocating the introduction of a statutory code of practice for DSS data-matching activities. A reply will be sent shortly.

HEALTH

Mental Illness

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients with *(a)* mental illness admitted before 1 June 1971 and *(b)* learning difficulties admitted before January 1970, were still receiving care in (i) hospital-based accommodation and (ii) community-based accommodation on 1 April 1996 broken down by region. [10734]

Mr. Burns: The number of patients with mental illness admitted before 1 January 1971 and patients with learning difficulties admitted before 1 January 1970, who were still receiving care in hospital or community-based accommodation on 1 April 1996, as reported by health authorities, is shown in the table.

Region	*Patients with mental illness*		*Patients with learning difficulties*		*Total*
	Hospital based	*Community based*	*Hospital based*	*Community based*	
Northern and Yorkshire	212	343	587	1,314	2,456
Trent	59	136	217	760	1,172
Anglia and Oxford	164	159	395	664	1,382
North Thames	400	619	721	1,072	2,812
South Thames	202	723	958	2,537	4,420
South and West	68	184	375	1,670	2,297
West Midlands	77	97	376	850	1,400
North and West	115	789	383	2,203	3,490
Total	1,297	3,050	4,012	11,070	19.429

Cannabis

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received concerning the legalisation of cannabis and its derivatives for medical use when prescribed by a qualified medical practitioner. [12415]

Mr. Malone: We have received a number of representations on this issue from Members of Parliament, the public and the medical profession.

E. Coli

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the incidence of verocytotoxin-producing escherichia coli in each of the last five years by region. [12038]

Mr. Horam: The information for England and Wales is provided in the following table:

Regional incidence of 0157 VTEC in England and Wales: 1992 to 1996

Health authority	*1992*		*1993*		*1994*		*1995*		*1996*	
	Number	*Rate*	*Number*	*Rate*	*Number*	*Rate*	*Number*	*Rate*	*Number*	*Rate*
Northern	47	1.52	31	1.00	54	1.74	79	2.55	33	1.06
Yorkshire	30	0.81	31	0.84	21	0.57	47	1.27	76	2.06
Trent	64	1.35	43	0.91	41	0.86	65	1.37	105	2.21
East Anglia	27	1.29	17	0.81	30	1.44	35	1.68	38	1.82
North West Thames	10	0.29	12	0.34	14	0.40	28	0.78	30	0.83
North East Thames	11	0.29	13	0.34	14	0.37	15	0.39	20	0.53
South East Thames	15	0.40	12	0.32	13	0.35	26	0.70	34	0.92

Regional incidence of 0157 VTEC in England and Wales: 1992 to 1996

Health authority	1992		1993		1994		1995		1996	
	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate
South West Thames	19	0.64	28	0.94	10	0.33	29	0.95	12	0.39
Wessex	20	0.64	16	0.51	32	1.02	76	2.54	27	0.90
Oxford	50	1.94	21	0.81	25	0.97	28	1.08	24	0.93
South Western	29	0.87	29	0.87	35	1.06	89	2.68	83	2.50
West Midlands	44	0.83	56	1.06	46	0.87	106	2.01	57	1.08
Mersey	8	0.33	10	0.41	14	0.58	25	1.04	21	0.87
North Western	64	1.59	35	0.87	36	0.90	63	1.57	64	1.59
Wales	32	1.10	31	1.07	26	0.90	81	2.79	36	1.24
Total	470		385		411		792		660	

1. Date from the Laboratory of Enteric Pathogens, CPHL
2. Rates expressed per 100,000 using 1992 OPCS figures
3. Since 1995 all diarrhoeal stools are tested for E. coli 0157 by PHLS.

Royal Free NHS Trust

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the provision of additional in-patient facilities at the Royal Free NHS trust. [12313]

Mr. Malone: In order for the Royal Free Hampstead national health service trust to respond to planned service changes, additional facilities are being put in place including 65 in-patient beds, a five-bedded high-dependency unit and an operating theatre.

Mr. Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the provision of high-dependency beds *(a)* at the Royal Free NHS trust and *(b)* in London. [12311]

Mr. Malone: To meet the additional demands arising from planned service changes, the Royal Free Hampstead national health service trust has built a new surgical high-dependency unit. Two of the new beds have opened, and the remaining three beds are expected to be available from April. In 1996–97 additional funding of £0.65 million has been made available in London to fund an increase in the provision of intensive care and high-dependency facilities.

Mr. Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many in-patients were treated by the Royal Free NHS trust in *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1990–91. [12310]

Mr. Malone: The Royal Free Hampstead national health service trust was established on 1 April 1991. The number of in-patient treatments provided by the trust rose from 34,378 in 1991–92 to 36,894 in 1995–96.

Mr. Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about changes in the accident and emergency facilities at the Royal Free NHS trust. [12312]

Mr. Malone: Over the past three years the Royal Free Hampstead national health service trust has been undertaking a phased programme of works to upgrade its accident and emergency department and to enable it to respond to planned service changes. Clinical areas for adults have recently been completed, and paediatric facilities are expected to be brought into use in May 1997.

Rehabilitation and Support Services

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment his Department has made of the success of the pilot projects funded in 1992 to develop the rehabilitation and support services for people with brain injury; and if he will make a statement; [12167]

(2) what action he is taking to ensure the continued funding for the 12 pilot projects set up to develop the rehabilitation and support services for people with brain injury after March 1997; [12170]

(3) what plans he has further to develop the rehabilitation and support services for people with brain injury on a national basis as a result of the 12 pilot projects which are due to end in March 1997. [12169]

Mr. Burns: In 1992 we commissioned the centre for health service studies at the university of Warwick business school to evaluate the cost-effectiveness and organisation of services at the 12 pilot sites for people with brain injury. The report will be published later this year. The aim has always been that the national health service trusts involved would seek funding from their local health purchasers to continue and develop the services which have been shown to be effective.

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to make CJD a notifiable disease; and if he will make a statement; [12670]

(2) what instructions have been issued by his Department to *(a)* neurologists and *(b)* other medical specialists treating people with CJD or suspected CJD to ensure such cases are brought to the attention of the CJD surveillance unit; [12669]

(3) what plans his Department have to make compulsory post-mortems on people who are suspected of dying from CJD; and if he will make a statement; [12668]

(4) what steps his Department has taken to ensure that relatives of people suspected of having died from CJD are notified of the need for a post-mortem to confirm CJD as the cause of death; [12695]

(5) how many of the CJD cases confirmed by his Department in 1996 fell into the age ranges *(a)* 0 to 20, *(b)* 21 to 30, *(c)* 31 to 40, *(d)* 41 to 50, *(e)* 51 to 60, *(f)* 61 to 70 and *(g)* over 70 years at the time of death; [12696]

(6) how many cases have been brought to the attention of the CJD surveillance unit where people have died under the age of 60 years from suspected CJD but have not had a post-mortem; [12694]

(7) pursuant to his Department's press release of 6 January, by what means his Department's scientists have been able to confirm that two living people have CJD. [12697]

Mr. Horam: The national Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease surveillance unit was established in 1990 to monitor the incidence of CJD and investigate the epidemiology of the disease, paying particular attention to occupation and eating habits so that any change in the pattern of CJD following the advent of BSE could be detected.

Regional neurologists were notified when the unit was set up. The unit has established good informal contacts with neurologists throughout the United Kingdom, which allow thorough investigation of a wide range of individual cases during the course of the illness. The clinical indications of classic CJD are well documented and understood by neurologists. The director of the national CJD surveillance unit wrote to all members of the Association of British Neurologists on 21 March 1996 describing the clinical and neuropathological features of the new variant CJD, and requesting that any case with this clinical or neurological profile be referred to the unit. A copy of the letter has been placed in the Library.

Cases of suspect CJD are mainly referred to the CJD surveillance unit directly from professional groups including neurologists, neuropathologists and neurophysiologists, and occasionally other sources. Given the present level of awareness of this disease we think it unlikely that any cases are missed. As a safety net, details are sought from all death certificates coded under the specific rubrics for CJD. There is no evidence to suggest that ascertainment would be improved by making CJD notifiable; indeed, because of the difficult nature of clinical diagnosis of CJD and the consequent difficulty of defining what should be notified, an attempt to make the disease notifiable might lead to fewer suspected cases being referred to the unit. The Government therefore have no plans to make CJD a notifiable disease.

Definite confirmation of CJD is possible only by microscopic examination of brain tissue. Normally this is conducted post-mortem. The team from the unit discusses the importance of the post-mortem with the clinician concerned, and also with the family if they raise the issue during epidemiological investigations. However, the decision of whether a post-mortem is carried out is a matter between the clinician and the relatives. Post-mortem examination has been carried out in 85 per cent. of cases where the patient is aged under 60. Of the 124 patients involved since 1990, only 18 have not had a post-mortem. Of these, seven, including one new variant case, were classified as "probable" according to clinical criteria and so are included in the published statistics.

The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee has considered the issue of the role of the coroner in relation to CJD deaths, and recommended that:

- it was appropriate to report deaths from iatrogenic CJD to the coroner;
- there was no need to report deaths from classical sporadic or familial cases;
- deaths from new variant CJD should not normally be reported. However, the reporting officer (either the medical consultant or the Registrar of Deaths) would need to consider whether the information available suggest the death could be "unnatural"; the coroner may decide to hold an inquest where there appeared to be doubt or dispute as to whether CJD, in any form, was the actual cause of death.

Post-mortems are not compulsory for any other clinical condition, and the Government have no plans to make them so for people who are suspected of having died from CJD. This is a matter in which the wishes of relatives must be paramount.

Diagnosis of CJD can occasionally be confirmed by positive brain biopsy while the patient is still alive. Biopsy is an invasive procedure which is potentially distressing for relatives, carries some risk of complication for the patient, may not always provide evidence of the diagnosis—a negative biopsy does not rule out the disease—and necessitates special precautions to be taken by the staff involved. Whether a biopsy is carried out is a clinical decision and we have no plans to change this.

A breakdown of deaths from CJD in 1996 by age at time of death is set out in the table.

Breakdown of definite and probable CJD deaths in 1996 by age at time of death

Age at time of death	*Number of cases*
0–20	2
21–30	4
31–40	3
41–50	7
51–60	4
61–70	10
Over 70	10

Mental Health

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish his Green Paper on mental health. [12571]

Mr. Burns: We intend to publish the Green Paper shortly.

Dental Services

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists since 1979 have undergone a period of retraining following criticisms made to the British Dental Association of their *(a)* clinical performance and *(b)* clinical judgment. [12465]

Mr. Malone: This is a matter for the General Dental Council.

Long-term Care (Pensions)

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to require social services departments to disregard 50 per cent. of the income from a personal pension when a person whose spouse lives in the family home enters long-term care. [12990]

Mr. Burns: Regulations are being amended with effect from 7 April 1997 so that local authorities will be required to ignore 50 per cent. of any personal pension or

retirement annuity contract of a person who enters long-term residential care who has a spouse who is not living in the same residential care or nursing home.

General Chiropractic Council

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will announce the designate membership of the first General Chiropractic Council. [13260]

Mr. Dorrell: I am pleased to announce that the designate membership of the first General Chiropractic Council is as follows:

Chairman (lay member):

Mrs. Norma F. Morris MA: visiting fellow at University College London currently engaged in research and consultancy in the field of science policy and research management.

Chiropractic members (all practising chiropractors):

Mr. Michael C. Copland-Griffiths

Ms Dana Green

Dr. Carla How

Mr. Nigel Hunt

Mr. Ian Hutchinson

Ms Susan King

Mr. Anthony M. Metcalfe

Mrs. Barbara Minter

Mr. Richard G. Rumary

Ms Susan L. Steward

Education members

Mr. Alan Breen

Ms Karen Flintoff

Mr. Timothy C. Jay

Mr. R. Brian Mouatt CBE BDS MGDSRCS.

Lay members

Mrs. Peaches Golding BA MCIM MIMgt: director of marketing and public relations company and regional co-ordinator of a Prince's Trust initiative to boost ethnic minority economic activity.

Mr. A. Robin Hodgson: retired chief executive of Hampshire county council and qualified solicitor.

Lady Peston (Helen): voluntary worker with particular interest in people with disabilities and communication impairments.

Mrs. Linda J. Stone FRPharmS: community pharmacist and former president of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain.

Professor Iain McCall FRCR: Professor of radiological science at the University of Keele, and consultant radiologist at the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt orthopaedic hospital.

The chairman and membership will meet shortly to begin the preliminary work of drawing up a business plan for the new GCC and the outline of the necessary structures for the administration of the statutory registration scheme for chiropractors. As soon as this preliminary work is complete, the first of the commencement orders will be made to bring the essential elements of the Chiropractors Act 1994 into force, and the members of the GCC will be formally appointed.

Government Policy (Children)

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the co-ordination of Government policy relating to children. [11118]

Mr. Burns: Many mechanisms, both formal and informal, are in place to ensure cross-Departmental co-operation in areas of shared interest. There are also arrangements for talking to and consulting both charities and voluntary organisations with an interest in children's issues. These arrangements work well, especially as they have been expanded by the forming of the children's services strategy group.

Deregulation (Medicinal Drugs)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the results of deregulation measures involving medicinal drugs. [11132]

Mr. Malone: Deregulation measures involving medicinal drugs have helped remove unnecessary or costly burdens on business without compromising the need to protect public health. The Government keep these measures under review and take further action as appropriate to maintain necessary safeguards.

Xenotransplantation

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his planned timetable for legislation on the ethics of xenotransplantation. [12184]

Mr. Horam: Legislation to regulate xenotransplantation will be introduced following due consideration, taking into account the results of the consultation exercise, and when parliamentary time allows. Until then the United Kingdom xenotransplantation interim regulatory authority will be established on a non-statutory basis to oversee xenotransplant developments. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has given a commitment to introduce legislation promptly should he be persuaded that any particular development creates a risk to public health.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department will place in the Library the representations it received during the consultation period on his Department's advisory group on the ethics of xenotransplantation report. [12720]

Mr. Horam: Unless confidentiality is requested, responses to the consultation exercise will be publicly available and copies will be placed in the Library.

NHS Employment Costs

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of the average annual cost to the Exchequer from the employment of *(a)* a nurse and *(b)* a doctor within the national health service. [12789]

Mr. Malone: The estimated annual average pay cost to the Exchequer of a nurse and a doctor employed in the hospital and community health service is £18,500[1] and £44,800[1] respectively. Other costs associated with employment cannot be identified separately.

[1] Rounded to the nearest hundred.

Eye Tests

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the annual cost of abolishing all charges for eye tests; and what estimate he has made of the number of people who presently make some payment for such tests. [12787]

Mr. Malone: We estimate that, on the basis of the trend in the number of national health service free sight tests apparent before the announcement of the restrictions in November 1987 and with NHS sight test fees at 1996–97 levels, removing the restrictions on the availability of NHS sight tests would cost about £120 million. Results from surveys suggest that in 1995–96 some 6 million people received private sight tests.

Child Migrants

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes he proposes in his policy towards former British child migrants in response to the interim report of the Western Australia Legislative Assembly Select Committee into child migration; and if he will make a statement. [12461]

Mr. Burns: None. As the report does not come to any firm conclusions and its major recommendation is for an honorary royal commission, a response at this time would not be appropriate.

Insulin

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment his Department has made of the Bellagio report of April 1996 on human insulin unawareness; [12679]

(2) how many United Kingdom insulin-dependent diabetics currently use animal insulins; and how many were doing so in 1990; [12673]

(3) what is the policy of his Department with regard to making known to newly diagnosed diabetics the choice between human and animal insulin; [12677]

(4) what steps his Department is taking to assure insulin users that animal insulin will continue to be available; [12676]

(5) if he will encourage manufacturers to make animal insulin available for insulin pens. [12678]

Mr. Horam: Manufacturers have confirmed that animal insulin will continue to be available in the United Kingdom until at least the year 2000. It is for them to decide whether or not to make animal insulin available for insulin pens. Clinical decisions on the most suitable type of treatment for a patient must be made by the individual's clinician. The Department of Health does not collect information on the number of insulin-dependent diabetics who use animal insulin. The Department of Health and the Medicines Control Agency are aware of the Bellagio report of April 1996, and will continue to monitor closely the safety of all insulins.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what records are kept of the number of complaints made by insulin users who have been adversely affected by human insulin. [12674]

Mr. Malone: Complaints by users of medicines are received by many different routes, for example by general practitioners, hospital clinicians, health authorities and the Department of Health. Records of the number of complaints made by users of a particular medicine are not collated centrally. Complaints about medicines are handled on an individual basis and, when it is suspected by the patient's doctor that an adverse reaction to a medicine has occurred, the doctor is requested to report it through the yellow card scheme to the Medicines Control Agency.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has evaluated into the responses of patients who have used human insulin. [12672]

Mr. Malone: As for all medicines, the quality, safety and efficacy of human insulins have been subjected to detailed scrutiny by the Medicines Control Agency and Committee on Safety of Medicines at the time of licensing. Subsequently, as part of the normal monitoring of marketed medicines, all post-marketing information and published research has been evaluated as it has become available.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the cost of maintaining prescription charges at present levels in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000. [12785]

Mr. Malone: We estimate the loss of income from maintaining prescription charges at their present level of £5.50 rather than raising them to £5.65 from 1 April 1997 would be approximately £9 million per annum for the next three financial years.

Service Provision

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he intends to take to keep pace with extra demands on the national health service from *(a)* demographic trends and *(b)* health-specific cost pressures; and if he will make a statement on the impact of such extra demands on health service provision. [12788]

Mr. Horam: The Government's commitment on funding for the national health service is set out in the White Paper "The National Health Service: A Service with Ambitions", presented to Parliament in November 1996. The White Paper discusses fully the implications of demographic change, the public's expectations of the NHS and of medical and technical advances. The Government keep the totality of cost pressures on the NHS, and the scope to deliver improved value for money, under review in reaching their decisions on public expenditure, year by year.

Dental Checks

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the annual cost of abolishing all charges for dental checks; and what estimate he has made of the number of people who presently make some payment for such checks. [12786]

Mr. Malone: The annual cost of abolishing charges for dental examinations in England, based on 1995–96 prices and charges, is estimated to be about £60 million, at current levels of demand. The number of courses of treatment where patients pay some charge for dental examinations is estimated to have been approximately 14.5 million in 1995–96.

Nurse Education

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the pre-registration nurse education intake in each year from 1987–88 to 1995–96. [12688]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is published English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting annual reports 1991–92 and 1995–96, copies of which are available in the Library.

Departmental Publications

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the *(a)* White Papers, *(b)* Green Papers, *(c)* consultation papers, *(d)* draft regulations and *(e)* circulars, for which his Department has been responsible issued in 1996 which his Department assesses could give rise, (i) directly and (ii) indirectly, to significant environmental effects. [12710]

Mr. Horam: The Department's major areas of policy responsibility do not have a significant environmental impact and we are not aware of any documents, issued in 1996, which have given rise to either direct or indirect environmental effect. However, the Department has worked in collaboration with the Department of the Environment to produce the United Kingdom national environmental health action plan and a consultative document on the inclusion of the environment as a key area in "The Health of the Nation" strategy, both of which would lead to improvements in environmental quality with parallel benefits to health.

Care Leavers

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department has undertaken to ensure local authorities provide adequate support for young people leaving care; and if he will make a statement. [12811]

Mr. Burns: The Department of Health issued comprehensive guidance to local authorities on after care to accompany the Children Act 1989. It has further reinforced messages about the need for social services to work collaboratively with other agencies in guidance on children's services planning. The Government have commissioned, and continue to fund, research on leaving care and provides funding to a number of voluntary organisations to promote developments in services. The social services inspectorate will be disseminating widely the findings of its recent inspection of leaving care services.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health according to what criteria young people leaving care are identified as vulnerable; and if he will make a statement. [12810]

Mr. Burns: The assessment of the individual needs of young people about to leave care is the responsibility of local authority social services departments on a case-by-case basis. Social services departments have a duty to draw up a care plan for each young person they are looking after. Comprehensive guidance on planning and reviewing children's cases and on the after care responsibilities of local authorities was issued to accompany the Children Act.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what percentage of young people leaving care are identified as vulnerable; and if he will make a statement. [12808]

Mr. Burns: The information requested is not held centrally.

Children's Rights (UN Report)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the UN committee report on the rights of the child. [12813]

Mr. Burns: We received the concluding observations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child on 27 January 1995. The UN convention on the rights of the child does not require us to publicise the report or to respond.

Meningitis

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the conditions that have to be met before a decision is taken to vaccinate *(a)* children in a primary school and *(b)* students living in halls of residence against the C strain of meningitis. [13014]

Mr. Horam: Guidelines on the control of meningococcal infection, including the use of antibiotics and vaccine, have been issued by the public health Laboratory Service since 1989. These are regularly updated and published and copies are sent to all directors of public health and consultants in communicable disease control. The most recent guidelines on the control of meningococcal disease were issued on 8 December 1995 in the PHLS's "Communicable Disease Report Review"; additional guidance on the management of clusters of meningococcal disease was included in a letter sent to all doctors from the Chief Medical Officer on 3 January and published in the CDR on 10 January, which was also sent to directors of public health and consultants in communicable disease control. These publications have been placed in the Library. Those with local expertise must make decisions about the detailed arrangements for the handling of outbreaks of meningococcal infection within these guidelines.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of vaccination programmes to protect against type C meningitis that were conducted in (i) 1976, (ii) 1977, (iii) 1978, (iv) 1979, (v) 1994 (vi) 1995 and (vii) 1996. [13016]

Mr. Horam: These data been collected for the period since April 1995 only. We are aware of three community and 10 schools meningococcal immunisation programmes in the period 1 April 1995 to 31 March 1996. Data are collected each March for the preceding full year.

Pharmaceuticals

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* quantity and *(b)* percentage of pharmaceuticals for (i) human and (ii) animal use produced in the United Kingdom were donated overseas; and if he will make a statement. [12717]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment his Department has made of the safety implications of companies donating pharmaceuticals for *(a)* human and *(b)* animal use; and if he will make a statement; [12719]

(2) what regulations his Department has set for the *(a)* quantities, *(b)* content, *(c)* labelling and *(d)* life span of pharmaceuticals for donation overseas; and if he will make a statement. [12718]

Mr. Malone: Medicines licensed for human and animal use within the European Community are assessed against criteria of safety, quality and efficacy. Countries outside the EC may have particular requirements for the import of pharmaceuticals for human or animal use. The World Health Organisation has issued detailed guidelines for donors and recipients relating to drug donations for international humanitarian relief. The code of ethics of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain provides guidance for pharmacists on the redirection of unwanted medicines to developing countries.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial incentives his Department gives to companies to donate pharmaceuticals overseas; and if he will make a statement. [12716]

Mr. Malone: None.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Government Policy

12. **Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many times the Cabinet Committee on the Co-ordination and Presentation of Government Policy meets each week. [11124]

Mr. Bates: Consistent with the principle of collective responsibility, it has been the practice of successive Governments not to make public information relating to the proceedings of Cabinet Committees.

17. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many people are employed in his Department to assist with the co-ordination of Government policy. [11130]

Mr. Bates: The co-ordination of Government policy is a ministerial activity. No staff are employed to support my right hon. Friend in this area.

18. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the role played by civil servants in the co-ordination and presentation of Government policy. [11131]

Mr. Bates: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my earlier answer to the question from the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton).

Magistrates (Bolton)

14. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what recent representations he has received on the appointment of new magistrates in Bolton and their working conditions. [11126]

Mr. Freeman: I have recently approved the appointment of six ladies and eight gentleman to the Bolton bench. The only representation I have had regarding the working conditions of Bolton magistrates is from the hon. Member.

Political Advisers

15. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many political advisers are attached to his office; and what services they carry out in relation to identifying supporters of Government policy. [11127]

The Deputy Prime Minister: One; my political adviser provides appropriate research and information.

Civil Servants

16. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what recent representations he has received concerning the impartiality of civil servants. [11128]

Mr. Bates: This Government are committed to a politically impartial civil service, as my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister made clear in response to representations made to me by several members of the Public Service Committee on 10 December.

Deregulation

19. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what are his main targets for deregulation during the lifetime of the Parliament. [11133]

Mr. Freeman: We will continue our successful programme of measures which, among other achievements, has already repealed or amended 1,000 regulations; set us on course to reduce the burden of paperwork by 26 per cent. by the year 2000; and introduced new business rights in enforcement actions.

22. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what further deregulatory measures he plans during the next three months, in respect of UK legislation and EU regulations. [11136]

Mr. Freeman: Among many planned measures, we are consulting on an increase in the audit threshold from £90,000 to £350,000. We will also be bringing forward further orders under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994, including an extension of the new business-friendly enforcement rights to building regulations, fire safety, consumer legislation and environmental health. In Europe, we will be launching a second round of the simpler legislation in the internal market—SLIM—initiative.

Safety (Young People)

20. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement regarding the recommendation he has received from the deregulation task force regarding safety of young people. [11134]

Mr. Freeman: The Government have rejected the deregulation task force recommendation to delay implementation of the young persons' activity centre licensing regime. The Government are implementing the scheme with minimum bureaucracy and will review the scheme thoroughly in 1999.

Millennium Exhibition

21. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a progress report on the provision of appropriate *(a)* public and *(b)* private funding of the millennium exhibition. [11135]

Mr. Freeman: The Millennium Commission has approved a grant of £200 million for the millennium exhibition at Greenwich; £150 million is the target for sponsorship, with the balance of the budget coming from receipts and other commercial income. More than half the £150 million sponsorship has already been identified. Negotiations are continuing in confidence with a number of major sponsors and it is hoped that the full target will be achieved in due course.

Computers (Millennium)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what is his estimate of the cost to Government departments of the changes necessary to prepare their computers for the millennium date change. [12752]

Mr. Freeman: I have nothing to add to the supplementary reply my hon. Friend the former Paymaster General made to the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) on 9 December last year, *Official Report,* columns 4–5.

Departmental Publications

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the *(a)* White Papers, *(b)* Green Papers, *(c)* consultation papers, *(d)* draft regulations and *(e)* circulars, for which his Department has been responsible issued in 1996 which his Department assesses could give rise, (i) directly and (ii) indirectly, to significant environmental effects. [12698]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the *(a)* White Papers, *(b)* Green Papers, *(c)* consultation papers, *(d)* draft regulations and *(e)* circulars, for which his Department has been responsible issued in 1996 which his Department assesses could give rise, (i) directly and (ii) indirectly, to significant environmental effects. [12714]

Mr. Freeman: A chapter in the 1996 White Paper "Competitiveness: Creating the Enterprise Centre for Europe" considered the relationship between economic growth and the environment. Among other things, it set out how companies can benefit from understanding and minimising the environmental impact of their activities.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 28 January 1997

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Cautions

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cautions have been administered by police forces to *(a)* adults, *(b)* young persons and *(c)* juveniles in each of the last five years. [13023]

Mr. Maclean: Information on the number of persons cautioned by age group is published in the Command Paper "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales", table 5.1 of the 1993 and 1995 editions. Copies are available in the Library.

Breathalysed Drivers

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drivers were breathalysed in the Christmas period in each of the past five years; how many of those tests were positive; and if he will make a statement. [11033]

Mr. Maclean: Figures collected by the Home Office do not enable the Christmas and new year period to be separately identified. The Association of Chief Police Officers, however, has collected figures on the number of positive breath tests during this period in each of the last five years, with the total number of screening breath tests required for 1992 to 1994. They are:

Breath tests over the Christmas and new year period, England and Wales 1992–93 to 1996–97

	Number of breath tests	*Number positive*
1992–93	59,069	4,248
1993–94	65,522	4,470
1994–95	78,009	4,706
1995–96	n/a	4,411
1996–97	n/a	[1]5,209

[1] Provisional.
n/a = not available.

The Home Office does, however, collect and publish figures for the month of December, and they are given in the table. Figures for 1996 are not yet available, but will be published in the spring. I will send the hon. Member a copy of the statistical bulletin when it is published.

Breath tests during December, England and Wales 1992 to 1995

	Number of breath tests	*Number positive/refused*	*Percentage positive/refused*
1992	110,100	8,500	8
1993	105,800	8,600	8
1994	129,100	8,700	7
1995	141,400	8,900	6

Police Accommodation

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answers of 11 December, *Official Report*, columns *266–67*, on Vauxhall police division and Grafton square and 13 January, *Official Report*, column *46*, on police accommodation in Lambeth, what is the relationship between the strategic review of the provision of police accommodation and the on-going review of the long-term police accommodation needs. [12375]

Mr. Maclean: The review of the long-term police accommodation needs refers to a five-yearly rolling review of the Metropolitan police's operational building strategy. The strategy is due to be updated by September 1997. Each area contributes to the review of the operational building strategy. The on-going strategic review into police accommodation needs in Lambeth will inform 5 Area's submission to the review process for the operational building strategy.

Ticket Touts

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many criminal proceedings involving alleged ticket touting at football matches under section 166 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 have been pursued to date; and how many convictions have been secured. [12359]

Mr. Maclean: In 1995, 210 defendants were prosecuted for the offence of "sale of football tickets by unauthorised person on day of match" under section 166 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. Of these, 188 were convicted.

Female Police

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of women by rank within the police forces in Wales on 31 December in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement. [12869]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* The information requested is shown in the table:

Number of female officers serving in police forces in Wales from 1991 to 1995

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Dyfed-Powys					
Association of Chief Police Officers	—	—	—	—	—
Superintendant	—	—	—	—	—
Chief Inspector	—	—	—	—	—
Inspector	—	—	—	1	1
Sergeant	5	7	7	6	6
Constable	95	102	144	117	119
Gwent					
Association of Chief Police Officers	—	—	—	—	—
Superintendant	—	—	—	—	—
Chief Inspector	1	—	—	—	—
Inspector	3	3	3	3	5
Sergeant	3	4	4	5	3
Constable	91	99	105	106	137

Number of female officers serving in police forces in Wales from 1991 to 1995

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
North Wales					
Association of Chief Police Officers	—	—	—	—	—
Superintendant	—	—	—	—	—
Chief Inspector	—	—	—	—	—
Inspector	3	4	4	4	2
Sergeant	7	5	7	7	10
Constable	135	144	146	165	174
South Wales					
Association of Chief Police Officers	—	—	—	—	—
Superintendant	1	1	—	—	—
Chief Inspector	—	—	—	—	—
Inspector	3	3	4	4	66
Sergeant	19	22	23	21	20
Constable	254	262	260	253	287

Figures for 1991 to 1994 as at 31 December. Figures for 1995 as at 31 March.

Football Matches (Policing)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the total number of police officers on duty at Premiership and Football League matches in England and Wales and the total cost of these officers for the seasons *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96. [12356]

Mr. Maclean: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Police (Court Attendances)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the police man hours spent in court attendance for each of the last five years. [11054]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* This information is not held centrally.

Young Offenders

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to bring section 60 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991 into operation; and if he will make a statement. [12488]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* Sufficient secure local authority accommodation is required before section 60 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991 can be brought into operation. The Government are funding an expansion of the local authority secure estate.

Police (Increased Strength)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the annual cost of providing an additional 3,000 police officers. [12806]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* The additional cost of 3,000 extra police constables in 1997–98 is an estimated £60 million, which the Government have made available.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Aid and Trade Provision

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list, by company and country, all projects granted assistance from the aid and trade provision in the financial years 1995–96 and 1996–97. [12924]

Dr. Liam Fox: The following new projects were approved for funding under the aid and trade provision in the financial years 1995–96 and 1996–97:

Country	*Company*	*Project*
1995–96		
China	Purac Ltd.	Liuzhou water
China	Siemens Plessey	Nanjing airport
Indonesia	Clough Smith	Samarinda transmission line
Indonesia	GEC Alsthom	Java power transmission
Indonesia	G. Cussons Ltd.	Piston engines research laboratory
Indonesia	Phillip Harris Ltd.	Science and technology, Java universities
Pakistan	Reynolds Boughton	Fire crash tenders
Ghana	Biwater International	SE districts water supply
Zimbabwe	Landrover Exports Ltd.	Supply of 300 Landrovers
1996–97		
China	Balfour Beatty	Guangzhou Metro overhead catenary system
China	GEC	Guangzhou Metro ventilation system
Philippines	Mabey and Johnson	Steel bridging
Ghana	TecQuipment Ltd.	Support to the national vocational training institute centres

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will release the correspondence and minutes of the meetings between the Overseas Development Administration, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department of Trade and Industry, relating to the television studios rehabilitation project, referred to in paragraph 2.6 of the National Audit Office report on "Aid to Indonesia" (HC 101 of Session 1996–97). [12594]

Dr. Liam Fox: I will write to the hon. Member.

TRANSPORT

Waste Management

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what proposals he has for the development of port and ship waste management plans; [12493]

(2) if he will make provision of port waste reception facilities a statutory duty. [12494]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* The Government attach considerable importance to the provision of waste reception facilities in ports. Harbour authorities are already under a statutory duty to provide adequate waste reception facilities under the Merchant

Shipping (Reception Facilities for Garbage) Regulations 1988 and the Prevention of Pollution (Reception Facilities) Order 1984. In January 1996, the Government announced the introduction of port waste management planning to improve the provision and use of waste reception facilities. Waste management plans were introduced initially on a voluntary basis, in advance of the introduction of the Merchant Shipping and Maritime Security Bill, which seeks to make port waste management planning mandatory. International regulations requiring ship waste management plans will be implemented from July 1997 for new ships and July 1998 for all ships.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the impact of the Merchant Shipping Regulations 1988 in reducing marine debris. [12492]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* Surveys by and on behalf of the Marine Safety Agency have shown that the waste reception facilities provided by harbour authorities pursuant to the Merchant Shipping (Reception Facilities for Garbage) Regulations 1988 are generally adequate. It is therefore difficult to make a specific assessment of the effect of the Merchant Shipping(Prevention of Pollution by Garbage) Regulations 1988 in isolation from other legislation relating to pollution of the marine environment from both shipping and land-based sources.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set up a public register of legal notices, offences and fines relating to pollution of the marine environment from shipping. [12496]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* The Government already publish details of vessels prosecuted for marine pollution offences and vessels which have been reported to their flag states for suspected pollution offences. We do not intend to introduce a public register.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it a statutory obligation for port authorities to keep garbage record books. [12495]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* Garbage record books have been developed by the International Maritime Organisation as a means to assess the compliance of ships with regulations on the discharge of garbage from ships. They will be required on new ships from July 1997 and on all ships from July 1998. It would be inappropriate for a similar requirement to be applied to port authorities.

Baggage (Airliners)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what reports his Department receives on unaccompanied, unchecked, unaccounted for and unexplained baggage in airliners; and what action he can take. [11233]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* Regular monitoring of compliance with the direction relating to the accounting and authorisation of baggage is carried out by my Department's inspectors. Where a deficiency is found, it is normally rectified on the spot. If this is not possible immediately, a deficiency notice is served requiring the aircraft operator to comply at the earliest opportunity. Should compliance not be achieved thereafter, formal enforcement powers are available.

Air Traffic Control Services

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon) of 16 January, *Official Report,* column *317,* on air traffic control services, if he will make a statement on the selection of the preferred bidder for the proposed services. [12957]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* The Civil Aviation Authority is now discussing with my Department and the Treasury the handling of tenders for the new Scottish centre, against the background of the strategy for future provision of air traffic control services on which they are consulting airlines and other interested parties.

Dangerous Substances

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what precautions currently required by his Department apply in respect of the transport of *(a)* plutonium, *(b)* other radioactive materials and *(c)* polychlorinated biphenyls by air; what plans he has to introduce more stringent measures; and if he will make a statement. [12214]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* United Kingdom legislation requires that all dangerous goods carried by air, including radioactive materials, and thus plutonium and PCBs, must comply with the very stringent standards and requirements of the International Civil Aviation Organisation's "Technical Instructions for the Safe Transport of Dangerous Goods by Air", which are updated biennially. This legislation, enforced by the Civil Aviation Authority, ensures that the UK fulfils its safety obligations under the convention on civil aviation. The technical instructions set the standards for the classification, packing, marking, labelling and documentation of all dangerous goods. We intend to continue with our current policy of requiring compliance with the up-to-date edition of the technical instructions.

Overweight Vehicles

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many operators have been prosecuted in each of the last 12 months for operating overweight heavy goods vehicles over 38 tonnes. [13194]

Mr. Bowis: I have asked the chief executive of the Vehicle Inspectorate to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ron Oliver to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 28 January 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question concerning the number of operators prosecuted in each of the last 12 months for operating overweight heavy goods vehicles over 38 tonnes.

Information on overweight heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) is not available in the format requested. However during the 1995/96 financial year there were 3,740 convictions for HGV overloading offences.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is his Department's policy in respect of prosecution of overweight heavy goods vehicle operators facing gross train weight charges of less than 10 per cent. who have not been prosecuted before; and if he will make a statement; [13193]

(2) if he will make it his policy to pursue prosecutions of all heavy goods vehicles which are found to be overweight; [13192]

(3) if he will list the ministerial directives he has issued to the Vehicle Inspectorate concerning overweight heavy goods vehicles in each of the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement; [13190]

(4) if he will place in the Library a copy of the ministerial directive issued to the Vehicle Inspectorate to the effect that only heavy goods vehicles over 10 per cent. or 2 tonnes over the 38 tonnes weight would be prosecuted; and who was responsible for issuing the directive. [13191]

Mr. Bowis: There have been no ministerial directives as such on this subject in the past 12 months. In order to promote consistency, Ministers agree guidelines for the prosecution of overloading offences by the Vehicle Inspectorate, but the final decision on whether to prosecute in individual cases rests with the inspectorate, in the light of all the circumstances. It is normal for the Vehicle Inspectorate to prohibit clearly overloaded vehicles whether or not it intends to take prosecution action.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a copy of the letter from the Vehicle Inspectorate prosecution and legal services relating to the threshold below which prosecutions against overloaded lorries should not be pursued. [13189]

Mr. Bowis: The Vehicle Inspectorate's prosecution and legal services unit has a standard letter which it uses to advise defendants and clerks to the courts in cases where selected offences are not proceeded with. Copies of these standard letters have been placed in the Library.

In November 1996, a small number of incorrect versions of these letters were sent out, copies of which have also been placed in the Library. As soon as the mistake was detected, the erroneous versions were stopped.

A46/A47

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if discussions to date between his Department and Leicestershire county council in respect of the A46/A47 link road constitute routine discussions about funding under the TPP—transport policies and programmes—process. [13250]

Mr. Watts: Yes.

Motorways (HGVs Overtaking)

Mr. Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many prosecutions have been made in the last few years of heavy goods vehicle drivers for using the overtaking lane of motorways; and if he will make a statement. [12290]

Mr. Maclean: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is not collected centrally.

Departmental Publications

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the *(a)* White Papers, *(b)* Green Papers, *(c)* consultation papers, *(d)* draft regulations and *(e)* circulars, for which his Department has been responsible issued in 1996 which his Department assesses could give rise, (i) directly and (ii) indirectly to significant environmental effects. [12711]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* The information requested is not kept centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Speed Cameras

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what authorities are responsible for installing speed cameras *(a)* on motorways and *(b)* on other roads; what measures his Department takes to ensure that the appropriate police authorities have time to prepare prosecutions; and what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of this means of curbing speeding. [13041]

Mr. Bowis: Highway authorities are normally responsible for installing the equipment in which the cameras are housed: these are the Highways Agency for motorways and trunk roads, and local authorities for other roads. The police are normally responsible for the purchase and operation of the cameras.

Section 1 of the Road Traffic Offenders Act 1988 requires that a summons or notice of intended prosecution must be issued within 14 days of the commission of a speeding or other road traffic offence. It is for individual chief constables to make arrangements to ensure that this requirement is met.

A study by Price Waterhouse of the costs and benefits of traffic light and speed cameras, commissioned by the Home Office, reported in August 1996. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Fuel Tax and Vehicle Excise Duty

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much fuel tax and vehicle excise duty on *(a)* goods vehicles over 3.5 tonnes, *(b)* cars and *(c)* motorcycles was paid in each of the last five years. [12342]

Mr. Bowis: The information is as follows:

1991–92: £10,816 million

1992–93: £11,227 million

1993–94: £12,490 million

1994–95: £13,960 million

1995–96: £15,436 million

A breakdown of fuel duty by types of vehicles is not available.

Vehicle excise duty (net of refunds) collected was:

£ millions

Tax class	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96
Goods vehicles over 3501 kgs	499	505	508	538	555
Private and light goods	2,354	2,695	3,055	3,242	3,407
Motorcycles	24	23	25	25	25

Sustainable Development

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how his Department has used the UK indicators for sustainable development in *(a)* the production of the Department's annual report, *(b)* monitoring progress towards meeting the objectives set out in the UK sustainable development strategy and *(c)* assessing the environmental implications of policy options; and what plans they have to extend their use in future within the Department. [12269]

Mr. Bowis: Indicators are broad brush, aggregated statistics which provide the policy making process with information about trends in transport use and the associated impact on the environment and the economy. My Department has taken account of the statistics contained in the "UK Indicators for Sustainable Development" in formulating the transport policies set out in the Department's annual report and in the Green paper, "Transport: The Way Forward", published in April 1996. Those polices are developed in accordance with the principles of sustainable development.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

EU Directives

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many legislative measures have been enacted to implement EU directives in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* each EU country in each year since 1992; and in each year what was the EU average. [11808]

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 22 January 1997]:* The table shows the number of statutory instruments, including amending instruments, made each year since 1992 to implement EC directives currently in force.

1992: 236

1993. 134

1994: 288

1995: 294

1996: 211

Source:

Butterworth's EC Legislative Implementator 1997, Issue 1. The figures are based on material collated up to 31 October 1996. Directives for which no implementing material has been identified, or which have been repealed or spent, have not been included. No Acts of Parliament were listed as implementing directives during the period in question.

Figures are not available for the number of legislative measure through which directives have been implemented in other member states. However, the Commission's 13th annual report on the monitoring of the application of Community law, COM(96)600 final, contains information about the application by member states of EC directives in force on 31 December 1995. This document is available in the Library.

ENVIRONMENT

Cement and Lime Kilns

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the *(a)* cement kilns and *(b)* lime kilns at each plant in the UK combusting (i) coal alone, (ii) coal in combination with petroleum coke, (iii) coal in combination with solvent waste, (iv) coal in combination with other high calorific wastes, (v) petroleum coke alone, (vi) petroleum coke in combination with solvent waste, (vii) petroleum coke in combination with other high calorific wastes and (viii) other high calorific wastes alone, showing in each case which other high calorific wastes are being combusted. [11664]

Mr. Clappison: I understand from the Environment Agency that the cement kilns and lime kilns in England and Wales burning fuels in the categories listed are:

(a) Cement kilns

(i) Coal alone

Blue Circle Industries plc, Plymstock, Devon (also burns coal with petroleum coke)

Blue Circle Industries plc, Barnstone, Nottinghamshire

Blue Circle Industries plc, Hope, Derbyshire

Castle Cement Ltd., Ribblesdale Works, Clitheroe, Lancashire (three kilns) (also authorised to burn coal with petroleum coke in all kilns, though rarely do so, and coal with solvent waste in two kilns)

(ii) Coal in combination with petroleum coke

Blue Circle Industries plc, Plymstock, Devon (also burns coal alone)

Blue Circle Industries plc, Westbury, Wiltshire (two kilns)

Blue Circle Industries plc, Claydon, Suffolk

Blue Circle Industries plc, Aberthaw Works, Vale of Glamorgan

Blue Circle Industries plc, Weardale, Co. Durham

Blue Circle Industries plc, Northfleet, Kent

Blue Circle Industries plc, Cauldon, Stoke on Trent (also burns petroleum coke with tyre chips)

Buxton Lime Industries, Tunstead, Buxton, Derbyshire

Castle Cement Ltd., Ketton, Lincolnshire (also burns this combination with Cemfuel, and also burns this fuel in combination with Cemfuel and waste tyres)

Castle Cement Ltd., Padeswood Works, Alyn and Deeside

Castle Cement Ltd., Ribblesdale Works, Clitheroe, Lancashire (three kilns) (three kilns, though rarely use this fuel. Also authorised to burn coal alone in three kilns and coal with solvent waste in two of the kilns.)

Rugby Group plc, Chinnor Works, Oxon (three kilns)

Rugby Group plc, South Ferriby, Barton upon Humber, South Humberside

Rugby Group plc, Rochester, Kent

Rugby Group plc, Rugby, Warwickshire

Rugby Group plc, Southam, Warwickshire (also burns coal with dycal)

(iii) Coal in combination with solvent waste

Castle Cement Ltd., Ribblesdale Works, Clitheroe, Lancashire (two kilns) (also burns coal alone in both kilns and coal with petroleum coke)

Rugby Group plc, Southam, Warwickshire (also burns coal with petroleum waste)

No other cement kilns are currently burning any of the other fuels listed.

(b) Lime kilns

(ii) Coal with petroleum coke

Buxton Lime Industries, Tunstead, Buxton, Derbyshire

Redland Aggregates, Whitwell, Worksop, Nottinghamshire (also burns petroleum coke, petroleum coke with solvent waste and coal with petroleum coke and solvent waste)

(v) Petroleum coke alone

British Sugar, York (two kilns)

Redland Aggregates, Whitwell, Worksop, Nottinghamshire (also burns coal with petroleum coke, petroleum coke with solvent waste and coal with petroleum coke and solvent waste)

Redland Aggregates, Thrislington, Co. Durham (T1 and T2 kilns)

(vi) Petroleum coke in combination with solvent waste

Redland Aggregates, Whitwell, Worksop, Nottinghamshire (also burns coal with petroleum coke, petroleum coke alone and coal with petroleum coke and solvent waste)

Redland Aggregates, Thrislington, Co. Durham (T3 kiln)

No other lime kilns are currently burning any of the other fuels listed.

The information relating to Scotland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and the information relating to Northern Ireland a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Teesside Development Corporation

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which developments or proposals by the Teesside development corporation have been opposed by *(a)* Stockton borough council and *(b)* Cleveland county council. [11874]

Sir Paul Beresford: Since 1987, Stockton borough council has opposed three planning applications initiated by Teesside development corporation. The applications were for developments at Teesside retail park, phase 2, the Rowing Course at Teesdale and a fenland village at Cowpen Bewley. Cleveland county council also opposed the Teesdale retail park phase 2 development.

EU Environmental Protection Schemes

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful attempts have been made by United Kingdom organisations in the last four years to obtain funds from the EU's (i) Altener, (ii) LIFE II: nature protection, (iii) Urban, (iv) Leader II, (v) Regis II, (vi) Save II and (vii) LIFE II: environmental protection schemes; and what funds have been allocated to the United Kingdom under each of these schemes. [12341]

Mr. Clappison: My Department is responsible for the Urban, English Leader II, and Save II schemes and the LIFE II: nature protection and LIFE II: environmental protection schemes. The President of the Board of Trade is responsible for Altener. Regis II does not apply to the United Kingdom.

LIFE II: Nature protection and LIFE II Environment protection:

These two schemes have been in operation since 1996; therefore, only one round of applications has been made. In 1996, there were two successful applications and one unsuccessful application to the LIFE II nature scheme, and 4.3 million ECU received in funding. With regard to the LIFE II environment scheme, there were seven successful and 36 unsuccessful applications in 1996, and 1.8 million ECU received in funding.

URBAN:

Urban is a three-year programme in operation from 1996 to 1999 and is worth 80.25 million ECU to the United Kingdom, excluding Northern Ireland, over the programme period. Ten areas have been approved for funding.

LEADER II:

LEADER II is a five-year programme running from November 1994 until 31 December 1999. My Department is responsible only for the English LEADER II programme, which has been allocated 31.82 million ECU in funding for the five-year period. This money was distributed among 17 targeted local development groups within England. The information relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for the relevant Secretaries of State.

SAVE II:

This information is not centrally available, as levels of funding for specific projects supported under the SAVE programme are a contractual matter between the European Commission and those carrying out each project.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how his Department has used the UK indicators for sustainable development in *(a)* the production of the Department's annual report, *(b)* monitoring progress towards meeting the objectives set out in the UK sustainable development strategy and *(c)* assessing the environmental implications of policy options; and what plans he has to extend their use in future within the Department. [12268]

Mr. Clappison: The UK indicators of sustainable development published last March are primarily intended to stimulate discussion about how we measure whether our development is sustainable. The indicators were developed to address and monitor the key sustainable development issues highlighted in the UK sustainable development strategy published in 1994. As such, they have been used to inform decisions about the priorities for action and work programmes in the year ahead, which will be reported in the annual White Paper on sustainable development and the Department's annual report, both of which are to be published shortly. The indicators are also used as appropriate to inform consideration of the environmental implications of policy options.

We have been consulting widely on the preliminary indicator package and we hosted a one-day seminar in November last year, inviting views from a wide range of interested parties—local authorities, the business community, non-governmental organisations, research

institutes and academics, as well as international indicator experts. A report on the seminar's findings is to be published shortly. A copy will be placed in the House Library.

A programme of work is in hand to review and improve the preliminary indicator set with a view to publishing a revised set in 1998. Expert groups will be set up, comprising people from within and outside Whitehall, to consider priority areas for improving the indicators package.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the Commission response of 4 December 1996 to the European Parliament's proposed amendments to the "Commission Proposals to the Council" (COM(95)647 final) on the review of the European Community programme of policy and action in relation to the environment and development, titled "Towards Sustainability" (COM(96)648 final). [12640]

Mr. Gummer: The Government see no particular difficulty with the proposed amendments. However, these have not been subjected to detailed discussion by the Council.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what initiatives his Department has *(a)* financially sponsored and *(b)* encouraged local authorities to take in the implementation of Agenda 21; and what resources his Department has committed in each year since 1992 to support Agenda 21. [12371]

Mr. Gummer: The Government are committed to sustainable development, and the principles of Agenda 21 are intrinsic in much of the spending and policies of my Department, most notably in areas of waste management and energy efficiency. Money available through the single regeneration budget and supplementary credit approval has often been used by local authorities to undertake initiatives in line with Agenda 21. The Government have consistently encouraged initiatives taken by local authorities to implement local Agenda 21. My Department's national level commitments to Agenda 21 can be found in the 1996 Environment White Paper, "This Common Inheritance UK Annual Report". Spending in particular areas is listed in my Department's annual report 1996. Copies of both of these are in the House Library.

Castle Cement, Clitheroe

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has received from Castle Cement in Clitheroe in respect of its plans to burn *(a)* shredded tyres and *(b)* waste products other than Cemfuel. [12469]

Mr. Clappison: None.

Organic Pollutants

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the recent United Nations Economic Commission for Europe discussions on limiting the use of persistent organic pollutants as they affect the United Kingdom. [12406]

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* The first formal negotiations on a United Nations Economic Commission for Europe agreement for reducing emissions of persistent organic pollutants took place last week in Geneva. They affirmed that the proposed protocol should be based on the sound scientific assessment of the environmental and health risks associated with the long-range air transport of these substances. The United Kingdom has been actively involved in developing this scientific underpinning over several years. Within the United Kingdom, the pollutants identified for inclusion in the protocol are already strictly controlled or banned.

Water Directives

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the timescale for the full implementation by the United Kingdom of the urban waste water treatment directive. [12489]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* Member states are required to implement the urban waste water treatment directive on a phased timetable. The earlier deadlines are the end of 1998 for the provision of sewerage and tertiary treatment for sewage discharges to sensitive areas and for the cessation of disposal of sewage sludge at sea; and the end of 2000 for the provision of both sewerage and the relevant degree of treatment to larger sewage discharges. The final deadline is 31 December 2005 for the provision of both sewerage and the relevant degree of treatment to all other sewage discharges.

Plastics Recycling Scheme

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to encourage a national plastics recycling scheme. [12491]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* The Government strongly support the efforts of the plastics industry on recycling. A number of organisations have been set up to increase the amount of plastic waste recovered from a number of sectors. For example, a national industry organisation, Recoup, was set up in 1989. It has the support of over 80 companies, including major plastics producers, containers manufacturers, soft drinks and household product suppliers, retailers and recyclers. Recoup works closely with local authorities to develop plastics recycling facilities. It estimates that over the last year more than 110 million plastic bottles—5,500 tonnes—were recovered. The material was collected from over 165 local authorities, which now offer collection facilities for plastic bottles. Other useful work on recycling is being done by the save-a-cup scheme, the Farm Films Group, the Polystyrene Recycling Association, and by ICER (electronic equipment). We encourage all companies in the plastics industry to back such organisations.

The plastics industry has also set up its own materials organisation—Valuplast—to co-ordinate its activities in response to the obligations placed on the whole packaging chain as a result of the recovery and recycling targets in the EC packaging and packaging waste regulations.

Badgers (A30)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action is being taken to protect a badger sett at footpath 7, Langland lane, Fairmile, Devon from A30 construction work. [13219]

Mr. Clappison: There is no intention to disturb or remove any badger sett. However, it has been necessary to carry out work on a tree in the vicinity of a sett, in connection with the A30 construction work. Disturbance to the badger sett has been minimised by removing only parts of the tree.

Kent County Council

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information is available to his Department as to the amount of debt that Kent county council had outstanding in each of the financial years 1992–93 to 1996–97, inclusive. [13175]

Mr. Curry: The available information for Kent county council is as follows:

Outstanding debt at end of financial year

	£ million
1992–93	355.4
1993–94	394.1
1994–95	429.5
1995–96	451.6

The figures include both long-term and short-term borrowing. Longer-term borrowing by authorities can be undertaken only to finance capital expenditure and is regulated by Government through the issue of credit approvals. The data for 1992–93 and 1993–94 are obtained from special surveys conducted by the Department of the Environment seeking information on the amount of outstanding longer-term debt and investment, and the later figures are estimates based on public works loan board data and transactions reported to the Department in the regular monthly and quarterly borrowing and lending inquiries.

Air Quality (Bexley)

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received about air quality in the London borough of Bexley. [13157]

Mr. Clappison: The Department has received a response from Bexley council to the consultation on the draft national strategy for air quality, which the Government are preparing in accordance with the Environment Act 1995.

Radon

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to issue more invitations for free radon measurements to householders living in areas where there are high radon levels. [13439]

Mr. Clappison: Following two successful campaigns conducted last year, we intend to offer a further quarter of a million invitations to have a free radon measurement this year. Invitations will be sent to all homes in England where there is a greater than 5 per cent. chance of being above the Government's radon action level, and which have not already received an invitation. Maps have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses showing these areas.

The invitations will complete a two-year programme to ensure that all households in the most radon-affected parts of the country have received an invitation to have a free measurement. The results obtained will allow clearer identification of localised areas where radon is a particular problem. Future measurement programmes will concentrate on these within the areas with a greater than 5 per cent. chance of being above the action level.

Water and Sewerage Services

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the action he proposes to take to increase competition for water and sewerage services. [13440]

Mr. Gummer: In answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) on 1 April 1996, *Official Report*, column *12*, I set out a number of proposals for extending competition in water and sewerage services in England and Wales. These would: introduce common carriage arrangements to allow companies to use an existing supplier's pipe network to provide individual customers with a choice of water supply; introduce similar provisions for sewerage services; extend the scope of inset arrangements, under which a new water or waste water undertaker can be appointed in respect of an area within an existing undertaker's area of appointment, to allow appointments to be for limited periods and in respect of co-located premises; remove restrictions on cross-border supply to enable water undertakers to supply water for non-domestic purposes to customers in another undertaker's area; and remove the water undertaker's monopoly on making connections to the water main.

I also announced the issue of a consultation paper in which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I sought views on these proposals.

Responses to the consultation paper were received from the water industry, commercial and industrial users, representative bodies, professional institutions and individual customers. They showed a broad measure of support for all our proposals and made a number of useful points about the way in which they could be put into operation. In the light of the positive response, it is our intention to proceed with these proposals with a view to bringing forward legislation in the next Parliament.

In developing this legislation we shall seek to provide a basis for competition both in waste water and clean water services, and to ensure that water quality continues to be safeguarded and that the charging regime continues to be fair and non discriminatory. We also intend to go further than our original proposals by following up suggestions made during consultation for extending the scope of common carriage and inset appointments to smaller users. We will look again to see whether a lower limit, perhaps in the 100 to 200 ML range, would be practicable and appropriate.

Meanwhile, we would urge users to take full advantage of those provisions for competition which already exist, in particular those which allow large users to seek water supplies from other sources and which allow flexibility in the provision of sewerage services.

Building Research Establishment

Mr. Garel-Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has selected a preferred purchaser for the Building Research Establishment; and if he will make a statement. [13455]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Following our consideration of the two final offers for the Building Research Establishment, we have decided to select the BRE management bid team as the preferred purchaser. We were grateful for the work done by the Built Environment Research Foundation in preparing its bid, but have decided not to proceed with it further. We are now firmly on course to transfer BRE to the private sector by the end of February as planned.

The Government's objectives for the sale are: to secure the provision of high-quality, independent and impartial research and development and advice, at good value for money, that meets the requirements of Government and industry and is responsive to the commercial needs of industry; to transfer the establishment to the private sector by the end of February 1997; and to optimise the net proceeds to the taxpayer.

The BRE management team bid was the one which best demonstrated that it met all the sale objectives. Overall the management team bid offers the best value for money for the taxpayer.

One of the Government's objectives from the outset has been to privatise BRE in a way that would secure wide support from the industry and the research world. I believe that the Foundation for the Built Environment model has this wide support. I am pleased to say that the Construction Industry Council has indicated that it will support it, as have an impressive number of organisations from all sections of the industry, and the major university interests.

We have looked very carefully at the preferred purchaser's proposals for safeguarding impartiality and independence in the private sector. In our view, the management bid team has demonstrated that the structure of ownership it proposes for BRE within the Foundation for the Built Environment will protect the impartiality and independence for which BRE is renowned. We believe that the organisation will continue to be able to provide high-quality, independent and impartial research and advice under its new ownership.

Industry Environmental Compliance

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the United Nations Environment Programme technical report "UNEP 36" on industry environmental compliance, in respect of its application to the United Kingdom. [12395]

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 23 January 1997]:* The report in question provides guidance primarily for countries that are in the process of setting up a system for environmental compliance and enforcement. The United Kingdom has a well-developed enforcement regime that, for major industrial processes, is now administered by the Environment Agency in England and Wales, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency in Scotland and the Environment and Heritage Service in Northern Ireland.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Police Forces (Government-sponsored Training)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will list the police forces that have received training as part of a scheme sponsored by Her Majesty's Government since 1988, detailing where and when the training took place and how much the training for each force cost; [11887]

(2) if he will list the foreign police forces trained by private companies under the scheme sponsored by Her Majesty's Government since 1988, indicating where and when the training took place, the name of the companies involved and the nature of the training provided; [11886]

(3) if he will list the police forces which, as part of a scheme sponsored by Her Majesty's Government, *(a)* received counter-terrorist or counter-insurgency training and *(b)* have been trained by the British Special Forces since 1988, in each case indicating where and when the training took place and how much the training of each force cost. [11888]

Mr. David Davis: Police and security forces receiving training sponsored by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office diplomatic wing, and Overseas Development Administration assistance for police training, were listed in the answer given by the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short) on 31 October 1996, *Official Report*, columns *218-19*, and in the answers given by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office to the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) on 14 May 1966, *Official Report*, columns *386-87*, and on 28 February 1996, *Official Report*, columns *546-47*. Details of overseas police training sponsored by the Ministry of Defence were provided in the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces to the hon. Lady on 12 December 1996, *Official Report*, columns *343-44*. Serving police officers from foreign forces have occasionally undertaken periods of academic study sponsored by Her Majesty's Government, but it would involve disproportionate cost to try to establish a record of this additional police study in the United Kingdom.

The training of police and security forces sponsored by Her Majesty's Government took place during the period 1988 to 1996 at the Bramshill police college, other training establishments in the United Kingdom and in the countries concerned.

The Overseas Development Administration employs some retired police officers, some of whom have established themselves as private companies, to provide consultancy advice and training. They have also employed the Royal Institute of Public Administration. Prior to 1996, there was no other Foreign and Commonwealth Office-sponsored training of police and security forces by

private companies. In 1996, the FCO diplomatic wing sponsored a pilot project involving private sector training of police forces from Malaysia and Cyprus.

On the basis of the figures for financial years 1994 to 1996, we estimate that about 1,200 overseas police and security force personnel have received training sponsored by the FCO diplomatic wing. It would not be possible for the whole period, except at disproportionate cost, to separate the costs of this police training from the costs of the UK military training and assistance scheme as a whole. However, in 1995–96, the average cost of such training was £1,886 per person.

Hitherto, the nature and content of bilateral military and associated police training programmes have been regarded as confidential between Governments because it has been judged that their disclosure would risk damaging our international relations. This practice is now being reviewed against the background of the Government's commitment to openness. The House will be informed of the results of the review in due course.

Gold (Restitution)

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the outcome of the latest discussions by the member Governments of the Tripartite Commission for the Restitution of Monetary Gold regarding the residue of gold and its possible distribution to individuals. [12996]

Mr. David Davis: The Tripartite Commission for the Restitution of Monetary Gold last met in Brussels on 17 December. In the light of suggestions from Jewish organisations that part of the commission gold be made available to benefit individual victims of Nazism, the tripartite Governments have decided to continue the technical and administrative preparations for the final distribution of the residue of gold, but not actually to begin the distribution. One factor that the tripartite Governments will take into account when considering the final distribution of gold will be the outcome of research currently being undertaken by the US presidential task force on Nazi gold, and separately by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, into the origin of the commission gold pool.

British Residents Overseas

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British citizens are currently resident in other European Union countries. [13165]

Dr. Liam Fox: According to our latest estimates, on 31 December 1995, there were 960,000 British citizens resident in other European Union countries.

TREASURY

Venture Capital Trusts

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the revenue loss to the Exchequer in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99 from tax reliefs on venture capital trusts. [12790]

Mr. Jack: Total tax relief for venture capital trusts is tentatively estimated to cost about £50 million for 1997–98. The cost for 1998–99 is not available, but would depend on future levels of take-up and rates of investment return.

Income Tax

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the *(a)* first year and *(b)* full year cost of raising the personal income tax allowances in 1997–98 by (i) £175, (ii) £190 and (iii) £200; and if he will estimate in each case the number of individuals who would cease to be liable to pay income tax as a consequence of such a change. [12747]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* Available information is given in the table.

Increase in non-aged and aged personal tax allowances £	*Full year cost at 1997–98 income levels*[1] *£ million*	*First year cost at 1997–98 income levels £ million*	*Number of taxpayers taken out of income tax (thousands)*
175	1,050	790	400
190	1,150	850	440
200	1,200	900	470

[1] Based on the Budget forecast.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the impact on revenue of ending the tax reliefs on *(a)* new personal equity plans and *(b)* new tax-exempt special savings accounts in (i) 1997–98 and (ii) 1998–99. [12796]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* The reduction in the cost of tax relief from not permitting any further investment in personal equity plans is tentatively estimated at £40 million for 1997–98.

The estimated reduction in the cost of income tax relief from not allowing new tax-exempt special savings accounts is about £50 million for 1997–98. The estimated reduction in the cost of tax relief from not permitting any further investment in TESSAs is approximately £80 million for 1997–98.

These estimates do not allow for any behavioural consequences as a result of changes to these tax reliefs, and follow the conventional assumption that the current interest rates remain unchanged.

Estimates for later years are not available, but in each case the effect would build up over time.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the additional revenue which would be raised by the Exchequer in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99 by introducing a new marginal tax rate of 50 per cent. on

taxable incomes of £100,000 per annum and over; and what is his estimate of the number of individuals who would be affected by such a policy. [12746]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* The estimated full year yield at 1997–98 income levels of introducing a new rate of 50 per cent. on taxable incomes above £100,000 is £1.4 billion. The yield includes the consequential effects on the yield of capital gains tax after allowing for likely changes in the volume of disposals. It does not take account of any other behavioural effects which might result from the introduction of the new rate of tax. About 140,000 taxpayers would be affected.

The yield for future years would depend on levels of income, tax reliefs and allowances in those years.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the additional revenue which would be raised by the Exchequer in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000 by increasing the basic rate of tax by one penny in the pound. [12745]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* The estimated full year yield would be about £1.7 billion at 1997–98 income levels. The yields for future years would depend on the levels of incomes, tax reliefs and allowances in those years.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the additional revenues which would be generated by a top rate of income tax of *(a)* 50 per cent. and *(b)* 60 per cent. on incomes over (i) £50,000, (ii) £60,000, (iii) £70,000, (iv) £100,000 and (v) £150,000. [12377]

Mr. Jack: Estimated full year yields at 1997–98 income levels are given in the table. The yields include the consequential effects on the yield of capital gains tax after allowing for likely changes in the volume of disposals. They do not take account of any other behavioural effects which might result from the introduction of such changes. It is not possible to provide a reliable estimate of the effect of introducing the higher tax rates for taxable incomes over £100,000.

Lower limit of taxable income £	*Full year revenue yield at 1997–98 income levels Top rate*	
	50 per cent. £ billion	*60 per cent. £ billion*
50,000	2.7	5.4
60,000	2.3	4.5
70,000	2.0	3.9
100,000	1.4	2.7

Pensioners (Tax)

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number and proportion of people aged 65 years or over who will *(a)* not pay any tax, *(b)* pay tax at 20 per cent. only, *(c)* pay tax at 23 per cent. and *(d)* pay tax at 40 per cent. in 1997–98. [12993]

Mr. Jack: Latest estimates for 1997–98 are given in the table. The estimates are based on information projected from the 1994–95 survey of personal incomes and population estimates from the Government Actuary's Department; they are therefore provisional.

Individuals aged 65 or over	*Number (millions)*	*Percentage*
Not liable to income tax	6.20	67
Lower rate	1.75	19
Basic rate	1.20	13
Higher rate	0.15	1
All	9.30	100

Mortgage Interest Tax Relief

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the number of new claims for mortgage interest tax relief from first time claimants in the most recent year for which figures are available. [12793]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* About 10.5 million single people or married couples benefited from mortgage interest relief in 1995–96. An estimated 400,000 of the beneficiaries were first time buyers with new mortgages.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy in respect of future levels of mortgage interest tax relief at source over the next five financial years; and if he will make a statement. [12795]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said in his 1995 Budget speech, interest relief will remain unchanged for the lifetime of this Parliament. Beyond that, the level of mortgage interest relief is a matter to be considered each year in the Budget.

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the revenue which would be raised by the Exchequer in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99 by ending capital gains tax reinvestment relief. [12744]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* The cost of capital gains tax reinvestment relief is tentatively estimated to be £65 million for 1997–98. Costs for later years would depend on future levels of capital gains and qualifying investment. In practice the yield from withdrawing the relief may be significantly different to the existing cost due to changes in taxpayers' behaviour.

Environmental and Social Costs

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the development of a progress indicator to take account of the environmental and social costs of economic activity as an alternative to gross domestic product; and if he will make a statement on the desirability of developing such an alternative measure. [10539]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 22 January 1997]:* The Office for National Statistics has examined the genuine progress indicator, but does not regard it as a good indicator; it sees more value in the preparation of a broad range of indicators such as those in the Department of Environment's "Indicators of Sustainable Development for the United Kingdom", and environmental accounts of which a pilot was published in *Economic Trends* in August 1996.

National Lottery

Mr. Darling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assumptions he has incorporated about capital expenditure from the proceeds of the national lottery for each of the years covered in table 5.4 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" 1997–98. [10852]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 16 January 1997]:* The amounts of capital expenditure financed from proceeds of the national lottery included in table 5.4 of the FSBR were:

National lottery capital expenditure

	£ million
1995–96[1]	130
1996–97	480
1997–98	960
1998–99	1,200
1999–90	1,440

[1] Outturn. These figures are for NLDF payments and exclude additional capital spending from the partnership contribution to lottery schemes.

Bank of England

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *606*, what assessment he has made of the advantages and disadvantages of independence for the Bank of England. [13188]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Chancellor carefully considered the case for granting greater autonomy to the Bank of England at the time of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee's report on the role of the Bank of England. The Government, in response to that report, said that we believed the current institutional arrangements for monetary policy—including publishing the minutes of the Chancellor's monthly meetings with the Governor—were fully capable of meeting the targets that the Government have set for inflation. We also said that we remained concerned about the questions of accountability to Parliament, and to the public, that a move towards greater autonomy for the bank would raise.

Inflation

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the consequences for the United Kingdom's future rate of inflation of the acceleration in the monetary—M4—growth between 1995 and 1996. [12926]

Mrs. Angela Knight: M4 is one of many indicators that the Chancellor considers when making his assessment of inflation prospects. Underlying inflation is currently just over 3 per cent. and is forecast in the Financial Statement and Budget Report, which is published with the Budget, to fall to 2½ per cent. by the second quarter of 1997.

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions since 1978 *(a)* British, *(b)* German and *(c)* French GDP has dropped by more than the limits prescribed by the stability pact agreed at the Dublin summit in any one year. [12474]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The principles for the stability and growth pact agreed at the Dublin summit are intended to ensure that the Council of Ministers will assess deficits over the 3 per cent. reference value of participants in the single currency on a case by case basis. In the procedure, the Commission would as a rule consider an excess over the reference value to be exceptional only if there is an annual fall of real GDP of at least 2 per cent. The number of occasions when GDP has fallen by 2 per cent. or more since 1978 are *(a)* two *(b)* nil and *(c)* nil respectively.

The Council's assessment, however, will also take into account observations by a member state showing that an annual fall of less than 2 per cent. is nevertheless exceptional. The proposed European Council resolution contains an undertaking by the member states, in evaluating whether the economic downturn is severe, as a rule to take as a reference point an annual fall in real GDP of at least 0.75 per cent. The number of occasions when GDP has fallen by 0.75 per cent. or more since 1978 are *(a)* three *(b)* two and *(c)* one respectively.

Employment Statistics

Mr. Hain: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the percentage of *(a)* workless non-pensioner households and *(b)* workless households with children together with the employment rate for (i) each European Union state and (ii) each Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country for each year for which the figures are available since 1992; [10932]

(2) what are the most recent available percentage figures for *(a)* workless non-pensioner households, *(b)* workless households with children and *(c)* the unemployment rate for (i) each European Union state and (ii) each OECD country; and what are those figures for each year for which they are available since 1992. [11629]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 22 January 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Peter Hain, dated 28 January 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent questions (10932 and 11629) on the employment rates and the percentage of workless households in European Union and OECD countries.

Information about employment and population for the European Union countries is published in Table 18 and Table 10 of Eurostat's *Labour Force Survey Results* for each year between 1992 and 1995.

Information about employment and population for the OCED countries is published in OECD's annual *Labour Force Statistics 1974–1994* and in *Quarterly Labour Force Statistics; Number 4*

1996. Information about population is published on page 18 to 21 of the annual publication and on page 82 of the quarterly publication. Information about employment is published on pages 26 and 34 of the annual publication and from page 8 onwards of the quarterly publication. Copies of these publications are available in the House of Commons Library.

The available information for the United Kingdom about the percentage of non-pensioner household with no one in employment and non-pensioner households with children with no one in employment is shown in the attached table. This information is not available for the other countries requested.

Percentage of non-pensioner households with no one in employment

United Kingdom

	All	*With dependent children*[1]
Spring 1992	18.1	17.2
Spring 1993	19.4	18.1
Spring 1994	19.4	18.7
Spring 1995	18.2	18.5
Spring 1996	18.2	18.5
Summer 1996	17.9	18.1

Source:
ONS, Labour Force Survey.
[1] Children aged 0–15 and 16–18 years old in non-advanced further education.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what was the percentage change in employment between 1992 and the latest year for which figures are available for *(a)* each European Union state and *(b)* each Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country; [10933]

(2) if he will list, as percentages, *(a)* the level and *(b)* the change in youth employment between 1992 and the latest year for which figures are available for (i) each European Union state and (ii) each Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country; [10934]

(3) if he will list, as percentages, *(a)* the level and *(b)* the change in youth unemployment between 1992 and the latest year for which figures are available for (i) each European Union state and (ii) each Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country; [10935]

(4) if he will list, as percentages, *(a)* the level and *(b)* the change in those unemployed for more than a year between 1992 and the latest year for which figures are available for (i) each European Union state and (ii) each Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country; [10936]

(5) if he will list, as percentages, *(a)* the level and *(b)* the change in part-time employment between 1992 and the latest year for which figures are available for (i) each European Union state and (ii) each Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country; [10937]

(6) if he will list, as percentages, *(a)* the level and *(b)* the change in full-time employment between 1992 and the latest year for which figures are available for (i) each European Union state and (ii) each Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country; [10938]

(7) what was the percentage change in employment between 1992 and the latest year for which figures are available for *(a)* each European Union state and *(b)* each Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country; [11630]

(8) what were the percentage figures for *(a)* the level and *(b)* the change in (i) youth employment and (ii) youth unemployment between 1992 and the latest year for which figures are available in (1) each European Union state and (2) each OECD country; [11631]

(9) what were *(a)* the percentage figures for those unemployed for more than a year and *(b)* the percentage change in these figures between 1992 and the latest year for which figures are available for (i) each European Union state an (ii) each OECD country; [11632]

(10) what were the percentage figures for *(a)* the level and *(b)* the change in (i) part-time employment and (ii) full-time employment between 1992 and the latest year for which figures are available for (1) each European Union state and (2) each OECD country. [11633]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 22 January 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Peter Hain, dated 28 January 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent questions (10933, 10934, 10935, 10936, 10937, 10938, 11630, 11631, 11632 and 11633) on full-time employment, part time-employment, youth employment, youth unemployment and long term unemployment in the European and OECD countries.

Employment information for the European Union (EU) countries is published in Eurostat's *Labour Force Survey Results* at 1992 and 1995. Information by age group is published in Table 18 and information by full-time and part-time status in Table 50.

Employment information for the OECD countries is published in OECD's *Labour Force Statistics 1974–1994* and in *Quarterly Labour Force Statistics; November 4 1996*. However, these publications do not provide a breakdown by age group or by full-time and part-time status.

International Labour Organisation (ILO) unemployment levels and rates by age and duration in each EU country are published in the Eurostat *Labour Force Survey Results* publication.

For those OECD countries who are not members of the EU the available information is limited to unemployment rates analysed by age. These are published in the OECD's annual *Labour Force Statistics 1974–1994*. Because of minor technical differences in the detailed compilation of the figures, the statistics published by OECD may not exactly match those published by Eurostat. However, like Eurostat, the OECD follows the ILO guidelines on definitions.

Copies of these publications are available in the House of Commons Library.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

D'Oyly Carte

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement about the future funding arrangements for the Gilbert and Sullivan D'Oyly Carte opera company. [13145]

Mr. Sproat: I am pleased to inform the House that the Arts Council of England announced on 23 January a significant new step in its relationship with the D'Oyly Carte company, by offering the company a grant of

£100,000 immediately, and the opportunity to apply for further funds to mount a national tour. In making the announcement, the Arts Council drew attention to the strong case that had been made for the council to support a touring light opera company, and to the demand for it on the part of audiences throughout the country. I hope that both parties will now be able to build on this, to develop a productive long-term relationship.

Accounts of Exempted Charities

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage to which format the accounts of exempted charities are required to conform in order to comply with the requirements of section 47(2) of the Charities Act 1993. [12860]

Mr. Sproat: Section 46(1) of the Charities Act 1993 requires charity trustees of any exempt charities to keep proper books of account with respect to the charity and, if not required by or under the authority of any other Act, to prepare consecutive statements of account consisting of an income and expenditure account relating to a period of not more than 15 months and a balance sheet relating to the end of that period. The statement of recommended accounting practice accounting by charities, published by the Charity Commission, applies in relation to all charity accounts unless a more specific statement of recommended practice applies. Section 47(3)(d) of the Act provides that the statement of accounts of an exempt charity to be provided on request is the most recently audited, if the accounts are required to be audited, or otherwise the most recently prepared accounts.

National Lottery Outlets

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many representations she has received from independent newsagents concerning the distribution of national lottery outlets. [12367]

Mr. Sproat: The Department has received a total of 29 representations from independent newsagents concerning the distribution of national lottery outlets, including 19 accompanied by letters from hon. Members.

Digital Transmissions

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will meet the costs of self-help groups converting their analogue receivers to accept digital transmissions before the introduction of the new BBC digital service; and if she will make a statement. [12544]

Mr. Sproat: Under section 33 of the Broadcasting Act 1996, the Government will consider how long it would be appropriate for television broadcasting services to continue to be provided in analogue form after the new digital terrestrial television services begin to be broadcast. The conversion of analogue self-help installations to the digital format and the basis for that conversion are among the issues which will be considered during the course of that review.

National Lottery Charities Board

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what amount and what percentage of the total awarded by the National Lottery Charities Board since its inception has been allocated to organisations representing older people and pensioners; and if she will list the recipients and the amounts received. [12992]

Mr. Sproat: The National Lottery Charities Board has so far made 6,925 grants worth £478 million. Of these, 620, 9 per cent. of grants, worth £33.7 million, 7 per cent. of the money, have been to charities and voluntary organisations for projects working specifically with older people and pensioners. The list of awards has been placed in the Libraries of the House. Many other grants will benefit people of all ages, including older people and pensioners.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Sight and Sound

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she has received the report from the National Council for Vocational Qualifications into the alleged irregularities in the award of qualifications at Sight and Sound, south London; what further investigations are continuing; and if she will make a statement. [13054]

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* As a police investigation is currently being undertaken in relation to alleged irregularities at Sight and Sound, it would be inappropriate to make a statement about any aspect of these allegations or NCVQ's or other inquiries.

Manufacturing Apprenticeships

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of the number of apprenticeships in British manufacturing industry; and if she will make a statement. [12995]

Mr. Paice: In summer 1996, there were around 44,000 people doing apprenticeships in manufacturing industry in Great Britain, according to the labour force survey.

Further Education

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received from further education colleges regarding the funding of the further education sector. [12945]

Mr. Paice: Twenty-one representations have been received between the announcement in the Budget on 26 November 1996 and 27 January 1997.

International Labour Organisation Conference

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what will be the Government's objectives and priorities for the forthcoming ILO conference in Geneva. [12553]

Mr. Paice: The Government's objective will be to promote UK employment and labour market interests in all conference discussions, and particularly in the formulation of possible new international standards on contract work and on job creation in small and medium-sized enterprises.

EU Funding

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful attempts have been made by United Kingdom organisations in the last four years to obtain funds from (i) the EU's promotion of training and mobility of researchers, (ii) Youth for Europe, (iii) Leonardo da Vinci, (iv) Socrates, (v) NOW, (vi) Youthstart, (vii) Integra, (viii) Adapt and (ix) Horizon schemes; and what funds have been allocated to the United Kingdom under each of these schemes. [12339]

Mr. Paice: The information is not available in the exact form requested. The tables set out the information that is available for each scheme. However, full information on projects funded in individual member states by the framework programme, including the training and mobility of researchers programme, is held only by the Commission. Thus, information on the numbers of successful and unsuccessful applications and the precise funds allocated to each member state are not available.

The current programme "Youth for Europe III" started in 1995 and the following information is available. Information on the funding of the centralised part of the programme is available from the Commission. The decentralised part of YFE III is administered on a national basis.

Youth for Europe III

Year	*Successful groups*	*Successful participants*	*Unsuccessful groups*	*Total groups*
1995	YFE III			
Decentralised Actions	801	11,176	40	841
Centralised Actions	48	Not applicable	35	83
1996	YFE III			
Decentralised Actions	522	7,725	26	548
Centralised Actions	[1]—	Not applicable	[1]—	[1]—

[1] Interim figures not available at short notice. Funding: Decentralised part of the programme.
1995: 1.273 MECU for youth exchange activities; .158 MECU for youth worker training.
1996: 1.290 MECU for Youth Exchange activities; .174 MECU for youth worker training.

Figures for the Leonardo da Vinci programme are available from 1995, when the programme began, and are as follows:

Leonardo da Vinci

Programme year	*Total applications*	*Successful projects*	*Unsuccessful projects*	*Percentage funded*	*UK receipts[1] (ECU)*
1995	825	219	606	27	15,967,783
1996	667	284	383	43	18,784,071
Combined totals	1,492	503	989	34	34,751,854

[1] The majority of funds are allocated on the basis of successful projects being approved. A small proportion of the funding is allocated as a block grant.

Figures for the SOCRATES programme are available from 1995, when the programme began, and are as follows:

SOCRATES

Programme funding	*Total applications*	*Successful projects*	*[1]in £000*
1995			
Centralised	[2]134 projects	68	2,962
Decentralised	[3]2,429 participants	1,795	1,741
Decentralised	[4]26,933 mobility grants	11,734	7,668
			12,371
1996			
Centralised	145 projects	84	4,301
Decentralised	3,507 participants	2,824	[5]4,403
Decentralised	26,259 mobility grants	[6]—	7,447
			16,151

SOCRATES projects are transnational and can be divided into centralised and decentralised actions. For decentralised actions the UK is allocated a block sum by formula to distribute amongst UK participants. For centralised actions there is no separate UK allocation, rather the funding for the projects is shared between participant organisations. The figures shown for SOCRATES centralised actions represent the funding made available for transnational projects co-ordinated by UK organisations.

[1] In January 1997 1 ecu = £0.7373.

[2] Includes ERASMUS Thematic Networks, COMENIUS 2 and 3(i), LINGUA actions A and D, Open and Distance Learning, and Adult Education.

[3] Individual participants in LINGUA, ARION and COMENIUS 1 and 3(ii) projects.

[4] Individual student mobility grants under ERASMUS.

[5] 1996 figures still provisional.

[6] Figure not yet available for 1996–97.

HORIZON, NOW, ADAPT AND EMPLOYMENT

Programme	*Successful projects*	*Unsuccessful projects*	*GB budget allocation (ECU) 1990–1994*	*GB budget allocation (ECU) 1995–1999*
HORIZON	219	Not Available	15,670,468	—
NOW	96	Not Available	5,415,658	—
ADAPT	80	131	—	313,282,000
EMPLOYMENT	230	400	—	—
HORIZON Disability	(66)	Not Available	—	44,710,000
HORIZON Disadvantaged/Integra[1]	[2](33)	Not available	—	38,146,000
NOW	(79)	Not Available	—	48,781,000
YOUTHSTART	(52)	Not Available	—	42,245,000

In 1995 the new EMPLOYMENT Community Initiative was launched with HORIZON, NOW strands and a new YOUTHSTART strand. For the first round (1995–1997) there were these three strands with the HORIZON, strand being further divided into Disadvantaged and Disability. For the second round (closing date for applications 11 April 1997) the HORIZON Disadvantage strand has been replaced by INTEGRA.

[1] HORIZON Disadvantaged round 1/INTEGRA round 2.

[2] Round 1 only.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful attempts have been made by his Department in the last four years to obtain funds from the European social fund; and what funds have already been allocated to the United Kingdom under this fund. [12418]

Mr. Paice: The Department obtains funds from the European social fund within the overall allocations for the structural funds agreed in advance with the European Commission. In the years 1993 to 1996, 729 separate payments were received. There has been only one occasion in the last four years when we were not sent the money requested, due to a misunderstanding with the Commission: the sums have since been received.

The following table shows the sums allocated to UK for the European social fund over the last four years:

ESF allocations to the UK (including community initiatives)

	1993	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Total: million ecu, 1996 prices	866	795	986	1,037
£/ecu rates	1.285	1.292	1.221	1.229
Total: £ million, 1996 prices	675	615	808	844

Technology College Initiative

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what are the criteria for bids for the technology college initiative. [13101]

Mrs. Gillan: The criteria for applications for technology college designation are set out in "Technology College Applications: A guide for Schools". A copy of this publication is available in the Library.

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many schools that were successful under the technology college initiative were members of the Technology Colleges Trust. [13095]

Mrs. Gillan: Of the 180 technology colleges so far operating or announced, 154 are members of the Technology Colleges Trust.

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what feedback was given to those schools whose bids for the technology college initiative failed to be accepted. [13096]

Mrs. Gillan: Letters to schools unsuccessful in their applications for designation as technology colleges give a general indication of the reasons. Schools which contact

the Department are given some further feedback but the Department does not enter into detailed discussion about applications.

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the role of the Technology Colleges Trust in advising on submissions for the initiative. [13097]

Mrs. Gillan: Applicants for technology college designation may request advice from the Technology Colleges Trust about seeking sponsorship, drawing up development plans and preparing applications. This carries no commitment that a school's application will be approved or that it will be given preference over applications from other schools. Information about this is set out in the guidance document available to all schools from the Department.

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many grant-maintained schools were awarded technology college initiative status. [13098]

Mrs. Gillan: Of the 180 technology colleges so far operating or announced, 92 are grant-maintained schools.

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the geographical distribution of schools awarded the technology college initiative status. [13099]

Mrs. Gillan: An analysis by Government office area of the 180 technology colleges so far operating or announced is given in the table.

Government office region	*Number of technology colleges*
Eastern	18
East midlands	18
London	18
Merseyside and north-west	33
North-east	12
South-east	32
South-west	17
West midlands	19
Yorkshire and Humberside	13
Total	180

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many schools achieved technology college initiative status. [13100]

Mrs. Gillan: One hundred and fifty-one schools are now operating as technology colleges under the specialist schools programme. A further 29 technology colleges were announced on 3 January to operate from September 1997.

Grant-maintained Schools, Kent

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the proportion of state *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools in Kent that are grant maintained. [13173]

Mr. Robin Squire: Five per cent. of primary schools and 54 per cent. of secondary schools in the Kent local education authority area are grant maintained.

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the number of grant-maintained *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools for which the Kent local education authority no longer had financial responsibility as at the end of the 1992–93 financial year; and in respect of how many grant-maintained (i) primary schools and (ii) secondary schools Kent local education authority has ceased to have financial responsibility since the beginning of the 1993–94 financial year. [13172]

Mr. Squire: At 31 March 1993, there were three primary and 33 secondary grant-maintained schools in the Kent local education authority area. Since 1 April 1993, 25 primary and 35 secondary schools in Kent have become grant maintained. Since 1 April 1994, the recurrent budgets for these schools have been determined and paid by the Funding Agency for Schools, with their annual maintenance grants being recouped from the local education authority.

WALES

BSE

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish evidence that he has evaluated on whether BSE-infected meat is currently present within the human food chain in Wales. [12162]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Government have put in place a number of measures to protect the public health from any risk from BSE. These include the destruction of all cattle suspected of suffering from BSE and the removal of specified bovine material to ensure that issues in which BSE infectivity might be found do not enter the human food chain. No infectivity has ever been found in meat.

Returns for BSE enforcement measures show continuing high compliance rates. Full details of all measures and compliance are published on a regular basis in the BSE enforcement bulletin. This is widely available and copies are placed in the Library.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his policy concerning BSE as it affects farms in Flintshire. [12287]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The control measures introduced by the Government have put the BSE epidemic into sharp decline. The number of new cases is currently at the lowest level for over six years.

We announced on 16 December 1996 that we would be moving ahead with the selective cull throughout the UK. We will have fulfilled all the Florence preconditions by implementing the cull; we shall be pressing for early progress on lifting the ban. We have listened carefully to the views of the farming industry on this matter, and have undertaken consultations both on the selective cull and on proposals for certified herds.

Deaf People (Funding)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how he proposes to safeguard the existing funding of those voluntary organisations devoted to supporting deaf and profoundly deaf people in Flintshire and other locations in the former county of Clwyd. [12283]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The future funding of voluntary organisations which work in support of deaf people in Flintshire is a matter for the local authority and the health authority.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what amounts of cash he gave to the former county of Clwyd for the support of deaf and profoundly deaf people in the former county of Clwyd. [12284]

Mr. Evans: Between 1992–93 and 1996–97 grants of over £182,000 were allocated under the flexible forms of community care and support for people with disabilities grant schemes to projects supporting deaf people in the former county of Clwyd. This includes £30,000 allocated to the North Wales Deaf Association.

Dual Carriageway (Flintshire)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the mileage of dual carriageway in the county of Flintshire. [12280]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: According to the latest estimates provided by the local authority based on Ordnance Survey maps published in 1990 the length of dual carriageway in Flintshire, measured in one direction only, was 35.7 miles.

Assisted Places Scheme

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the average parental income of children currently assisted under the assisted place scheme in Wales. [12607]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Details of gross parental incomes are not held centrally. However, currently 46 per cent. of parents of children participating under the scheme pay no fees at all because their relevant annual incomes are below the contribution threshold of £9,783.

Dental Services

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the *(a)* percentage and *(b)* number of dental practices in Wales which do not currently treat children under the national health service. [12481]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is not held centrally.

Agri-environment Schemes

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much was allocated to agri-environmental schemes in Wales other than Tir Cymen and environmentally sensitive areas in the last year for which figures are available; and how much has been allocated to farmers whose land is designated as severely disadvantaged within the less favoured area. [12645]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The provision in 1996–97 is:

Scheme	*£000*
Habitat scheme	610
Moorland scheme	1,280
Organic aid	382
Countryside access	2
Total	2,274

There is no separate allocation for less favoured areas. These schemes are voluntary and the amount paid in less favoured areas depends on the number of farmers from those areas who choose to enter the scheme.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the total amount allocated by the Countryside Council for Wales for the Tir Cymen scheme during the current financial year; and how much has been allocated to farmers whose land is designated as severely disadvantaged within the less favoured area. [12646]

Mr. Evans: In 1996–97, £5.36 million has been allocated. A number of farmers whose land has been designated as severely disadvantaged within the less favoured areas have entered the scheme, although there is no separate record of how much has been allocated to them.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the total sum allocated under the environmentally sensitive area scheme for the current financial year; and how much has been allocated to farmers whose land is designated as severely disadvantaged within the less favoured area. [12647]

Mr. Evans: The provision for 1996–97 is £6.76 million. There is no separate allocation for less favoured areas. The scheme is voluntary and the amount paid in less-favoured areas depends on the number of farmers from those areas who choose to enter the scheme.

Schools (Performance)

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the costs of *(a)* publishing and *(b)* distributing the booklet, "School Performance Information 1996". [12648]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The costs of making these booklets ready for publication and for distributing them to parents, schools and others amounted to £113,815—just under 80p per copy.

Baglan Hospital

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when it is now proposed to approve the construction of the Baglan hospital; and if he will make a statement. [13035]

Mr. Hague: My Department informed the Glan-y-Mor NHS trust and Lechyd Morgannwg Health on 24 January 1997 that the outline business case has been approved. This enables the trust to seek funding under the private finance initiative.

Inward Investment (Aberavon)

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the new industries that have been brought to the Aberavon constituency from abroad in each of the past five years. [13036]

Mr. Hague: Since 1 January 1992, there have been 12 inward investment projects recorded for the Aberavon constituency promising 405 new jobs, 420 safeguarded jobs and capital investment of £75.6 million. One of these involved investment by an overseas company new to the area and that was recorded in 1993.

I am also pleased to announce today that Sumitomo will be setting up a new subsidiary in Baglan creating over 80 new jobs in a project of almost £3 million to manufacture flat flexible cables.

Ambulance Services

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) when he *(a)* encouraged the Welsh ambulance policy advisory group to develop an expression of interest to reconfigure the Welsh ambulance services and *(b)* requested it to submit its proposals to him by June; [13197]

(2) if he will place in the Library copies of correspondence between his Department and the Welsh ambulance policy advisory group concerning the group's outline expression of interest of 1996 and subsequent correspondence referring to future expressions of interest on ambulance service mergers. [13195]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Any proposals to reconfigure ambulance trusts are matters for the trusts themselves in conjunction with respective commissioners. They have not been asked for an expression of interest or set a timetable for its submission. I welcome the work being undertaken by the Welsh ambulance policy advisory group and I am aware that the group's objective is to submit joint proposals for the future provision of ambulances in Wales by June 1997. If the proposals include a possible reconfiguration of trusts, that would be subject to public consultation in the usual way.

Correspondence between the Department and NHS trusts is treated as management in confidence.

Local Government Finance

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he will announce his decisions on the 1997–98 local government revenue settlement; and if he will make a statement. [13385]

Mr. Hague: I have given careful consideration to the representations that I have received on my provisional settlement proposals. I chaired a meeting of the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government Finance on 16 December, at which settlement matters were discussed; and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State met representatives of police authorities in Wales on 10 January.

Having taken account of all the representations, I have decided to confirm total standard spending at £2,931.3 million and aggregate external finance at £2,577.9 million for 1997–98. The increase in TSS is £66.3 million or 2.3 per cent. on 1996–97. The increase in AEF is £64.1 million or 2.6 per cent. TSS includes £169.2 million for community care and £340.6 million to fund police services. I believe that my proposals provide local authorities with a fair level of funding in 1997–98 given the overall level of resources available and other spending needs.

AEF will comprise £1,732.7 million in revenue support grant; £584 million in distributable non-domestic rates; £244.5 million in specific grants, including police grant; £0.2 million for Dyfed-Powys police authority to damp the effect on council tax payers in its area of a reduction of over 2 per cent. in its police grant and SSA allocations resulting from methodology changes in the police funding formula; and £16.5 million to damp council tax increases to ensure that no council tax payer in Wales faces an increase in their bill of more than 15 per cent., excluding community council precepts and discretionary non-domestic rate relief. Actual council tax levels will depend on the budgetary decisions of individual local and police authorities.

The £16.5 million within AEF for council tax reduction is less than the provisional amount of £18.3 million announced to the House on 12 December. Changes to local authority standard spending assessments from provisional to final stage and adjustments to local authorities' base budgets resulting from consultation mean that less money is needed to maintain the 15 per cent. threshold. The balance of £1.8 million is added to revenue support grant.

I propose to lay the local government finance report (Wales) 1997–98 before the House on 3 February. At the same time, I shall be laying the special grant report (Wales) 1997 and the limitation of council tax (relevant notional amounts) report (Wales) 1997–98.

I am placing final settlement details for individual local authorities and police authorities in the Library. My decisions are subject to the approval of the House of Commons.

PRIME MINISTER

Arms Exports

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 25 November, *Official Report*, column *1*, when he expects to be able to report to Parliament the results of his review of export licensing controls. [12628]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) on 22 January, *Official Report*, columns *600–01* on progress on the Government's response to the recommendations made by Sir Richard Scott following his inquiry into the export of arms and arms-related goods to Iraq.

European Council

Mr. Hawksley: To ask the Prime Minister where the European Council at the end of the United Kingdom's presidency of the European Union in 1998 will be held. [13499]

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects to announce his decision on the location of the June 1998 European summit conference. [13058]

The Prime Minister: The European Council will be held in Cardiff.

Derek Bentley

Miss Lestor: To ask the Prime Minister what decision he has made in respect of a pardon for Derek Bentley. [13155]

The Prime Minister: My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is considering carefully the latest request for a posthumous free pardon. He will make an announcement as soon as a decision has been reached.

Minister for Children

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will appoint a Minister for Children. [12721]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* I have no plans to do so. The Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), has ministerial responsibility for children's services at the Department of Health. However, all Government Departments are aware of the need to consider children's interests and there are many mechanisms in place, both formal and informal, to ensure inter-departmental co-operation on children's issues. These arrangements work well, especially now they have been expanded by the forming of the children's services strategy group which brings together central and local government and the major voluntary organisations to look at key issues. This group is co-ordinated by the Department of Health.

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 January. [11691]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

HEALTH

Dental Services

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review the current arrangements for patients giving consent to dental work. [12380]

Mr. Malone: We have no plans to review these arrangements. The General Dental Council, in its guidance on professional conduct and fitness to practise, advises that dentists must obtain valid consent prior to treatment and have a duty to explain what treatment they propose to provide. The form that the patient signs before treatment and the general dental services regulations reflect this.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to improve NHS oversight of courses of treatment proposed by dentists. [12466]

Mr. Malone: The dental reference service provides independent professional dental patient examination and related services in response to requests from general dental practitioners, national health service managers, health departments and the Dental Practice Board, by which it is managed. Funding was provided in 1996–97 for the expansion of the DRS to 60 dentists.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the trends in the incidence of dental caries among school children *(a)* in Bolton and *(b)* nationally since 1979. [12470]

Mr. Malone: The British Association for the Study of Community Dentistry conducts annual surveys of dental caries prevalence in children within a four-yearly cycle comprising those aged five, 12 and 14, throughout Great Britain. BASCD began these surveys in 1985–86 in England and Wales. The tables show the mean number decayed, missing and filled in the deciduous teeth only of five-year-old children, in the permanent teeth only of 12 and 14-year-old children in Bolton, and the figures for five, 12 and 14-year-olds in England.

Mean number of decayed, missing and filled teeth of five-year-olds[1] in Bolton and England since 1987–98.

	Bolton	England
1987–88	2.67	1.73
1989–90	2.82	1.62
1991–92	3.52	1.66
1993–94	3.36	1.74

[1] Deciduous teeth only.

Mean number of DMFT of 12-year-olds[1] in Bolton and England since 1988–89

	Bolton	England
1988–89	2.03	1.49
1992–93	2.18	1.15

[1] Permanent teeth only.

Mean number of DMFT of 14-year-olds[1] in Bolton and England since 1986–87

	Bolton	England
1986–87	3.79	n/a
1990–91	n/a	2.14
1994–95	2.52	1.67

[1] Permanent teeth only.
n/a = no data available.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the largest national health service payment to a single dentist in 1995–96 working alone. [13158]

Mr. Malone: The largest gross fee payment in 1995–96 to a national health service dentist who had no other dentists working for him was £546,000.

Water Fluoridation

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list his Department's grants awarded since 1986 to the British Fluoridation Society indicating the purpose of each grant. [12633]

Mr. Malone: The British Fluoridation Society is an organisation of charitable status which exists to promote the artificial fluoridation of water and has assisted the Department in its objective of improving the oral health of the population. The table gives details of grants to the British Fluoridation Society by the Department of Health since 1986.

Department of Health grants to the British Fluoridation Society for the period from 1986 to 1996

Year	£
1996–97	[1]17,609
1995–96	[1]74,000
1994–95	63,000
1993–94	62,247

Department of Health grants to the British Fluoridation Society for the period from 1986 to 1996

Year	£
1992–93	56,000
1991–92	51,491
1990–91	45,784
1989–90	31,000
1988–89	30,000
1987–88	20,000
1986–87	20,000
1985–86	30,000

[1] Additional funding made available to finance individual projects.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the scientific work published since 1990 upon which the Government's advisers have based their recommendations to fluoridate water. [12440]

Mr. Malone: It is not possible to provide a full list of scientific publications used in support of the Government's policy of water fluoridation, given that the policy is based on advice obtained from a variety of sources, some external to the Department of Health, each with its own area of expertise and source material on fluoridation.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on departmental staff secondments to the British Fluoridation Society since 1986. [12634]

Mr. Malone: No departmental staff have been seconded to the British Fluoridation Society.

Eye Tests

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 3 December, *Official Report*, column *640*, if he will separately identify the number of NHS eye tests carried out on people aged over 65 years in each year since 1989. [12560]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is as follows:

The estimated number of national health service sight tests received by people aged over 65 years in Great Britain.

1993–94: 1.428 million

1994–95: 1.773 million

1995–96: 1.711 million

Information on the age of people who received NHS eye tests between 1989 and 1992 is not available.

Mental Health Services

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by what means the NHS executive monitors the implementation of the care programme approach for those patients discharged from psychiatric hospitals in under one week. [12604]

Mr. Burns: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave her on 11 December 1996, *Official Report*, column 227.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide additional funding to the NHS for hospital care and aftercare for mentally disordered prisoners. [12603]

Mr. Burns: We have provided an additional £15 million for health authorities for 1997–98 for the care of mentally disordered offenders. Health authorities will be expected to provide support on the basis of £1 for every £2 of central funding, making £22.5 million in total. In addition, an extra £5 million has been allocated to health authorities for the current financial year for acute mental illness and this will include care for mentally disordered offenders.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many extra-contractual referrals of mentally ill patients to private hospitals *(a)* for England and *(b)* by region there were in each year since 1986. [12601]

Mr. Burns: This information is not available centrally.

Hospital Long-stay Beds

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the number of long-term continuing care beds per health authority in the Northern and Yorkshire region separately identifying long-stay *(a)* geriatric and *(b)* medical beds. [12479]

Mr. Horam: Information is not available centrally in the form requested. The information that is available centrally is contained in "Bed availability in England", copies of which are available in the Library.

Breast Cancer Screening

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his policy towards the availability of mammograms for persons aged 50 years and over within the national health service; and if he will make a statement. [12558]

Mr. Horam: The national health service breast screening programme invites women aged 50 to 64 years for breast screening by mammography once every three years. Women aged 65 and over may continue to be screened every three years on request. In 1994–95—the latest available figures—more than 1 million women in England aged 50 and over were screened by the programme with over 5,000 cases of cancer detected.

We have no plans to extend the programme to include men, in whom there are a very small number of cases of breast cancer—under 200 per year.

Symptomatic women of any age can request a mammogram at any time, in discussion with their general practitioner.

Paediatric Intensive Care

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many paediatric intensive care beds are currently available in the Northern and Yorkshire region; and how many there were in 1992. [12946]

Mr. Horam: Information on the availability of paediatric intensive care beds is being collected routinely for the first time in 1996–97. Such data are not available for 1992. A recent special bed survey identified 17 general and 14 specialist paediatric intensive care beds in the Northern and Yorkshire region. This includes three

additional general paediatric intensive care beds opened this winter.

Doctors

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* career grade doctors in hospital service and *(b)* general practitioner principals there were in each year since 1988. [13215]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is provided in the following tables:

Hospital career grades staff 1988 to 1995 in England as at 30 September each year

Whole-time equivalent

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Consultant	13,200	13,670	14,190	14,500	14,850	15,210	15,640	16,930
Staff grade[1]	—	30	250	470	710	1,050	1,240	1,640
Associate specialist	660	670	740	760	770	840	820	940
Total	13,870	14,370	15,180	15,730	16,330	17,100	17,690	19,500

[1] This was a new grade introduced in 1989. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

N.B. Hospital practitioners and clinical assistants data are not given as most of these are general practitioners.

Source:

The Department of Health Medical and Dental Workforce Census.

Unrestricted principals at 1 October in England

Year	*Unrestricted principals*
1988	25,322
1989	25,608
1990	25,662
1991	25,686
1992	25,968
1993	26,289
1994	26,567
1995	26,702

Source:

GMS statistics.

Note:

An unrestricted principal is a practitioner who provides the full range of general medical services and whose list is not limited to any particular group of persons. The figures provided for unrestricted principals are not whole time equivalents and include part-timers, returners and salaried partners.

Medical Services (Commercial Organisations)

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many commercial organisations have expressed an interest in involvement in the provision of general medical services under the proposals of the Primary Care Bill. [13214]

Mr. Malone: The Department has received one informal expression of interest from a commercial organisation.

Breast Implants

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what clinical trials he *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on silicone gel-filled breast implants, prior to their being made available on the national health service. [13080]

Mr. Horam: No clinical trials on silicone gel-filled breast implants were commissioned or evaluated by the Department of Health prior to their being made available to the national health service.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many British women have received breast implants filled with silicone gel *(a)* in private practices and *(b)* on the national health service; [13075]

(2) how many breast implants filled with silicone gel have been implanted since their introduction to Britain *(a)* in private practices and *(b)* on the national health service. [13074]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department made of the decision by the United States Food and Drug Administration in April 1992 to restrict the use of breast implants filled with silicone gel. [13073]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health made no assessment of the decision by the United States Food and Drug Administration, but independently set up an expert advisory group in 1992 to examine all evidence relating to breast implants and connective tissue disease. The group concluded that, on the basis of all data available at that time, there was no evidence of an increased incidence of connective tissue disease associated with silicone gel breast implants. It therefore saw no reason to alter current practice or policy in the UK, and endorses these conclusions following an updated review of all data available in 1994.

Silicone Poisoning

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many British women have been diagnosed with silicone poisoning in each of the last four years. [13072]

Mr. Horam: No figures are held on women diagnosed with silicone poisoning since no distinct clinical disorder characterised by a particular profile of symptoms and linked to silicone exposure has been identified by relevant specialists in the United Kingdom.

Human Prostheses

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* legislative measures and *(b)* guidance govern the safe use of human prostheses. [13071]

Mr. Horam: Human prostheses come within the scope of the Medical Devices Regulations (SI 1994 No. 3017) which came into force on 1 January 1995, with a

transition period which runs until June 1998. No additional guidance has been issued on the safe use of the products.

Alpha-l-antitrypsin Deficiency

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the national distribution of sufferers of the disease alpha-l-antitrypsin deficiency; and what assessment he has made of the pattern of distribution; [13079]

(2) what estimate he has made of the average lifespan of sufferers of the disease alpha-1-antitrypsin deficiency; and how this relates to the average lifespan of non-sufferers; [13078]

(3) how many consultants in Britain are specialists in the disease alpha-l-antitrypsin deficiency; [13077]

(4) how many British people suffer from the disease alpha-l-antitrypsin deficiency. [13076]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not collected centrally.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Companies House

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what is his policy in respect of consultation with Companies House unions; [12933]

(2) if he will list the locations, time scales and cost of establishment of regional satellite offices for Companies House; [12931]

(3) if he will list in respect of the projects which are being undertaken in Companies House, Edinburgh, in relation to the five-year development plan, the *(a)* name of the project, *(b)* cost, *(c)* time limits, *(d)* terms of reference, *(e)* number of staff involved and *(f)* consultants involved; [12939]

(4) what is the number of full-term, agency, fixed-term and casual staff employed at Companies House, Edinburgh; and if he will make a statement on future staffing levels under the agency's five-year development plan; [12930]

(5) if he will make it his policy that there will be no *(a)* voluntary and *(b)* compulsory redundancies in the Edinburgh office as a result of the proposed Companies House five-year development plan; [12923]

(6) what is the estimated cost of the new technology with specific reference to electronic filing and image database to be employed at Companies House, Edinburgh, Cardiff and London; and what estimate he has made of the number of staff affected at these localities. [12932]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I am asking the chief executive of Companies House to reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Holden to Mr. Nigel Griffiths, dated 28 January 1997:

You recently tabled a number of questions to the President of the Board of Trade regarding the future of Companies House Executive Agency, particularly as it relates to our Edinburgh Office. I have been asked to reply to you direct. Before I address your specific questions, it might be helpful if I set out a number of points by way of background.

The Five Year Development Plan is an internal working document which we are using as a tool to help us plan our way ahead to a fully electronic era for Companies House. Although there has been extensive internal debate on the Plan, the document is still in a draft form and has not been shown to Ministers or approved by them. The figures in the Plan relating to IT projects, staffing levels, timing and expenditure are all indicative only.

We have invested a considerable amount of time involving staff in discussions about the Plan, giving them opportunity to air views, ask questions and become involved in taking the Plan forward. Trade union representatives have been involved in discussions from an early stage.

I will turn now to the particular questions which you raise:

PQ 96/960: Companies House's employees and the unions which represent them have been briefed on proposed developments and consultation on relevant areas has been initiated. Companies House management expect to continue the communication and consultation process.

PQ 96/961: In addition to Cardiff, Edinburgh and London offices: Companies House operates what it terms regional satellite offices in Manchester. Leeds and Birmingham. An outlet is also maintained on behalf of Companies House in Glasgow. There is no present intention to expand their number. No firm plans have been made for their future. Employees in the four locations together amount to under ten and establishment costs are correspondingly small.

PQ 96/962: None of the projects identified in the Five Year Development Plan is specific to Companies House Edinburgh, although that location is affected by many of the planned projects for Companies House overall. In view of the status of the Development Plan, no worthwhile definition of individual projects can be given at this time.

PQ 96/963: At end-December 1996, Companies House Edinburgh employed 30 (full time equivalent) permanent staff and 8 (full time equivalent) on short term contracts. It is expected that future levels in Edinburgh will be lower than present numbers.

PQ 96/964 The Five Year Development Plan referred to is an internal working document intended to chart the way to achieving the strategic objectives of the Ministerially-approved "Strategy 2000" for Companies House. It is likely that their achievement will require voluntary redundancy. It is hoped that compulsory redundancy can be avoided although no commitments to that effect have been given.

PQ 96/965: It is anticipated that Companies House will expend around £10 million on new technology projects over the next four years. Electronic filing is likely to cost around £0.5 million. The image database embraces a number of projects, some of which have yet to be fully defined, so it is impossible to give an accurate estimate of cost at this time. The work of most of the 900 staff within the Agency will be affected to a greater or lesser degree at the transition is made to new technology.

If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Insolvency Service

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the delay which has occurred in relation to the staff pay rise in the Insolvency Service; and if interest has been paid on the late pay. [12017]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have asked the chief executive of the Insolvency Service to reply.

Letter from Desmond Flynn to Mr. Nick Harvey, dated 28 January 1997:

You asked the President of the Board of Trade for a statement about the timing of the staff pay rise in The Insolvency Service and whether interest has been paid; and, separately, you have written to the Minister, John Taylor MP, about this. These are matters which fall within the operational responsibility of Peter Joyce as Chief Executive of The Insolvency Service and I have therefore been asked to reply in Mr Joyce's absence form the office.

Pay awards in the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and its Agencies are always put into effect as quickly as possible. The existing pay system incorporates a settlement date which is used for calculation purposes as soon as any award is finalised.

DTI pay administration staff and the Chessington Computer Centre implement pay awards individually once they have been initiated by Insolvency Service management. Within The Insolvency Service, we have recently experienced problems arising from a backlog of recruitment and promotion boards following decision on the Options exercise on contracting out certain areas of our work. The timetable for processing and paying awards depends on the negotiating timetable, the reporting cycle, and the need to adjust systems and to train staff to ensure accurate implementation of each pay settlement. In a performance-based system, the performance box marking and the negotiated settlement must both be known before action is taken on individual awards.

In 1996 DTI established a standard reporting cycle of April-March, but the settlement date for most staff remained at 1 April; in 1997 DTI plans to standardise the settlement date at 1 August. Under the new delegated arrangements on pay awards our intention will be to try and process staff reports, negotiate the collective awards and implement the individual awards nearer to the settlement date. Under the existing arrangements however calculating back to a settlement date has been unavoidable. Although it was not possible to predict exactly how long the whole process will take, DTI management has of course been aware of this position and took it into account in calculating and negotiating pay offers. There is no right to interest on pay increases in the pay system.

In the coming year, 1997/98 transitional provisions relating to the question of pay awards will be needed to move to common settlement date and because a new pay system is being introduced on 1 August. The new system is being developed to be simpler to administer and more stream-lined than the old one bringing closer together in time settlement reference dates and the finalisation of any award of a pay increase for individuals.

Airbus Project

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what launch aid he proposes to make available to British Aerospace plc for the Airbus C XX project. [12994]

Mr. Greg Knight: The Government will consider fully any application for launch aid. No such applications have been received from British Aerospace plc in respect of new Airbus projects.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to introduce national legislation designating Sunday as a day of rest following the Government's challenge to article 5 of the working time directive. [13208]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have no plans to do so.

The Court of Justice of the European Communities accepted our application to annul the second sentence of article 5 of the working time directive, which said that the minimum weekly rest period should in principle include Sunday.

Exports

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total value of exports from the Yorkshire and Humberside region for each of the past three years; and if he will make a statement. [12835]

Mr. Page: This information is not officially collated on a regional basis and is therefore unavailable.

Bank of Credit and Commerce International

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will set up an inquiry into the conduct of the liquidation of BCCI and the fees charged by the liquidators prior to the payment of the first dividend. [12938]

Mr. John M. Taylor: No. The fees payable to the UK joint liquidators are a matter for the liquidation committee of creditors.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will investigate the factors underlying the non-distribution of assets retained by the BCCI liquidators since 1992. [12929]

Mr. Taylor: I have discussed progress on the liquidation of BCCI with the UK joint liquidators and am satisfied that the delay in paying a first dividend was caused by the need to resolve litigation in the UK and other jurisdictions.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the total amount of funds which have been recovered by the BCCI liquidators since 1992; and what amount of funds is now held by them. [12937]

Mr. Taylor: Total realisations by the UK liquidators in the period from their appointment as provisional liquidators to 15 January 1996 were US $961.3 million, with other receipts of US $215.3.

Funds in hand as at 20 January 1997 totalled £205.7 million and US $266.7 million.

A report by the liquidators covering the fifth year of the liquidation and made up to 15 January 1997 will be made in the near future.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will ask the liquidators to report progress to his Department in respect of their attempts to recover BCCI assets held by the United States Department of Justice; and what sums are being claimed; [12927]

(2) if he will make a statement on the agreement entered into by the BCCI liquidators with the United States Department of Justice in respect of recovery of BCCI assets; and if he will investigate the factors underlying the delay in recovering those assets. [12928]

Mr. Taylor: The UK liquidators, then the provisional liquidators, were not a party to the plea agreement with prosecuting and regulatory authorities in the United States under which all BCCI assets within US jurisdiction were forfeited to the US Department of Justice. Under the terms of the agreement, but subject to the exercise of the US Attorney-General's discretion, the liquidators estimate that between US $350 and US $750 may be received by them once all claims within the United States have been determined. To January 1996 they had received some US $244 million.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what will be the total amount distributed in the first dividend declared by the BCCI liquidators. [12936]

Mr. Taylor: The initial dividend payment by the principal estates was 24.5 per cent. and totalled US$1.35 billion.

Packet Radio

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade in what circumstances United Kingdom radio amateurs are permitted to *(a)* send and *(b)* receive E-mail letters through the USA via packet radio. [11294]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The use of E-mail via packet radio is not currently provided for under the amateur radio licence. The Radiocommunications Agency is reviewing the position, in consultation with the Radio Society of Great Britain.

Out-of-town Supermarkets

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he has taken to restrict the number of out-of-town supermarkets in rural areas. [12011]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have been asked to reply.

We have published revised versions of PPG13 (transport) and of PPG6 (town centres and retail developments), which encourage the location of town centre uses, including retailing in existing centres. Additionally Government have undertaken a wide variety of regeneration and redevelopment projects which will also encourage development in town centres, including the single regeneration budget and English Partnerships.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Special Schools

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the special schools in Northern Ireland indicating the number of pupils attending each and specifying those providing a full-time nurse; and if he will make a statement about the criteria for provision of full-time nurses. [11701]

Mr. Ancram: Available data, at 31 October 1995, are as follows. An asterisk indicates schools with a full-time nurse.

	Number
Belfast	
Cedar Lodge*	158
Clarawood	35
Fleming Fulton*	174
Glenveagh*	146
Greenwood House	59
Harberton	198
Jaffe	45
Mitchell House*	70
Oakwood*	74
Park	143
St. Francis	24
St. Gerard's	250
Western	
Belmont House	210
Cranny	39
Erne	141
Foyleview, Londonderry*	100
Glasvey	36
Glenside	45
Greystone Hall	90
Heatherbank	134
Killadeas	51
North Eastern	
Beechgrove	23
Dunfane	144
Hillcroft	73
Jordanstown	127
Kilronan	81
Loughan	68
Muckamore	39
Roddensvale	50
Rosstulla	156
Sandelford	96
Thornfield	77
South Eastern	
Ardmore House	21
Beechlawn	253
Brookfield	87
Clifton	92
Dundonald (Tor Bank)	139
Killard House	206
Knockevin	86
Longstone	201
Parkview	106
Southern	
Ceara	48
Donard	39
Fallowfield	30
Lisanally	60
Rathfriland Hill	90
Sperrinview	45

In addition there are three hospital schools in Altnagelvin, Londonderry (27), Belfast (130) and Lindsay, Newtownbreda (19).

The provision of nurses is a matter for the local health and social services board based on its assessment of need in individual cases.

Joyriding

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list *(a)* the number of people convicted of joyriding over the last five years, *(b)* the number of cars stolen, *(c)* the clear-up rate, *(d)* the range of sentences imposed and *(e)* the bail rules for this offence; and what assessment he has made of the value of custodial sentences in respect of this offence. [12175]

Sir John Wheeler: Information for 1991 to 1995 in relation to the offence of taking a vehicle without the owner's consent is given in the following tables.

In Northern Ireland, statutory criteria for the granting of bail apply only in relation to offences which are scheduled under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1996. Decisions on the granting of bail for the offence of taking a vehicle without the owner's consent are the responsibility of the court and are based on common law precedents.

The sentence imposed for taking a vehicle without the owner's consent is a matter for the discretion of the court, taking into account the circumstances of individual cases. Custodial sentences are imposed when the court is of the opinion that the serious nature of the case and the need to protect the public require such a sentence. The Government are currently conducting research into the effectiveness of different court disposals which will enable an assessment to be made of their value.

Table A: Court convictions for "taking a motor vehicle without the owner's consent or other authority", under Article 172 of the Road Traffic (NI) Order 1981

Year	Total number of convictions
1991	396
1992	443
1993	444
1994	449
1995	530

Table B: Recorded crimes and clear-up rate in relation to "taking a motor vehicle without the owner's consent or other authority"

Year	Number of crimes recorded	Clear up rate (per cent.)
1991	4,928	40
1992	5,842	35
1993	5,353	42
1994	5,115	29
1995	4,521	27

Table C: Sentences imposed for "taking a motor vehicle without the owner's consent or other authority"

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Immediate imprisonment	66	123	133	128	136
Suspended imprisonment	55	81	89	73	98
Training school order	27	17	13	24	17
Community supervision	113	93	94	100	113
Fine	98	105	92	95	103
Discharges	37	23	23	29	61
Other	0	1	0	0	2

New House Completions (Belfast)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many new house completions there have been in each of the last six years *(a)* in the Belfast city council area, *(b)* in the greater Belfast urban area excluding the city council area, *(c)* in east Belfast excluding south-east Belfast, within the city council area and *(d)* in the greater east Belfast excluding the city council part of east Belfast; and if he will set out the boundaries used for these statistics. [12177]

Mr. Moss: Information is not available in the exact form requested by the hon. Member. It may, however, be possible to provide available information in a form which is useful to the hon. Member and I will write to him accordingly.

Murders

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list for each year since 1968 the number of murders recorded in Northern Ireland which have been cleared up and how many remain under investigation; how many people have been convicted in connection with these murders; how many have been convicted of murder and how many convicted of a lesser offence; and how many convicted of murder have subsequently been released. [12338]

Sir John Wheeler: This information is not available in the form requested and to obtain it would incur disproportionate cost.

The Chief Constable's annual reports provide details of offences—including murder—the number cleared and persons proceeded against and convicted. The reports from 1970 are held in the House of Commons Library.

Power Supply (Newry and Mourne)

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on each incident which resulted in a power supply failure, in the Newry and Mourne district in each of the past 10 years, indicating the length of time power was off, the estimated number of houses involved, the electoral wards affected and the nature of the fault. [11689]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 24 January 1997]:* I am informed by Northern Ireland Electricity plc that the detailed information requested is not readily available. However NIE is required under regulation 35 of the Electricity Supply Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1991, which came into effect on 3 February 1992, to notify the Department of Economic Development of major failures of supply. The following failures in the Newry and Mourne district have been notified under regulation 35:

Date	Number of customers affected	Duration Hours	Duration Minutes	Change of failure
30 March 1993	5,300	2	50	Gale damage
10 June 1993	4,200	1	43	Conductor fault
12 September	3,900	1	55	Overhead line fault
16 October 1993	5,300	2	05	Third party damage to conductor
6 February 1994	4,355	1	27	Gale damage
17 August 1994	25,000	0	08	Inadvertent trip during protection testing
1 June 1995	25,900	3	10	Conductor fault
9 April 1996	11,000	0	20	Fault following malicious damage

I understand that NIE is currently engaged in a major long-term capital investment programme in the Newry and Mourne district with the aim of improving the security and quality of electricity supply in the area.

Departmental Publications

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the *(a)* White Papers, *(b)* Green Papers, *(c)* consultation papers, *(d)* draft regulations and *(e)* circulars, for which his Department has been responsible issued in 1996 which his Department assesses could give rise, (i) directly and (ii) indirectly to significant environmental effects. [12706]

Mr. Moss *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* The information is not available in the specific form requested but papers, draft regulations and circulars issued by the Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office in 1996 which could give rise to significant environmental effects are as follows:

(a) White papers: None

(b) Green papers: None

(c) Consultation papers:

The Draft Protection of Water again Agricultural Nitrate Pollution Regulations

Proposal for a Draft Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order

Proposal for a Draft Industrial Pollution Control (Northern Ireland) Order

The Draft Industrial Pollution Control (Prescribed Processes and Substances) Regulations

National Air Quality Strategy (issued as part of a UK-wide consultation)

The Draft Surface Waters (Abstraction for Drinking Water) (Classification) Regulations

Producer Responsibility for Packaging and Packaging Waste

Larne Area Plan (Draft)

Planning Policy Statement Retailing and Town Centres

Planning Policy Statement Industrial Land

Towards and Beyond the Millennium

Belfast Urban Area Plan (Alteration No. 2)

Carrickfergus Area Plan 1995–2011 Preliminary Proposals

Lisburn Area Plan Preliminary Proposals

Planning Policy Statement Planning and Roads Considerations

Derry Area Plan Draft Plan

North East Area Plan

Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001 (Amendment No. 2)

Carrickfergus Area Plan 1995–2011—Draft Plan

Draft Planning (Control of Advertisements) (Amendment) Regulations

Guidance Notes for Listed Building Owners and Their Agents

Access to the Northern Ireland Countryside

Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985—Review of Schedules

Building Regulations requirement for the conservation of the fuel and power

Northern Ireland Organic Aid Scheme

(d) Draft regulations

The Litter (Statutory Undertakers) (Designation of Relevant Land) Order (Northern Ireland) 1966

The Air Quality Standards (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1966

The Protection of Water against Agricultural Nitrate Pollution Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1966

The Genetically Modified Organisms (Risk Assessment) (Records and Exemptions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1966

The Control of Asbestos in Water (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1966

The Surface Waters (Abstraction for Drinking Water) (Classification) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1966

Planning (Use Classes) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 1966

Planning (General Development) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 1966

Countryside Access Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996

(e) Circulars

Environmental newsletter issued to businesses in Northern Ireland

Waste Exchange Bureau circular issued to businesses in Northern Ireland

Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 guidance issued to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

Extradition

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make representations to the Irish Government to repeal Irish extradition legislation preventing outward extradition unless bilateral arrangements exist; and if he will make a statement. [12449]

Mr. Kirkhope: I have been asked to reply.

The provision in question relates to the extradition by Ireland of its own nationals. It is the policy of the United Kingdom not to refuse extradition on the ground of nationality, and it continues to urge other Governments to re-examine their policy and legislation if it prohibits the extradition of their own nationals. The 1996 European Union extradition convention requires of all member states that they examine their domestic legislation on the question of extradition of own nationals during the ratification process.

SCOTLAND

Food Safety

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many incidents of food poisoning have been investigated by food enforcement authorities in each year since 1993. [11327]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: This information is not held centrally. Since the beginning of 1996, the Scottish centre for infection and environmental health has collated and published data relating to outbreaks of infectious intestinal disease which includes outbreaks due to food poisoning although these are not shown separately.

The SCIEH weekly reports which contain information relating to the first three quarters are: 12 April 1996 (volume 30 No. 96/15), 26 July 1996 (volume 30 No. 96/30) and 4 October 1996 (volume 96/40).

Inward Investment (Glasgow)

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list each overseas company, by sector, which has located business in Glasgow in each of the last five years and the total number of jobs created in each category as a result. [11864]

Mr. Kynoch: All our dealings with inward investors are undertaken on a commercially confidential basis and it would not therefore be appropriate to publish details of individual projects except in cases where details of the project have been announced by the company itself.

The following table contains details of the inward investment projects attracted to Glasgow during the last five years where the company in question is overseas-owned and where the project has been the subject of a public announcement.

Date of announcement	Company	Ultimate ownership	Planned new jobs	Sector
November 1992	Depenova Development AB	Sweden	20	Healthcare
August 1994	Atlantic Information Systems	Iceland	25	Software
June 1995	MIC Textiles UK Ltd.	Turkey	30	Textiles
May 1996	Mabbett and Associates Inc	United States	12	Environmental services
December 1996	Polaroid (U)K Ltd.	United States	150	Shared service centre

The job figures are based on information provided by the companies concerned at the time of the investment decision and take no account of subsequent developments.

In addition, there were a further 14 projects by overseas-owned companies which were not publicly announced. These projects involved the planned creation of over 700 new jobs and the safeguarding of nearly 900 existing jobs.

There has of course also been a significant level of inward investment in Glasgow by companies based in other parts of the United Kingdom. TSB bank, BT and Abbey National, for example, have all announced the establishment of major new call centres in the city.

The figures for total inward investment in Glasgow—both by overseas-owned and UK-owned companies—show that, over the past five years, the city has attracted nearly 50 projects involving the planned creation or safeguarding of over 5,000 jobs.

Public Appointments

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 11 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *281–84*, what factors underlay the extension of the period of office of the Scottish Office appointees to each of the non-departmental public bodies listed. [12141]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is common practice for individuals to be offered re-appointment where they have achieved a satisfactory standard of performance and this was the case in each of the extensions concerned. The Commissioner for Public Appointments has confirmed this practice in the case of first re-appointments but has advised that second re-appointments should be exceptional and normally subject to a scrutiny process, including consideration of other candidates.

Ayrshire and Arran Health Board

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for the last two financial years and for the current financial year the names of public relations companies employed by Ayrshire and Arran health board and the cost of these contracts to the health board during these periods. [12294]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not collected centrally. This is a matter for Ayrshire and Arran health board.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the effect on spending on public relations by the Ayrshire and Arran health board of the appointment by the board of a communications manager. [12295]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not held centrally.

Public Relations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how much *(a)* Dunbartonshire Enterprise and *(b)* Grampian Enterprise spent on contracts with public relations and marketing companies during the financial years (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1994–95 and (iii) 1996–97 to date; and if he will indicate the companies involved; [12151]

(2) if he will make a statement on the repeated refusal by Grampian Enterprise and Dunbartonshire Enterprise to supply information requested by the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South in respect of their expenditure on public relations and marketing contracts during the last two years; and what assessment he has made of (i) the reasons the hon. Member is denied the information and (ii) the consistency of this refusal with the new procedures put in place by the enterprise network to promote greater openness in its operations. [12431]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 23 January 1997]:* This is a matter for Dunbartonshire Enterprise and Grampian Enterprise Ltd. respectively. I understand that they have now written to the hon. Member.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the normal tendering arrangements operated by his Department in respect of its non-departmental public bodies were fully implemented in respect of the recent contract awarded by Scottish Enterprise to Beattie Media; in what circumstances his Department is able to dispense with these procedures; and if he will make a statement. [12152]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 23 January 1997]:* The award of this contract complied with departmental requirements and I understand that it also complied with Scottish Enterprise's detailed internal guidance on tendering.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information the Scottish Office received about Scottish Enterprise's contract with Beattie Media during the negotiations and before the award of the contract; and which individual within Scottish Enterprise took the decision to award its recent public relations contract to Beattie Media. [12153]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 23 January 1977]:* Scottish Enterprise is not required to advise the Department of such contracts. Details of the decision making process are a matter for Scottish Enterprise and I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the recent award of a public relations contract by Scottish Enterprise to Beattie Media, indicating the value of the contract, the period over which it will operate and what services are covered by the contract. [12154]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 28 January 1997]:* This is a matter for Scottish Enterprise and I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member directly.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements for tendering for public relations contracts are stipulated by the Scottish Office in respect of Scottish Enterprise and other non-departmental public bodies. [12155]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 23 January 1997]:* Scottish Enterprise and other non-departmental public bodies are expected to comply with the relevant provisions of Government accounting, which require that purchasing should be based on value for money and that goods and services should be acquired by competition unless there are convincing reasons to the contrary. These provisions make no distinction between contracts for public relations and for other purposes.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will ask for a report from Scottish Enterprise in respect of its recent contract with Beattie Media to clarify whether the contract was awarded outside of normal tendering procedures operated by Scottish Enterprise. [12302]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 23 January 1997]:* I have already been informed that the award of this contract complied with Scottish Enterprise's internal guidance on tendering.

Scottish Enterprise Contracts

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on how many occasions during the current and previous financial year Scottish Enterprise has awarded contracts inconsistent with tendering arrangements stipulated by his Department; and if he will list the companies involved in these contracts and the values of the contracts. [12157]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 23 January 1997]:* Scottish Enterprise is expected to comply with all relevant aspects of Government accounting which emphasises the importance of value for money and requires that goods and services be acquired by competition unless there are convincing reasons to the contrary.

I am not aware of any contracts awarded which failed to comply with that requirement, but this is an area subject to scrutiny by Scottish Enterprise's auditors.

Forestry Commission Land

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what area of Forestry Commission *(a)* land and *(b)* woodland has been sold in (i) England, (ii) Scotland and (iii) Wales in each year since 1979; and what area he proposes should be available for future sale. [12485]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 24 January 1997]:* The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by Forest Enterprise. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. Gordon Cowie, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Gordon M. Cowie to Dr. Gavin Strang, dated 28 January 1997:

The Secretary of State for Scotland has asked me to reply to your question about Forestry Commission disposals in England, Scotland and Wales since 1979.

I enclose a list showing the areas of all land and forest land sold in each year from 1979 for the three countries.

As announced in the Government's expenditure plans 1996–97 to 1998–99, the Commission plans to sell 13,000 hectares of forest land in each of the next two years.

Sales by countries of Forestry Commission properties (including woodland areas) by year since 1979

Year ended 31 March	Hectares All land	Forest land
England		
1980	[1]—	300
1981	414	189
1982	1,309	676
1983	2,523	2,126
1984	4,680	4,025
1985	6,976	6,561
1986	2,789	2,489
1987	2,786	2,377
1988	4,593	4,108
1989	1,629	1,386
1990	1,989	1,824
1991	1,556	1,452
1992	1,737	1,673
1993	1,006	883
1994	1,171	1,091
1995	1,486	1,389
1996	1,897	1,785
Scotland		
1980	[1]—	300
1981	1,465	368
1982	7,371	1,510
1983	8,135	4,061
1984	36,543	11,345
1985	18,359	7,671
1986	10,555	4,055
1987	6,220	2,674
1988	3,359	1,662
1989	4,286	1,716
1990	4,620	2,633
1991	4,754	2,384
1992	3,517	3,359
1993	8,437	4,930
1994	12,462	12,105
1995	7,286	6,824
1996	5,889	5,357
Wales		
1980	[1]—	0
1981	361	131
1982	1,743	161
1983	1,450	445
1984	3,347	1,137
1985	3,522	1,840
1986	3,229	1,770
1987	1,950	1,135
1988	977	617
1989	1,760	1,226
1990	1,242	1,102
1991	1,118	934
1992	1,657	1,231
1993	1,146	1,014
1994	1,317	1,223
1995	2,036	1,801
1996	1,302	1,075

[1] Before 1980 central records were kept only of forest land.

Business Rates

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the financial gain to small businesses of his change in policy in 1997–98 regarding business rates; and how much and what share of that benefit accrues to businesses in west Dunbartonshire. [12760]

Mr. Kynoch: The Scottish Office estimates that the benefits to small businesses from the measures on business rates announced in the November 1996 budget total some £8 million in 1996–97. Information is not held centrally on the precise benefits to small businesses in west Dunbarton. The Scottish Office model of the effects of these measures indicate that small businesses in the former Dunbartonshire district will benefit by approximately £90,000 in 1997–98 and businesses in the former Clydebank district will benefit by approximately £40,000. Together these represent a 1.6 per cent. share of the total estimated benefits to small businesses in Scotland.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage and amount of local government income has been uncollected in each year since 1979; and if he will indicate whether rates, community charge or council tax applied in each year. [12764]

Mr. Kynoch: Information is not available centrally on the amount of uncollected domestic and non-domestic rates in the period before 1989–90. Table 1 gives the amount and percentage of community charge income unrecovered for each year between 1989–90 and 1992–93, and the amount and percentage of council tax income unrecovered for each year between 1993–94 and 1995–96.

Between 1989–90 and 1992–93 local government income was not affected by unrecovered non-domestic rate income as any shortfall in non-domestic rate income was made up through revenue support grant. From 1993–94 the operation of non-domestic rate pooling ensures that local authority income is not affected by any unrecovered amounts of non-domestic rates.

Table 2 shows for each year from 1979–80 to 1988–89 the reduction to gross rate income recorded in authorities' accounts arising from rates written off as irrecoverable, the net cost of collection and the repayment of rates paid in error. This is not directly comparable to the figures given in table 1, particularly as it relates to amounts written off rather than amounts uncollected and covers both domestic and non-domestic rates.

Table 1: Amounts of community charge and council tax billed and collected[1]

	Net amount billed[2]	*Amount uncollected at 31 October 1996 £000s*	*Percentage uncollected at 31 October 1996*
Community charge			
1989–90[3]	860,704	83,520	9.7
1990–91[3]	916,589	123,356	13.5
1991–92[3]	747,606	117,766	15.8
1992–93[3]	878,940	163,721	18.6
Council tax			
1993–94	898,866	58,953	6.6
1994–95	971,698	80,837	8.3
1995–96	1,045,577	115,503	11.0

Source:
Community charge and council tax receipts return.:
Notes:
[1] Amounts billed and uncollected include community water charges and council water charges.
[2] Gross amount billed minus rebates granted, as reported by councils at end October 1996.
[3] Excludes information on billed and uncollected amounts for North Lanarkshire, which has, to date, been unable to supply this information.
1. Authorities are asked to exclude surcharges for late payment in amounts billed and amounts collected. Not all authorities are able to do this.

Table 2: Gross rate income and reductions in rates due: 1979–80 to 1988–89

	Gross rate income[1] *£000s*	*Reduction in rates due*[2] *£000s*	*Reduction as percentage of gross income*
1979–80	742,608	15,171	2.0
1980–81	961,993	19,918	2.1
1981–82	1,313,022	34,558	2.6
1982–83	1,495,504	24,625	1.6
1983–84	1,500,194	27,560	1.8
1984–85	1,590,861	33,328	2.1
1985–86	1,872,802	44,055	2.4
1986–87	1,978,748	53,812	2.7
1987–88	2,229,246	65,921	3.0
1988–89	2,292,648	67,678	3.0

Source:
Local Financial Returns.
Note:
[1] Gross rate income includes income from domestic and non-domestic rates.
[2] Reduction in rates due includes rates written off as irrecoverable; net cost of collection rates and repayment of rates paid in error.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the resource planning assumption on capital expenditure advised to West Dunbartonshire council in September 1994; what is the gross capital allocation to west Dunbartonshire for 1997–98; and what factors underlie the differences between the two sums. [12766]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: No resource planning assumptions for housing capital expenditure were issued to West Dunbartonshire council in September 1994; nor has the council received a gross capital allocation for 1997–98.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of West Dunbartonshire council's budget for 1996–97 was met by Scottish Office grant and business rates; and how much cash, in real and constant price terms, was allocated by him to west Dunbartonshire for *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98. [12759]

Mr. Kynoch: Around 83 per cent. of west Dunbartonshire council's planned level of revenue expenditure in the current year is being supported by a

combination of *(a)* basic aggregate external finance—AEF—*(b)* additional AEF from the self-financed mismatch scheme, *(c)* supplementary mismatch scheme grant and *(d)* district equalisation scheme grant.

The following table shows the level of support to the council from these four sources for 1996–97 and 1997–98 in both cash and real terms.

Year	*Cash £ million*	*Real terms £ million (1997–98 Prices)*
1996–97		
(a) Basic AEF[1]	111.3	113.5
(b) Additional AEF from self-financed mismatch scheme	2.4	2.4
(c) Supplementary mismatch scheme	1.2	1.2
(d) District equalisation scheme	0.3	0.3
1997–98		
(a) Basic AEF[1]	109.2	109.2
(b) Additional AEF from self-financed mismatch scheme	1.9	1.9
(c) Supplementary mismatch scheme	0.9	0.9
(d) District equalisation scheme	0.15	0.15

[1] Adjusted to take account of phasing-out of local government re-organisation costs and the introduction of nursery vouchers.

Both the self-financed mismatch scheme which COSLA proposed and the supplementary mismatch scheme which is funded by the Exchequer were introduced on a transitional basis in order to give the councils concerned time to bring their expenditure levels more closely in line with their levels of Government support. In 1997–98, the councils will receive 50 per cent. of the assistance which they are receiving from these two schemes in the current year. The district equalisation scheme is being phased-out on the same basis.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage share of the total Scottish Office grant was allocated to each council in Scotland in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98. [12761]

Mr. Kynoch: The percentage share of total Government support, comprising aggregate external finance, supplementary mismatch scheme grant and district equalisation grant, allocated to each council in Scotland in 1996–97 and 1997–98 is shown in the table.

Council	*1996–94*	*1997–98*
	Percentage	
City of Aberdeen	3.72	3.61
Aberdeenshire	3.74	3.81
Angus	1.87	1.92
Argyll and Bute	2.09	2.06
Clackmannanshire	0.88	0.88
Dumfries and Galloway	2.83	2.85
City of Dundee	3.23	3.19
East Ayrshire	2.31	2.33
East Dunbartonshire	1.76	1.77
East Lothian	1.47	1.49
East Renfrewshire	1.34	1.39
City of Edinburgh	7.47	7.66
Falkirk	2.44	2.45
Fife	6.24	6.20
City of Glasgow	15.74	15.34
Highland	4.53	4.48
Inverclyde	1.91	1.91
Midlothian	1.48	1.44
Moray	1.61	1.61
North Ayrshire	2.58	2.65
North Lanarkshire	6.25	6.21
Orkney	0.71	0.72
Perth and Kinross	2.15	2.18
Renfrewshire	3.28	3.29
Scottish Borders	2.06	2.06
Shetland	0.90	1.05
South Ayrshire	2.00	2.05
South Lanarkshire	5.64	5.66
Stirling	1.57	1.61
West Dunbartonshire	2.17	2.10
West Lothian	2.79	2.78
Western Isles	1.25	1.26
Scotland	100	100

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the expenditure by councils in Scotland, in *(a)* real and *(b)* constant price terms, in each year since 1979 on recovery of local government rates, community charge or council tax through sheriff officers; and if he will indicate for each of those years the amount recovered by sheriff officers. [12765]

Mr. Kynoch: My Department obtains information from local authorities about their total expenditure on collection of local taxation. However, data are not held centrally about either *(a)* expenditure on collection through sheriff officers or *(b)* amounts recovered by sheriff officers.

Capping Limits

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will exclude expenditure on redundancy payments from capping limits. [12758]

Mr. Kynoch: At its meeting with my right hon. Friend and me on 17 January, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities asked whether it would be possible for a council, if it so wished, to use part of its 1997–98 capital allocation to fund spend-to-save measures including redundancies. My right hon. Friend agreed to consider this proposal provided it was neutral in public expenditure terms. He will announce his conclusion as soon as possible.

Water Grants

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the amount given to each water and sewerage authority in Scotland in each financial year from 1990–91 to 1995–96, in respect of *(a)* first time water grant and *(b)* first time sewerage grant. [13059]

Mr. Kynoch: The information is not available in the form requested since no distinction was made between water and sewerage grants paid for first time provision and general improvement of the supply of the services. Details of the amounts paid to each water and sewerage authority for general improvement, from 1990–91 up to and including 1995–96, are set out in the tables.

Table 1: Rural water supply improvement grants paid

	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96
Councils						
Borders	246,423	262,387	266,304	345,039	236,534	221,271
Central	90,195	101,633	107,855	123,125	131,648	73,409
Dumfries and Galloway	475,583	475,397	685,781	591,399	521,776	521,505
Fife	30,826	27,984	61,490	18,022	53,956	18,022
Grampian	999,710	1,196,309	1,119,051	1,638,244	1,218,846	1,096,916
Highland	912,836	1,039,104	766,017	857,364	866,296	926,659
Lothian	451,712	467,206	421,898	463,044	795,949	403,482
Orkney	165,415	165,347	162,853	178,121	176,018	175,380
Shetland	239,314	190,550	223,770	210,819	191,170	237,971
Strathclyde	355,899	296,802	443,570	436,380	425,506	411,788
Tayside	261,850	266,387	279,944	318,340	223,280	200,013
Western Isles	199,002	190,500	236,872	336,484	307,529	286,675
Total paid	4,428,765	4,679,606	4,775,405	5,516,381	5,148,508	4,573,091

Table 2: Sewerage improvement grants[1] paid

	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
Councils					
Borders	—	970,000	1,100,000	1,284,000	—
Central	—	2,300,000	3,270,000	3,552,000	—
Dumfries and Galloway	—	1,590,000	2,000,000	2,125,000	—
Fife	—	3,140,000	5,390,000	5,983,000	—
Grampian	—	2,000,000	5,060,000	5,043,000	—
Highland	—	3,650,000	3,770,000	6,000,000	—
Lothian	—	5,460,000	5,000,000	5,628,000	—
Strathclyde	—	5,320,000	12,050,000	15,156,000	—
Tayside	—	4,080,000	4,420,000	6,376,000	—
Orkney	—	810,000	1,010,000	2,155,000	—
Shetland	—	210,000	1,170,000	1,072,000	—
Western Isles	—	470,000	760,000	626,000	—
Total paid	—	30,000,000	45,000,000	55,000,000	—

[1] These grant payments were made as a part of a grant scheme which was implemented in 1991–92 and completed in 1993–94.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Sustainable Development

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how his Department has used the UK indicators for sustainable development in *(a)* the production of the Department's annual report, *(b)* monitoring progress towards meeting the objectives set out in the UK sustainable development strategy and *(c)* assessing the environmental implications of policy options; and what plans they have to extend their use in future within the Department. [12267]

Mr. Boswell: The Department's officials played an active part in the interdepartmental working group which prepared the UK indicators of sustainable development. We consider that the indicators are a valuable tool for helping us to monitor progress towards sustainable development.

However, most of the indicators relevant to agriculture track changes in the state of the environment. They do not identify precisely the extent and nature of agriculture's contribution.

In order to address these gaps in our knowledge, the Department announced plans to develop more detailed measures of agriculture's impact on the environment in "Rural England 1996"—jointly published by this Department and the Department of Environment in October 1996. The initial work will focus on indicators of pesticide use, emissions of ammonia and greenhouse gases, nutrient losses to water and soil quality. This work should help us to identify future priorities for action or new policy directions which will be recorded in future departmental annual reports.

Rabies

Sir David Steel: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the review that he is conducting on rabies policy to be completed. [12588]

Mrs. Browning: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on 15 January 1997, *Official Report*, column *288*.

Cattle Breeds

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received and what research he has commissioned on the implications of a reduction in the genetic pool of cattle breeds in the United Kingdom. [12855]

Mrs. Browning: As I explained to the hon. Member on 21 March 1996, *Official Report*, column *314*, the Ministry has commissioned work on the theory of genetics which included specific studies on the effects on the gene pool of selective breeding of farm animals. The research concluded that any potential negative effects can be avoided by targeted breeding.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefit Fraud

13. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received concerning the use of traditional methods in combating benefit fraud. [11381]

Mr. Heald: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State regularly receives correspondence on a range of fraud issues. The Government have made cracking down on fraud a top priority and this year fraud investigation and anti-fraud initiatives are forecast to result in the detection of about £1½ billion fraud.

Cold Weather Payments

14. **Mr. Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much has been paid out in cold weather payments since 1 December; and on which dates payments were triggered. [11382]

Mr. Roger Evans: Since 1 December 1996, payments amounting to over £43 million have been triggered on 16 days. The details of actual dates are available in the Library.

Pensioners

15. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the effect of the introduction of a higher guaranteed minimum income for pensioners on incentives to save. [11383]

Mr. Heald: Any means-tested income scheme for pensioners at a significantly higher level than income support would weaken any incentives for individuals to make their own provision for retirement and penalise those who do so.

Incapacity Benefit

16. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the effect on the Department's budget of the shift from invalidity benefit to incapacity benefit. [11384]

Mr. Burt: Incapacity benefit was introduced in April 1995 in order to simplify the structure of provision for the sick and disabled and improve the targeting of resources on the long term sick. It is estimated that the introduction of incapacity benefit will reduce expenditure in the long term by around £2.3 billion per year.

Child Support Agency

17. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to improve the administration of the Child Support Agency. [11385]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The Child Support Agency is performing well against its 1996–97 business plan. Further challenging targets seeking improvements in performance over and above that achieved this year will be set for 1997–98.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans the Child Support Agency has to restore the charging of fees for assessment of clients after 17 April. [13216]

Mr. Mitchell: There are no plans to restore fees from April 1997. Regulations came into force in January 1997 which suspended fees for both the assessment and collection services for a further two years until April 1999.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what discussions he has had on the involvement of the private sector in the running of the Child Support Agency; and which operations centre is under consideration for such involvement. [13031]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant CB. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Terry Rooney, dated 27 January 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency and the private sector.

Consideration of the degree of scope for further private sector involvement in the provision of services is one of the components of the Agency's strategy to deliver efficiency savings in line with the Departmental Change Programme, but at the moment no decisions have been made and no individual business unit is under consideration.

The private sector has always been involved in providing facilities management and other support services within the Agency. It also works with the Agency on a partnership basis in providing our Audit and Computer services and, more recently, Royal Mail have been contracted to open the post for all Child Support Agency Centres. Where there are sound business reasons, we will take full advantage of the relevant experience and skills of the private sector to help us further improve our performance.

I hope this is helpful.

Benefits Spending

19. **Ms Hodge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the increase in spending on social security benefits per head of population since 1979. [11387]

Mr. Burt: Average spending on social security benefits per head of population has increased by 79 per cent. since 1979.

Parent Plus Scheme

20. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he plans to introduce the parent plus scheme; and if he will make a statement. [11388]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Parents plus will be piloted in 12 areas over a three-year period starting this April, offering advice and help to up to 100,000 lone parents on income support who wish to return to work.

This is further evidence of the Government's commitment to helping lone parents into employment—successive changes to the benefits systems have already helped over 200,000 lone parents to move off income support into work since 1992.

Income Support

21. **Mr. Benton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current proportion of children living in households dependent on income support; and what it was in 1979. [11389]

Mr. Roger Evans: The latest estimate is that 25.3 per cent. of children in Great Britain live in families receiving income support. A direct comparison with 1979 is not possible.

Notes:

1. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.

2. Sample size 5 per cent.

3. Children are defined as aged 15 and under.

4. Percentages reflect the number of children in families receiving income support as a proportion of all children aged under 16 in Great Britain, based on ONS 1995 mid-term estimates of the population.

Source:

Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry May 1995.

Office of National Statistics mid-term estimates of the population 1995.

24. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give the latest estimate of the numbers of senior citizens who may be eligible for income support and other allowances but who failed to claim these benefits. [11396]

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) earlier today.

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the level of waste in respect of income support payments. [11371]

Mr. Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the oral answer I gave the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) earlier today.

Christmas Bonus

22. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will review the amount of Christmas bonus paid to pensioners. [11390]

Mr. Heald: The Department has no plans to review the amount of the Christmas bonus. We have targeted help on those pensioners receiving income-related benefits, this extra help is now worth around £1.2 billion a year since 1988.

Means-tested Benefits

23. **Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are currently dependent on means-tested benefits; and what the figure was in 1979. [11393]

Mr. Roger Evans: The latest estimate is that 15.04 million people live in families receiving income support, family credit, disability working allowance, housing benefit or council tax benefit. It is not possible to make a direct comparison with the position in 1979.

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10,000.

2. Beneficiaries are defined as claimants, their partners and dependants.

3. Means tested benefits are defined as income support, housing benefit, council tax community charge benefit, family credit, and disability working allowance.

4. Disability working allowance was introduced in April 1992.

5. Council tax benefit replaced community charge benefit from April 1993.

6. Housing Benefit and Council tax benefit figures exclude cases where there is no entitlement because of non-dependent deductions.

7. Council tax benefit cases do not include second adult rebate cases.

8. Income support replaced supplementary benefit in April 1988.

9. Family Credit replaced family income supplement in April 1988.

Source:

1. Housing benefit management information system, annual 1 per cent. sample taken at the end of May 1995.

2. Family credit 5 per cent. sample of awards.

3. Disability working allowance 100 per cent. count of claims.

4. Income support statistics quarterly enquiry May 1995.

Benefit Recipients

25. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many recipients there are of social security benefits; and how many of them are under 21 years of age. [11397]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Benefit[1]	*All recipients*	*Recipients under age 21*
Attendance allowance[2]	1,184,000	0
Child benefit[3]	6,980,700	83,500
Council tax benefit[4]	5,624,000	96,000
Disability living allowance[2]	1,812,000	219,000
Disability working allowance[5]	10,541	360
Family Credit[6]	693,000	5,000
Housing Benefit[4]	4,734,000	142,000
Incapacity benefit[7]	1,780,380	920
Income support[8]	5,710,000	382,000
Industrial injuries disablement benefit[9]	244,800	600
Invalid care allowance[10]	359,272	5,283
Maternity allowance[7]	12,160	760
One parent benefit[3]	993,500	24,600
Reduced earnings allowance[9]	150,600	0
Retirement pension[11]	9,722,000	0
Severe Disablement Allowance[7]	355,200	25,600
Unemployment benefit[12]	398,000	7,000
War disablement pension[13]	266,789	67
War widows pension[13]	59,611	2
Widows benefit[11]	290,740	40

[1] As a person can be in receipt of more than one benefit at a time, it is not possible to quantify the total number of recipients.

[2] Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand, and are based on a 5 per cent. sample at 30 November 1996.

[3] Figures are based on a 1 per cent. sample at 31 December 1995.

[4] Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand, and are based on a 1 per cent. sample at 31 May 1995.

[5] Figures are based on a 100 per cent. count at 31 July 1996.

[6] Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand, and are based on a 5 per cent. sample at 31 May 1996.

[7] Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample at 31 August 1996.

[8] Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand, and are based on a 5 per cent. sample at 24 February 1996.

[9] Figures are based on a 10 per cent. sample at 30 March 1996.

[10] Figures are based on a 100 per cent. sample at 16 January 1997.

[11] Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample at 31 March 1996.

[12] Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand, and are based on a 5 per cent. sample at 9 May 1996.

[13] Figures are based on a 100 per cent. sample at 31 December 1996.

Child Benefit

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on child benefit. [11692]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Child benefit contributes £560 a year to the cost of bringing up a child, and remains the cornerstone of our policies for family support. We believe that all families with dependent children should receive some help from either the tax or the benefit system, a principle recognised throughout Europe.

Proposals put forward by the Opposition would remove this help from more than a million families whose 16 to 18-year-olds choose to stay on in full-time education.

Disabled People (Council Tax)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consultation *(a)* he has had and *(b)* proposes to have with the disablement income group in relation to the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (General) Amendment Regulations 1997; and if he will make a statement on the responses he has received from organisations of and for disabled people to the regulations. [12723]

Mr. Roger Evans: The proposals for the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (General) Amendment Regulations 1997 have been referred to the Social Security Advisory Committee for consultation. Comments have been invited from organisations and individuals who may have views on the proposals and there have been numerous responses including those from the disablement income group and other similar organisations. I shall be responding to the report of the Social Security Advisory Committee in a Command Paper which will be published in due course.

National Insurance

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 9 December 1996, *Official Report*, columns *70-72*, what was the total expenditure on national insurance benefits as a percentage of total income in each year from 1979–80 to 1995–96 at 1995–96 prices. [13020]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Year	*National insurance benefit expenditure as a percentage of total income to the national insurance fund*[1]
1979–80	92.1
1980–81	93.0
1981–82	101.1
1982–83	96.0
1983–84	93.5
1984–85	94.2
1985–96	95.0
1986–87	94.7
1987–88	90.7
1988–89	85.2
1989–90	88.7
1990–91	86.1
1991–92	98.2
1992–93	101.5
1993–94	86.8
1994–95	87.0

Source:
National Insurance Fund accounts.
Note:
[1]Excludes income from national insurance contributions allocated to the national health service.

Departmental Estate

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the preferred bidders in the Government's sale of the Department of Social Services's estate and indicate which have been fined for financial irregularities. [13094]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is as follows:

Mapeley Holdings Ltd.

Opus

Partnership Property Management Ltd. (PPM)

We are not aware that any of the above companies have been fined for financial irregularities.

War Pensions Agency

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to require claimants of the War Pensions Agency to pay for their medical and service records. [13029]

Mr. Heald: These are matters for Mr. Kevin Caldwell, chief executive of the War Pensions Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from K. C. Caldwell to Mr. Terry Rooney, dated 27 January 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about charges to claimants of War Pension, for medical and service records.

The War Pensions Agency has no plans to charge claimants for the service and medical records it obtains when dealing with claims or appeals.

The Agency obtains service records from the Ministry of Defence, based on information supplied by the claimant. The Agency also obtains any medical evidence required by the Agency's medical advisors. This evidence may already exist: for example the claimant's hospital medical records are loaned to the Agency free of charge by National Health Service Hospitals under a long standing agreement.

In many cases, particular medical evidence is commissioned by the Agency. This may include medical examination of the claimant or a report from the claimant's General Practitioner. Payment for these services is made by the Agency.

Claimants may submit any evidence they consider will assist their claim. The Agency does not reimburse claimants for the cost of obtaining such evidence and this is made clear in claim forms.

I hope you find this information useful.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the impact of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 on the costs of social security payments to asylum seekers. [12116]

Mr. Roger Evans: It is not possible to measure the impact of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 on the costs of social security payments as no data are held on how many asylum seekers appealing against a refusal of refugee status were in receipt of benefit.

DEFENCE

Military Museums

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the regimental and corps museums which *(a)* have and *(b)* have not achieved registration from the Museums and Galleries Commission. [12874]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* The information is as follows:

Museum	*Location*
a. Fully registered museums	
Queen's Dragoon Guards	Cardiff
Royal Scots Dragoon Guards	Edinburgh
Royal Dragoon Guards	York
	Chester
Queen's Royal Hussars	Eastbourne
	Warwick
9th/12th Royal Lancers	Derby
Kings's Royal Hussars	Preston
Light Dragoons	Newcastle upon Tyne
Queen's Royal Lancers	Belvoir Castle
Royal Armoured Corps and Royal Tank Regiment	Bovington
Royal Regiment of Artillery	Woolwich
Corps of Royal Engineers	Chatham
Royal Corps of Signals	Blandford
Foot Guards	London
Royal Scots	Edinburgh
Royal Highland Fusiliers	Glasgow
King's Own Scottish Borderers	Berwick upon Tweed
Black Watch	Perth
Highlanders	Aberdeen
	Fort George
Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment	Dover
	Winchester
	Guildford
Royal Regiment of Fusiliers	Alnwick
	Warwick
Royal Anglian Regiment	Bury St. Edmunds
	Norwich
Kings Own Royal Border Regiment	Carlisle
Prince of Wales's Own Regiment of Yorkshire	York
Green Howards	Richmond
York and Lancaster Regiment	Rotherham
Devonshire and Dorset Regiment	Dorchester
Cheshire Regiment	Chester
Royal Welch Fusiliers	Caernarfon
Royal Regiment of Wales	Cardiff
	Brecon
Royal Gloucester, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment	Gloucester
	Salisbury
Worcester and Sherwood Foresters Regiment	Worcester
	Nottingham
Staffordshire Regiment	Lichfield
Light Infantry	Winchester
	Bodmin
	Shrewsbury
Royal Green Jackets	Winchester
Royal Irish Regiment	Enniskillen
Parachute Regiment	Aldershot
Gurkhas	Winchester
Royal Army Medical Corps	Aldershot
Royal Army Dental Corps	Aldershot
Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps	Aldershot
Corps of Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers	Arborfield
Army Air Corps	Middle Wallop
Royal Army Chaplains Department	Upavon
Adjutant General's Corps (Royal Military Police)	Chicester
Army Physical Training Corps	Aldershot
b. Provisionally registered museums	
Household Cavalry	Windsor
King's Royal Hussars	Winchester
Light Dragoons	Barnsley
Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders	Stirling
Royal Regiment of Fusiliers	London
	Bury
Royal Anglian Regiment	Chelmsford
	Northampton
Queen's Lancashire Regiment	Preston
Royal Irish Regiment	Ballymena
	Armagh
Royal Logistic Corps	Camberley
c. Not registered	
Royal Irish Regiment	Belfast

Low Flying

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many representations his Department has received against low-flying aircraft during each year since 1990. [12164]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer givne to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) on 3 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *885*, for the years 1990 to 1994. The numbers of inquiries and complaints about military low flying received in 1995 and 1996 are as follows:

1995: 6,790

1996: 6,465

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will define the geographical area included in the central Wales tactical training area; what changes have been made to this definition since 1993; and if he will list the number of sorties carried out below 250 ft in this area in each year since 1992. [12166]

Mr. Soames: The central Wales tactical training area comprises the south-west proportion of Montgomery, the north-west corner of Brecon and Radnor, the north-east corner of Carmarthen and north Pembroke. The area, which is designated as low-flying area 7T, is shown on the map of the day low-flying system which is available in the Library of the House. There have been no changes to its boundaries since 1993. The numbers of operational low-flying movements authorised into the central Wales TTA in each year since 1992 are as follows:

1992: 174

1993: 192

1994: 89

1995: 147

1996: 140

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been paid to farmers in Wales for *(a)* loss of livestock, *(b)* abortions and *(c)* loss of production caused by low-flying aircraft in each year since 1992. [12165]

Mr. Soames: It is not possible to provide the detailed information required without disproportionate cost. However, the amounts paid to farmers in Wales in compensation for livestock and agricultural production losses due to military low flying since 1992 were:

Year	*£*
1992	35,811
1993	38,964
1994	65,723
1995	67,138
1996	40,363

I regret to say that while preparing the answer to this question, it was discovered that the answer I gave to the hon. Member on 14 June 1995, *Official Report*, column *537*, was wrongly calculated. The correct figure is £65,723.

Mutual Defence Agreement

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will update his answer of 8 March 1995, *Official Report*, column *253*, on the number of United States personnel stationed in the United Kingdom and the number of United Kingdom personnel stationed in the United States and their locations. [12662]

Mr. Arbuthnot: There are now no US employees stationed in the UK under the terms of the 1958 agreement. Four US employees are in the UK as part of the Polaris sales agreement, as amended for Trident; they are located as follows:

Bristol: 3

Barrow: 1

There are five British personnel stationed in the USA as part of the 1958 agreement and they are located in the British embassy, Washington DC; in addition, one atomic weapon establishment employee, on a short-term appointment, is stationed at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. A further 17 British personnel are in the USA as part of the Polaris sales agreement, as amended for Trident; their locations are as follows:

Crystal City, Arlington, Virginia: 13

Kings Bay, Georgia: 1

New London, Connecticut: 1

Laurel, Maryland: 1

Dahlgren, Virginia: 1

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will update his answer of 8 June 1995, *Official Report*, column *297*, in respect of the list of projects on which his Department is working jointly with Los Alamos National Laboratory. [12667]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Details of areas of research involving the Los Alamos National Laboratory are as follows:

Warhead electrical components and technologies

Energetic materials

Test monitoring

Nuclear materials

Non-nuclear materials

Nuclear counter-terrorism technology

Facilities

Nuclear weapons engineering

Nuclear warhead physics

Computational technology

Laboratory plasma physics

Aircraft, missile and space system hardening

Manufacturing practices

Nuclear weapon accident response technology

Nuclear weapon code development

Nuclear weapon environment and damage effects

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 28 June 1995, *Official Report*, column *682*, what estimate he has made of the total cost to public funds of the visits listed for each financial year. [12661]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Such information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Research and Development

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the planned expenditure by his Department, its agencies and public bodies on all forms of support for defence-related research and development in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99; and if he will make a statement. [12777]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Information concerning expenditure on support for defence-related research and development is not held centrally and could be compiled only at disproportionate cost. However, under provisional plans, total departmental expenditure on actual research and development, for the years 1997–98 and 1998–99, is expected to be as follows:

	Expenditure (£ million)		
Year	*Research*	*Development*	*Total research and development*
1997–98	549	1,687	2,236
1998–99	532	1,652	2,184

These data were published in the 1996 "Forward Look of Government-funded Science, Engineering and Technology", which also contains details of my Department's research and development activities.

Disciplinary Offences

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many disciplinary offences involving *(a)* men and *(b)* women of each service of HM forces were dealt with by (i) court martial and (ii) commanding officers in each of the last two years. [13163]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is not available in the form requested. Central records of court martial convictions are maintained, but not of the individual offences brought before courts martial and acquittals. Information on the number of offences dealt with by commanding officers could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Information on the number of men and women convicted by court martial, analysed by service and sex, in the past two years is available and is provided in the table.

Court martial convictions

Service	*1995*	*1996*
Navy		
Total	78	51
Service men	77	48
Service women	1	3
Army		
Total	399	[1]292
Service men	389	[1]285
Service women	5	[1]3
Civilian men	2	[1]2
Civilian women	3	[1]2
RAF		
Total	97	61
Service men	95	59
Service women	1	2
Civilian women	1	—

[1] These figures cover the period 1 January 1996 to 1 September 1996.

Official Ministerial Visits

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list for each of the Ministers in his Department how many official ministerial visits they have undertaken since 1 January; and how many of these have been abroad. [9378]

Mr. Soames: All Ministers of this Department have made numerous visits to defence establishments and other organisations throughout the country; details of every ministerial visit are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, details of overseas visits are readily available, and the number for each Minister from 1 January 1996 to 13 December 1996 is:

Secretary of State: 31

Min (AF): 15

Min (DP): 7

USofs: 9

Note:

An overseas visit may include more than one country.

Smoking (Service Personnel)

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the incidence of smoking-related diseases among service personnel and ex-service personnel; and how those figures compare with equivalent sections of the non-service population. [12408]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to discourage cigarette smoking among service personnel. [12410]

Mr. Soames: The Ministry of Defence does not encourage smoking within the armed forces; indeed the aim is to create a non-smoking working environment, insofar as this reflects the wished of staff. The dangers of smoking are emphasised in the services through lectures to recruits and trainee officers, and unit medical officers health education sessions. It is now a matter of policy for all medical officers to promote anti-smoking health advice, particularly at medical examination for new recruits and on an opportunistic basis for existing personnel. In addition, personnel have access to both service generated literature and Health Education Authority booklets on physical fitness in which the adverse effects of smoking are highlighted.

Duke of York (Helicopter Flight)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *452*, on the flight path of the naval helicopter, if the head teacher and other senior staff at Cowarth Park school were informed beforehand of the visit of the naval helicopter. [12317]

Mr. Soames: Yes. The visit to Cowarth Park school had been prearranged with both school and local authority agencies, as is normal in such cases.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *452*, on the flight plan of the helicopter, if there was a departure from the sortie plan. [12315]

Mr. Soames: No.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *452*, on the cost of the training flight, what is the estimated cost of keeping the naval helicopter airborne for one hour. [12318]

Mr. Soames: The cost of operating a RN Lynx MK3 helicopter for one hour, excluding overhead costs, is approximately £1,300.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *452*, on the flight plan of the helicopter, what type of helicopter was used in the training flight. [12314]

Mr. Soames: The helicopter used for this training flight was a RN Lynx MK 3.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *452* on the flight path of the naval helicopter, what was the training purpose of the visit to Cowarth Park school. [12316]

Mr. Soames: The overall purpose of the sortie was to provide navigation training.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many times in 1996 a naval helicopter *(a)* on a training sortie and *(b)* for any other reason picked up HRH the Duke of York from his home in Sunningdale. [13226]

Mr. Soames: The only occasion in 1996 when HRH the Duke of York was picked up by a Royal Navy helicopter from his home in Sunningdale was on 13 November.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *452*, what was the role of the Duke of York in the helicopter training sortie on 13 November 1996. [13...]

Mr. Soames: The training sortie on 13 November 1... included a prearranged visit to Cowarth Park school. The Duke of York was conveyed as a passenger during this leg of the overall sortie.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how his Department has used the UK indicators for sustainable development in *(a)* the production of the Department's annual report, *(b)* monitoring progress towards meeting the objectives set out in the UK sustainable development strategy and *(c)* assessing the environmental implications of policy options; and what plans they have to extend their use in future within the Department. [12270]

Mr. Soames: My Department conducts its activities in accordance with the Govnerment's overall policy on the environment, including sustainable development. Environmental considerations are taken into account in the development of defence policy, and where specific environmental targets or objectives, including sustainable development targets, impact on my department, appropriate action is taken by the responsible areas of management.

War Pensions

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library copies of those documents available to service personnel in 1968 relating to possible entitlement to war pensions. [12561]

Mr. Soames: In 1968 responsibility for payment of war pensions rested with the then Minisury of Social Security. Copies of any documents which my Department made available to service personnel at that time relating to entitlement to war pension were not retained separately from our main departmental records and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Auxiliary Oilers

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce the award of a contract for the design and construction of new auxiliary oilers for the Royal Navy. [12830]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I hope to be able to make an announcement in the near future.

Trafalgar Class Submarines

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to award a contract for the design and construction of the batch 2 Trafalgar class submarines; and if he will make a statement. [12831]

Mr. Arbuthnot: If we can achieve an acceptable price with GEC-Marconi, we hope to place the prime contract for three batch 2 Trafalgar class submarines around Easter.

Gulf War Syndrome

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 18 December, *Official Report*, column *630*, on Gulf war syndrome, if he will list the other categories of illnesses suffered by Gulf veterans who have been examined as part of his Department's medical assessment programme. [13003]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of the reply will be placed in the Library of the House.

Royal Yacht

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the total running costs for the royal yacht Britannia for each year since 1990. [13218]

Mr. Soames: The total operating costs of HMY Britannia are:

Year	*£ thousand*[1]
1990–91	9,272
1991–92	12,458
1992–93	8,361
1993–94	8,397
1994–95	11,424
1995–96	8,423
1996–97[2]	7,575

[1] Figures are outturn unless otherwise stated.
[2] Estimate.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the duties performed by the royal yacht Britannia during Cowes week in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement; [13228]

(2) what was the total cost to public funds of the royal yacht Britannia's presence at Cowes week in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [13227]

Mr. Soames: HMY Britannia's attendance at Cowes for the past five years has continued the traditional and popular royal patronage of this event. A list of individual duty engagements attended by and undertaken in Britannia is not held centrally, and information on the marginal costs of individual deployments could be provided only at disproportionate cost. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave today to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) for the total annual running costs for Britannia since 1990.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total current annual cost for running the royal yacht Britannia; how many miles it has covered and at what average cost per nautical mile in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [13232]

Mr. Soames: In the calender years 1992 to 1996, HMY Britannia covered the following distances:

Year	*Distance (nautical miles)*
1992	11,614
1993	36,062
1994	18,932
1995	25,071
1996	16,716

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave today to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) for the total annual running costs for Britannia since 1990.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total cost to public funds of the *(a)* alcohol, *(b)* tobacco and *(c)* live entertainment provided on the royal yacht Britannia in each of the last five years. [13221]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is not readily available, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

However, as a matter of policy, while the sponsors of commercial events are not charged for the use of HMY Britannia when she is used to promote British exports and attract inward investment, all additional costs incurred, over and above normal running costs, are paid for by the Government Departments and organisations concerned.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many jobs will be created by the construction of the new royal yacht for citizens from *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the EU and *(c)* other countries broken down by type of employment; and if he will make a statement. [13225]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Government's decision to build a new royal yacht is expected to sustain 400 to 500 jobs in a British shipyard. No breakdown by type of employment is available.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the total value of the royal yacht Britannia as *(a)* scrap, *(b)* sold with restrictions on its future use and *(c)* sold with no restrictions on its future use; and if he will make a statement. [13229]

Mr. Arbuthnot: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear in his statement on 22 January that the Government do not believe that it is appropriate to sell Britannia to a new owner for private use when she is decommissioned in December. We are seeking proposals for a suitably prestigious future use which is in the public interest, within the United Kingdom and would guarantee that her excellent condition be maintained. Should this not prove possible we will then consider the option of scrapping Britannia. We do not at present have an estimate of her scrap value.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost per annum of cleaning the *(a)* outside and *(b)* inside of the royal yacht Britannia in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [13231]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is not readily available, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the *(a)* dates of, *(b)* costs of and *(c)* guests at the last 10 receptions held on the royal yacht Britannia while docked; and if he will make a statement. [13224]

Mr. Soames: The dates, location, and nature of the last 10 events were:

Date	*Location*	*Type of function*	*Number of guests*	*Host/sponsor*
12 July	Amsterdam	Reception	150	HM Ambassador to The Hague; HM The Queen's Award Winners for Export Achievement
11 July	Amsterdam	Reception	150	HRH The Duke of Kent; British Invisibles
11 July	Amsterdam	Seminar and royal dinner	50	HRH The Duke of Kent; British Invisibles
6 July	Falmouth	Royal reception	40	HM The Queen Mother
4 July	Portsmouth	Royal dinner	43	HRH The Princess Alexandra and Sir Angus Ogilvy; the King Edward VIII hospital at Midhurst
		Royal Reception	150	
26 June	Lisahally, Londonderry	Royal Reception	125	HRH The Prince of Wales; Northern Ireland Tourist Board
		Royal dinner	48	
25 June	Belfast	Royal Reception	135	HRH The Prince of Wales; The Irish Development Board
25 June	Belfast	Royal dinner	50	HRH The Prince of Wales; Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

The costing information requested is not readily available, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

However, as a matter of policy, while the sponsors of commercial events are not charged for the use of HMY Britannia when she is used to promote British exports and attract inward investment, all additional costs incurred, over and above normal running costs, are paid for by the government departments and organisations concerned.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the countries visited by the royal yacht Britannia in each of the last five years. [13222]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is:

Year	*Countries visited*
1992	Gibraltar, Italy, Malta, France, Scotland, Sweden.
1993	The Azores, Bermuda, USA, Mexico, Jamaica, Lesser Antilles, Windward Islands, Leeward Islands, Gibraltar, Malta, Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE, India, Yemen.
1994	The Azores, Bermuda, USA, Belize, Grand Cayman, Jamaica, The Bahamas, France, Finland, Russia, Denmark.
1995	Grand Canary, Ivory Coast, Namibia, South Africa, Ghana, Senegal, Madeira, Germany, Greece, Balearic Islands, Portugal.
1996	The Azores, Bermuda, USA, Canada, The Netherlands.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many nights members of the royal family spent aboard the royal yacht Brittannia in each year since 1990. [13217]

Mr. Soames: Members of the royal family have spent the following numbers of nights aboard Brittannia since 1990.

Year	Number of nights
1990	30
1991	32
1992	24
1993	46
1994	24
1995	23
1996	23

Harrier Pilots (Redundancies)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 16 January, *Official Report*, column *311*, how many Royal Navy Harrier pilots have applied for premature voluntary release in each of the last 12 months; how many were turned down in each month; and for what reasons. [13161]

Mr. Soames: There have been no applications for premature voluntary release from Royal Navy Harrier pilots in the last 12 months.

Service Personnel

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women are currently serving in each service of Her Majesty's armed forces. [13164]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to tri-service personnel statistics 1 entitled "Strengths, Intake and Outflow of UK Regular Forces" dated 1 December 1996 a copy of which is held in the Library of the House.

Armed Forces (Employment Rights)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends to implement section 31 of the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993. [13153]

Mr. Soames: The Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993 along with certain other employment legislation, has now been consolidated into the Employment Rights Act 1996 and the provisions of section 31 of TURERA are now contained in sections 191 and 192 of the 1996 Act. Section 26 of the Armed Forces Act 1996 amends the detailed provisions of section 192 of ERA. Once these amendments have been brought into force, an order will be made giving effect to section 192. Work is currently being undertaken on both these measures to ensure that section 192 is in force in the appropriate form as soon as practicable.

Private Lee Clegg

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects his Department to complete its consideration of whether to pay Lee Clegg's legal costs for his Court of Appeal hearing. [12859]

Mr. Soames: My Department will pay all reasonable legal costs incurred by Lee Clegg in respect of his forthcoming Court of Appeal hearing. Should there be any subsequent legal proceedings, we would wish to consider the matter in the light of the circumstances at the time.

Cadet Scheme

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the cost of *(a)* the combined cadet force in schools, *(b)* the sea cadet force, *(c)* the army cadet force and *(d)* the air training corps, in each of the last 10 years at current prices; how many children served in each of these forces in each of the last 10 years; what plans he has to increase the numbers serving in each of the forces; and what discussions he has had with representatives from the cadet forces about future changes to the cadet scheme. [13159]

Mr. Soames: The cost of the cadet forces to the Ministry of Defence for the last 10 years is as follows. The figures are in millions of pounds at current prices;

(a) Combined cadet force in schools

1986–87: n/a
1987–88: n/a
1988–89: n/a
1989–90: n/a
1990–91: n/a
1991–92: n/a
1992–93: n/a
1993–94: 6.1
1994–95: 6.6
1995–96: 6.2

(b) Sea cadet corps

1986–87: n/a
1987–88: n/a
1988–89: n/a
1989–90: n/a
1990–91: 4.7
1991–92: 5.4
1992–93: 5.6
1993–94: 5.3
1994–95: 5.6
1995–96: 5.7

(c) Army cadet force

1986–87: n/a
1987–88: n/a
1988–89: n/a
1989–90: n/a
1990–91: n/a
1991–92: n/a
1992–93: n/a
1993–94: 20.9
1994–95: 22.2
1995–96: 23.4

(d) Air training corps

1986–87: n/a
1987–88: n/a
1988–89: n/a
1989–90: n/a
1990–91: n/a
1991–92: 17.4
1992–93: 17.8
1993–94: 18.8
1994–95: 19.2
1995–96: 20.3

The number of young people in the cadet forces at the end of the last 10 financial years is as follows:

Combined cadet force

1986–98: 42,318
1987–88: 42,737
1988–89: 41,796
1989–90: 40,945
1990–91: 39,825
1991–92: 39,809
1992–93: 39,565
1993–94: 39,131
1994–95: 39,061
1995–96: 39,732

Sea cadet corps

1986–87: 16,663
1987–88: 16,335
1988–89: 15,943
1989–90: 16,014
1990–91: 16,036
1991–92: 16,368
1992–93: 16,464
1993–94: 16,233
1994–95: 15,531
1995–96: 15,697

Army cadet force

1986–87: 43,617
1987–88: 41,555
1988–89: 39,209
1989–90: 39,559
1990–91: 39,423
1991–92: 39,356
1992–93: 39,975
1993–94: 40,486
1994–95: 39,778
1995–96: 40,171

Air training corps

1986–87: n/a
1987–88: 38,363
1988–89: 37,577
1989–90: 35,285
1990–91: 34,201
1991–92: 35,020
1992–93: 35,381
1993–94: 35,474
1994–95: 35,343
1995–96: 34,528

Air Training Corps costs

During the preparation of this reply, it became clear that the answers I gave to the hon. Member for Stoke on Trent, North (Ms Walley) on 14 May 1996, *Official Report*, column *400* and to the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) on 27 November 1996 *Official Report*, column *237* were misleading. Both sets of figures provided relate to the cost of the Air Cadet Organisation, and therefore include the cost of the Air Training Corps plus the RAF element of the Combined Cadet Force. The relevant figures for the cost of the ATC, at in-year prices, should have been:

1991–92: £15.1 million
1992–93: £16.1 million
1993–94: £17.6 million
1994–95: £18.3 million
1995–96: £19.8 million

The Government wish strongly to encourage wider voluntary participation in all the cadet organisations. We are considering ways of increasing the scope of the cadet forces so as to allow even more young people the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of membership. Discussions with representatives of the cadet forces will take place as soon as it is appropriate.

Gulf War (Dosimeters)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British Army units were issued with personal dosimeters during the Gulf war; and if he will make a statement. [13160]

Mr. Soames: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Disciplinary Sentences (Salaries)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what rules govern the payment of salary to *(a)* Royal Navy, *(b)* Army and *(c)* Royal Air Force personnel whilst they are awaiting confirmation of a disciplinary sentence. [13162]

Mr. Soames: The payment of salary in these circumstances is governed by *(a)* the Naval Discipline Act 1957 *(b)* the Army Act 1955 *(c)* the Air Force Act 1955, in conjunction with the single service pay regulations and Queen's Regulations. In the Royal Navy there is no confirmatory procedure: sentences, including those which affect pay, are effective immediately. At present, where individuals in Army and RAF cases are awaiting confirmation of a disciplinary sentence, all sentences, including those which affect pay, are also effective immediately. In the event of the sentences in Army and RAF cases being quashed, any sums deducted are of course, repaid. The Armed Forces Act 1996, however, provides for the abolition of confirmation procedures for the Army and RAF, thereby bringing arrangements in these services into line with those of the Royal Navy.

Food Supply Contract

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the outcome of the competition for the food supply contract for the armed forces. [13384]

Mr. Soames: The supply of food for the armed forces was contracted to the Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes—NAAFI—in 1994 for a three-year period. The contract expires on the 30 September 1997 and the Department have been running a competition for the follow-on contract. After careful evaluation of the tenders received, the decision has been taken to award the new contract to Booker Foodservice Group, which was judged to offer the best overall value for money for the

Department. The contract will be for a five-year period commencing 1 October 1997 and is worth in excess of £400 million.

The recommendations of the recent NAO report on supply of food to the armed forces are fully reflected in this contract.

NAAFI will, of course, continue to provide its traditional range of retail and other services to the armed forces. My Department is in discussion with Booker Foodservice and NAAFI to ensure a smooth transition, and to assist NAAFI to achieve a successful outcome to the restructuring already under way following last year's independent review.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 29 January 1997

DEFENCE

Weather Centres

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the quality of the measuring equipment at *(a)* the Leeds, *(b)* the Nottingham and *(c)* the Waddington weather centres. [12962]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Meteorological Office. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from J. C. R. Hunt to Mr. Peter Hardy, dated 29 January 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the quality of measuring equipment at Meteorological Office weather centres, as this falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Meteorological Office.

The observing equipment used at all three sites is SAMOS (Semi Automatic Meteorological Observing System), a system developed within the Meteorological Office.

Prior to acceptance for general operational use this system underwent detailed trials and evaluation to prove its viability as an accurate observing system suitable for replacing manual observations.

The sensors are calibrated in the Meteorological Office Quality Assurance laboratory before installation and as necessary in subsequent use. Leeds and Waddington are manned stations and staff there perform check climate measurements every morning against separate, calibrated sensors.

Nottingham (or more correctly Watnall) is co-located with a Meteorological Office maintenance centre. The duty technician on site checks the wet bulb reservoir and general condition/operation of the equipment, but routine caretaker observations are not carried out. Watnall and Waddington are well exposed sites giving a good representation of the local meteorological conditions. Leeds Weather Centre SAMOS is located on a roof top site within the city and may be subject to local effects particularly in respect of wind and temperature.

All data on receipt at HQ Bracknell go through automatic quality evaluation procedures.

I am confident that the equipment we use gives excellent results whilst making significant savings on the cost of a fully manned operation.

I hope this gives you the information you need.

Guardsmen Fisher and Wright

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from Lieutenant General Sir David Scott-Barrett on the subject of guardsmen Fisher and Wright; and when he plans to reply to those representations. [12185]

Mr. Soames: My right hon. Friend has received one representation direct from Lieutenant General Sir David Scott-Barrett. A representation from the hon. Member for Linlithgow is one of a number which have been received on behalf of a group of former Scots Guards, including Lieutenant General Sir David Scott-Barrett. Replies to these letters will be sent shortly, but will not address their substance, since that is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Cadet Force

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the cost of his proposals to extend the cadet force in schools. [13181]

Mr. Soames: The Government are considering ways of increasing the scope of the cadet forces to allow even more young people the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of membership. Options and the costs associated with them are still under consideration.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Dentists (Prison Sentences)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many former dentists *(a)* have served and *(b)* are currently serving a prison sentence following conviction for assault arising from extensive and wholly unnecessary treatment. [12473]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 29 January 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking, how many former dentists (a) have served or (b) are currently serving a prison sentence following conviction for assault arising from extensive and wholly unnecessary treatment.

The information requested is not available centrally.

Prisons (Drugs Testing)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the total number of extra days which will be served in prison due to positive drug tests which have been taken since September 1996; [12383]

(2) if he will list the total number of extra days which will be served in prison due to positive drug tests which were taken before March 1996. [12382]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 29 January 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions concerning the total number of extra days to be served due to positive drug tests.

This information is given in the table.

Unsuspended additional days awarded for all drug test offences for the periods requested

Period of adjudication	*Number of days*	*Number of punishments*
Before March 1996	37,614	2,977
September–December 1996 (provisional)	56,205	3,738

(1) This table includes the offences of 'unauthorised use of a controlled drug', 'refusing to provide a drug test sample' and 'falsifying a drug test sample'.

(2) The 'unauthorised use of a controlled drug' offence is not exclusively provable by testing, as discovery of the physical act of drug use might also lead to the offence being proven. We are unable to distinguish between those offences discovered by testing and by other means.

(3) The offence of unauthorised use of a controlled drug was introduced in February 1995. Mandatory drug testing began in eight establishments at that time, and was extended to the rest of the estate between September 1995 and March 1996.

(4) Offences are grouped by the date of adjudication rather than the date of testing/discovery.

(5) A survey in 1994 indicated that about 17 per cent. of punishments of additional days are later remitted.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to commission independent research relating to the introduction of mandatory drugs testing in all prisons. [12210]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. George Howarth, dated 29 January 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about plans to commission independent research relating to the introduction of mandatory drug testing in all prisons.

Two separate research projects have already been commissioned. The first project commenced in July 1996 and is being carried out by the University of Oxford Centre for Criminological Research. The study is qualitative in nature and focuses on five establishments and its purpose is to assess the impact of mandatory drug testing on the level and nature of drug misuse in prisons. The final report of this research is expected to be provided to the Prison Service before the end of April

The second project was commissioned in December 1996 and is being carried out by the National Addiction Centre. The study will use data available for all prisons and its purpose is to provide an evaluation of the impact of the mandatory drug testing programme on substance misuse in prison. The time frame for a report has yet to be finally determined.

The final report of this research is expected to be provided to the Prison Service before the end of April 1998.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if she will list *(a)* the number of prisoners (i) randomly tested for drugs, (ii) tested for drugs on suspicion, (iii) tested for drugs while on risk assessment, (iv) tested for drugs while on frequent testing, (v) tested for drugs on reception and (vi) voluntarily tested for drugs in each month prior to March 1996 and *(b)* the number of these prisoners who have tested positive for each type of drug for each of the above categories; [12420]

(2) if he will list the number of multiple drug positives from a single sample for the categories *(a)* randomly tested for drugs, *(b)* tested for drugs on suspicion, *(c)* tested for drugs while on risk assessment, *(d)* tested for drugs while on frequent testing, *(e)* tested for drugs on reception and *(f)* voluntarily tested for drugs since mandatory drug testing began; [12381]

(3) if she will list *(a)* the number of prisoners (i) randomly tested for drugs, (ii) tested for drugs on suspicion, (iii) tested for drugs while on risk assessment, (iv) tested for drugs while on frequent testing, (v) tested for drugs on reception and (vi) voluntarily tested for drugs in each month since September 1996 in each prison and *(b)* the number of these prisoners who have tested positive for each type of drug for each of the above categories. [12421]

Miss Widdecombe: I will write to the hon. Member.

Prisoners (Life Sentences)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of prisoners in England and Wales as of 1 January who were serving a life prison sentence for murder. [12171]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 29 January 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking what was the number of prisoners in England and Wales as of 1 January who were serving a life prison sentence for murder.

The latest available provisional information is for 31 December 1996. On that date there were 2,964 persons in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales serving a life sentence for murder.

Immigration (Detention and Deportation)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of those people detained in Birmingham prison under Immigration Act powers were deported during (i) October, (ii) November and (iii) December; and what were their nationalities. [12327]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Dr. Lynne Jones, dated 29 January 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking, how many of those people detained in Birmingham Prison under Immigration Act powers were deported during (i) October, (ii) November, and (iii) December; and what were their nationalities.

Provisional information shows that the number of persons discharged from Birmingham prison to the Immigration Service for removal under Immigration Act powers during October was 5 and during November was 12. Information for persons discharged from Prison Service establishments in December is not yet available.

A breakdown by nationality is given in the attached table.

Discharges from Birmingham prison to the Immigration Service for removal under Immigration Act powers in October and November 1996 by nationality[1]

Nationality	*Number*
October 1996	
India	3
Others[2]	2
Total	5
November 1996	
India	6
Others[2]	6
Total	12

[1] Provisional figures.

[2] Nationalities with only one prisoner are included in "Other".

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women were detained in prisons, under Immigration Act powers, at the end of (i) October, (ii) November and (iii) December; what were their nationalities; how many were deported; and in which prison establishments they were detained. [12350]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Dr. Lynne Jones, dated 29 January 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the number of women detained in prison, under Immigration Act powers, at the end of (i) October, (ii) November, and (iii) December; what were their nationalities; how many were deported; and in which prison establishments they were detained.

The information requested on those detained is given in the attached table. Provisional information shows that between October and November, 8 persons were recorded as being discharged for removal by the Immigration Service.

Information on persons discharged from Prison Service establishments in December is not yet available.

Population of female Immigration Act detainees[1] *in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales on last day of month, October–December 1996; by nationality*[2]

Nationality	*Number*
October 1996	
HMP Holloway	
Jamaica	6
Nigeria	3
Others	6
HMP Eastwood Park	
Other	1
Total	16
November 1996	
HMP Holloway	
Jamaica	10
Nigeria	2
Others	4
HMP Eastwood Park	
Other	1
Total	17
December 1996	
HMP Holloway	
Jamaica	9
Nigeria	2
Other	6
HMP Eastwood Park	
Other	1
Total	18

[1] Provisional figures.

[2] Nationalities with only one prisoner are included in "Other".

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were detained in Birmingham prison, under Immigration Act powers, in (i) October, (ii) November and (iii) December; and what were their nationalities. [12326]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Dr. Lynne Jones, dated 29 January 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking, how many people were detained in Birmingham Prison, under Immigration Act powers, in (i) October, (ii) November and (iii) December; and what were their nationalities.

The information requested is given in the attached table.

Population of Immigration Act detainees[1] *in Birmingham prison on 31 October, 30 November and 31 December 1996; by nationality*[2]

Nationality	*Number*
31 October 1996	
Algeria	2
India	11
Israel	4
Nigeria	2
Others	4
Total	23
30 November 1996	
Algeria	5
India	7
Jamaica	3
Pakistan	2
Others	3
Total	20
31 December 1996	
Algeria	7
India	4
Jamaica	2
Nigeria	2
Turkey	2
Others	1
Total	18

[1] Provisional figures.

[2] Nationalities with only one prisoner are included in "other".

Prison Sieges

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of prison sieges or hostage takings which took place in each prison in England and Wales during 1996. [12163]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 29 January 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question, about the number of prison sieges or hostage-takings which took place in each prison in England and Wales during 1996.

There were nine hostage incidents during the year 1 January 1996–31 December 1996 as detailed in the attached table.

Date	*Prison*
10 February 1996	HMP Frankland
11 February 1996	HMP Whitemoor
25 March 1996	HMP Wakefield
1 August 1996	HMP Whitemoor
7 September 1996	HMP Belmarsh
9 September 1996	HMP Liverpool
11 September 1996	HMP Leeds
2 October 1996	HMP Durham
27 December 1996	HMP Wakefield

Paedophiles

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the annual cost, in each of the last three years, of keeping convicted paedophiles in prison; how many such prisoners there were; what was the average cost per prisoner; what proportion of these prisoners were serving a second or subsequent sentence for such an offence; how much was spent in each year on treatment aimed at reducing the risk to the public of reoffending; and how much was spent in each year on research to improve the effectiveness of such treatment. [12198]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Peter Thurnham, dated 29 January 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your Question about the costs of keeping convicted paedophiles in prison.

Cost per place figures relating specifically to paedophile offenders are not available. However, the average cost per prisoner for the financial year 1995–96 was £466 per week.

It is not possible to identify paedophiles from prison population statistics as neither Prison Service statistics, nor central databases record the age of the victim for all offences.

The overall cost of treatment programmes is not available but the cost of the staff time involved in delivering and supervising the Sex Offender Treatment Programme is estimated at £2,000 per prisoner.

Some monitoring of the Sex Offender Treatment Programme is built in to the cost per prisoner and cannot be disaggregated from the overall cost. The Home Office has commissioned independent research evaluating the Sex Offender Treatment Programme (The STEP Project).

Over the past three years the STEP Project expenditure totals £191,000, made up as follows:

1994–95: £72,000

1995–96: £67,000

1996–97: £52,000

Disabled Prisoners

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the prisons that have a disability officer to monitor prisoners with physical, sensory or mental disability; [12113]

(2) what plans he has to ensure that there is a disability officer to monitor prisoners with a physical, sensory or mental disability in each prison. [12114]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. George Howarth, dated 29 January 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Questions asking if he will list all the prisons which have a disability officer to monitor prisoners with physical, sensory or mental disability and what plans he has to ensure that there is a disability officer to monitor prisoners with a physical, sensory or mental disability in each prison.

Prison Service establishments are not at present required to appoint disability officers for monitoring such prisoners. Prison Service policy and practice in relation to disabled prisoners is currently being reviewed, with the assistance of an advisory group on which organisations representing people with sight, hearing and other disabilities are represented. The provision of having in each establishment an officer with specific responsibility for matters relating to disabled prisoners is a suggestion which has arisen in consultation and will be duly considered.

Prisons (Drugs Misuse Report)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 5 November, *Official Report*, column *431*, when he expects to respond to the recommendations contained in the report of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs "Drug Misusers and the Prison System—An Integrated Approach". [12115]

Miss Widdecombe: My right hon. and learned Friend wrote to Lady Runciman and Professor Grahame-Smith on 13 January 1997, thanking them for their very useful report and enclosing some detailed comments on its recommendations. I am arranging for the detailed comments to be placed in the Library.

Vivisection

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications his Department has received under article 5(6) of the animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986; and how many and what percentage of the applications resulted in a licence being granted. [13085]

Mr. Sackville: Since 1 January 1995, 128 project licences have been granted which involve the use of species listed in article 5(6) of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986.

Applications to use these species may not be granted for a number of reasons. The application may be refused and the applicant may decide to withdraw the application prior to formal refusal, or authority to use an alternative species may be granted instead. The number of applications in each of these categories is not recorded centrally.

Police Grant

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how he plans to allocate police grant in 1997–98. [13628]

Mr. Maclean: I have laid before the House the Police Grant Report 1997–98. This should be read in conjunction with, for England, the Local Government Finance Report and the Special Grant Report (No. 23) and, for Wales, with the Local Government Finance Report (Wales) 1997–98 and the Special Grant Report (Wales) 1997.

Funding figures for each police authority are set out in the table.

£ million

Police authority	*1996–97 Funding*[1]	*1997–98 Funding*[1]
English shire forces		
Avon and Somerset	154.6	158.7
Bedfordshire	57.3	58.9
Cambridgeshire	66.4	68.2
Cheshire	98.5	101.1
Cleveland	73.3	75.2
Cumbria	57.1	58.6
Derbyshire	92.5	95.3
Devon and Cornwall	153.4	158.6
Dorset	64.9	66.6
Durham	71.5	73.3
Essex	151.7	155.9
Gloucestershire	58.5	60.1
Hampshire	175.3	180.0
Hertfordshire	89.9	92.4
Humberside	103.1	105.9
Kent	163.9	168.5
Lancashire	163.5	167.7
Leicestershire	94.8	97.3
Lincolnshire	59.0	61.5
Norfolk	76.0	78.1
North Yorkshire	69.7	71.9
Northamptonshire	58.4	60.0
Nottinghamshire	115.2	119.3
Staffordshire	108.9	111.8
Suffolk	61.7	63.4
Surrey	88.0	91.8
Sussex	151.1	155.2
Thames Valley	202.6	208.2
Warwickshire	49.2	50.6
West Mercia	103.5	106.3
Wiltshire	60.7	62.2
English metropolitan forces		
Greater Manchester	342.5	351.2
Merseyside	221.9	227.3
Northumbria	188.2	193.4
South Yorkshire	154.7	158.8
West Midlands	344.0	353.4
West Yorkshire	260.9	267.5
London forces		
Metropolitan police[2]	1,649.6	1,688.0
City of London[3]	59.1	61.6
English total	6,314.9	6,483.9
Welsh forces		
Dyfed-Powys	48.6	49.9
Gwent	62.8	64.5
North Wales	69.3	71.2
South Wales	151.1	155.1
Welsh total	331.7	340.8
Total	6,646.7	6,824.7

[1] Rounded to the nearest £100,000. Funding is the sum of all police grant, standard spending assessments and damping grant.
[2] Figure for the Metropolitan police does not include funding allocated to the Receiver under the other services block SSA for school crossing patrols, magistrates courts and the probation service.
[3] Figure for the City includes police SSA and grant, but excludes other SSAs such as capital financing which are allocated to the common council of the City of London as a whole in respect of all its functions.

Police Scientific Development Branch

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what decision he has made about the future status of the police scientific development branch. [13629]

Mr. Howard: The prior options review found that the functions performed by the police scientific development branch are needed and that it should remain in the public sector as an integral part of the Home Office. The review concluded, however, that in order to enhance the customer focus of the branch, a number of further managerial improvements should be adopted. The director of PSDB will put these in place as soon as possible.

My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade is also making a general statement today on the overall outcome of the prior options review programme of public sector research establishments.

Mr. Barry Horne

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) for how long Mr. Barry Horne has been detained on remand at Bullingdon prison; [12613]

(2) what counselling is being made available to Mr. Barry Horne, currently in Bullingdon prison; [12614]

(3) what information he has obtained about the objectives of Mr. Barry Horne's hunger strike at Bullingdon prison; and if he will make a statement; [12615]

(4) if he will make a statement on the hunger strike currently being undertaken by Mr. Barry Horne at Bullingdon prison. [12616]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answers 24 January 1997]:* Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Tony Banks, dated 29 January 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Questions about Mr. Barry Horne who is being held, on remand, at Bullingdon prison and is at present on hunger strike.

Mr. Horne, was first remanded into custody on 27 July 1996. He was transferred to Bullingdon from Bristol on 23 December. He was returned to Bristol Prison on 28 January.

He began to refuse food on 6 January, claiming this was in protest against the policy of the Government in respect of vivisection. Mr. Horne has stated his action is not connected with his treatment at Bullingdon and that he has no complaints against the prison.

Mr. Horne remains on normal residential location but visits the prison health care centre on a regular basis, where he is examined and counselled by medical staff and a doctor on the dangers of continuing his refusal of food. His medical condition, which at present is not considered to be life threatening, is closely monitored.

Although Mr. Horne refuses to take food, he does take fluids. There is no evidence of him becoming dehydrated and he remains physically mobile.

Breathalysed Motorists

Mr. John Townend: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of motorists breathalysed during the pre-Christmas period proved positive; and what was the proportion during the same period in 1995. [13081]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 28 January 1997]:* Figures collected by the Home Office do not enable the pre-Christmas period to be separately identified. The available information relates to the total number of screening breath tests required, and the number which proved positive or were refused, in each calender month.

The latest such information was published in table 3 of the Home Office statistical bulletin "Breath Test Statistics, England and Wales 1995", issue 7/96, a copy of which is listed. Figures for 1996 are not yet available, but will be published in the spring.

Table 3: Screening breath tests and number positive or refused by month

England and Wales 1995 — *Numbers and percentages*

Month	*Total tests*	*Positive/refused*	*Percentage positive/refused*
January	54,100	7,000	13
February	48,100	7,000	15
March	49,700	7,700	16
April	47,200	8,200	17
May	46,100	7,700	17
June	49,400	7,200	15
July	53,300	7,700	14
August	52,000	8,200	16
September	47,500	7,900	17
October	54,000	8,600	16
November	59,800	8,300	14
December	141,400	8,900	6
Total	702,700	94,400	13

ENVIRONMENT

EU Town Twinning Scheme

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful applications have been made by United Kingdom organisations in the last four years to obtain subsidies from the EU's town twinning scheme; and what funds have already been allocated to the United Kingdom under this scheme. [12347]

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department does not collect this information.

Thames Gateway Initiative

Sir Roger Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the projects under consideration under the Thames gateway initiative, indicating the likely start and completion dates, the estimated costs and the number of jobs he estimates will be created. [12567]

Mr. Curry: There are many proposals for a variety of investments in Thames gateway, to be made by different organisations in the public and private sectors, and in partnership between the two. Data are not held centrally, but it is clear that, in the 18 months since publication of the Thames gateway planning framework, good progress is being made towards its implementation.

Telecommunication Masts

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to introduce further guidelines governing the siting of telecommunication masts. [12999]

Sir Paul Beresford: Last year, we published a code of practice on planning procedures for the erection of telecommunication masts under permitted development rights. The Government are working with the local authority associations and telecommunications code system operators who erect masts to monitor the effectiveness of the code and review its implementation.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has received regarding the siting of telecommunication masts in unsuitable locations in the last year. [12998]

Sir Paul Beresford: In the past years, 165 representations and a standard petition letter from 57 signatories were received from people concerned about the siting of telecommunication masts.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to issue guidance to reduce the intrusion of telecommunication masts into the natural environment. [12943]

Sir Paul Beresford: Guidance to reduce the intrusion of telecommunications masts into the natural environment has already been issued. Planning policy guidance note 8 sets out planning policy for telecommunications development including masts. We have also published a code of practice, prepared jointly with the local authority associations and representatives of the telecommunications industry, on planning procedures for the erection of masts under permitted development rights.

Area Cost Adjustments

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the value of the area cost adjustment in 1996–97 and in 1997–98 to (i) Buckinghamshire county council, (ii) Milton Keynes borough council, (iii) Aylesbury Vale district council, (iv) Wycombe district council, (v) Chiltern district council, (vi) South Buckinghamshire district council and (vii) the Thames Valley police authority; and if he will make a statement. [12833]

Sir Paul Beresford: The contribution to SSAs from the area cost adjustment is listed in the table.

The contribution of the area cost adjustment is not the same as the amount an authority would gain or lose if there was not an area cost adjustment in the standard spending assessment system. If the area cost adjustment were removed, it would be necessary to revise the analyses on which SSA formulae are based, and we would wish to consult local authority associations on what would then be the most appropriate formulae.

The area cost adjustment (ACA) contribution for 1996–97 and 1997–98 settlement SSAs

£ million

	1996–97 settlement SSA ACA contribution	*1997–98 settlement SSA ACA contribution*
Buckinghamshire CC	23.220	16.522
Milton Keynes BC	0.784	5.627
Aylesbury Vale DC	0.576	0.498
Wycombe DC	0.599	0.518
Chiltern DC	0.675	0.624
South Buckinghamshire DC	0.719	0.652
Thames Valley Police	6.069	5.637

The large changes in the ACA contribution for Buckinghamshire CC and Milton Keynes BC between 1996–97 and 1997–98 are due to the effects of local government reorganisation.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what planning guidance exists to control the spread of telecommunication masts in areas of outstanding natural beauty and near national heritage sites. [12944]

Sir Paul Beresford: Except in an emergency, the erection of telecommunication masts in areas of outstanding natural beauty needs planning permission from the local planning authority. The erection of masts near national heritage sites is subject either to full planning control or to the prior approval procedure under part 24 of schedule 2 to the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995, depending on the size and location of the mast. Guidance on such applications is set out in the Department's planning policy guidance note 8. This emphasises the need to protect sensitive environments.

Energy Conservation Reports

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the energy conservation authorities which have not yet submitted reports as required by the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995. [12985]

Mr. Clappison: As at 23 January 1997, energy conservation under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 had been received from 349 of the 358 English energy conservation authorities. The following nine authorities had not yet submitted a report:

Allerdale district council
Alnwick district council
Berwick upon Tweed district council
Fenland district council
Gosport district council
Harborough district council
South Ribble district council
South Staffordshire district council
Wellingborough district council

Packaging Waste Regulations

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to lay before Parliament the draft Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) regulations; and if he will make a statement. [13438]

Mr. Gummer: I am today laying before Parliament the draft Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations which are subject to affirmative resolution procedure.

These regulations are the outcome of a lengthy process of dialogue and consultation with business about the means by which the United Kingdom can achieve a more sustainable approach to the 8 million tonnes of packaging waste which it generates each year. Packaging is the largest recyclable element in the domestic waste stream and our goal is to double the amount which we are currently recovering. The Government's objective has been to find a policy framework within which the efficiency and innovation of the market can be allowed to function successfully to achieve this goal and these regulations reflect a successful partnership between Government and industry. I pay tribute to the numerous individuals and companies from all sectors of industry for their contribution to this process and in particular to the Advisory Committee on Packaging chaired by Sir Peter Parker which has helped in the preparation of these regulations. I am happy to agree the committee's proposal for its continuing review and I am placing copies of the advisory committee's recent recommendations in the Library.

The regulations are based on the shared producer responsibility approach agreed by industry on 15 December 1995. Draft regulations were published for consultation in July 1996 and I announced on 18 December 1996, *Official Report*, columns *614–16*, the main modifications I proposed to make in the light of consultation. The regulations will, I believe, create a market incentive for businesses both to reduce packaging waste and find cost-effective ways of recycling or otherwise obtaining value from packaging waste. In particular, they provide for industry-led "compliance" schemes to be established to take on businesses' obligations for them, thus relieving them of much of the necessary administrative burden or for businesses to choose to comply with their obligations individually if they wish. The regulations also set down a staged approach to the obligations that businesses are required

to discharge and include a staged threshold for smaller businesses. The regulations will enable the UK to meet the recycling and recovery targets contained in the EC directive on packaging and packaging waste, 94/62/EC.

I propose to keep the regulations under review on an annual basis in the light of the progress which the UK is making towards the recycling and recovery targets. Effective measures will need to be in place to ensure that the UK is in a position to achieve and to continue to achieve the directive targets. However, I will want to consider whether these provisions remain fully necessary and appropriate in this form, while also taking account of the views of the advisory committee on the need for changes arising from the review which it will complete in 1998. A further statement will be made about implementation of other aspects of the packaging directive.

Special Financial Assistance (Manchester)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce the outcome of his Department's meeting with Manchester city council and the Greater Manchester police authority in relation to the special financial assistance for Manchester announced by the Minister of State, the right hon. member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), on 13 January; and if he will make a statement. [12735]

Sir Paul Beresford: My officials are consulting Manchester city council, Greater Manchester police authority and the London borough of Tower Hamlets on detailed proposals for a special grant, to be made under section 88B of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, to help them cope with the cost of dealing with the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks last year on Manchester and docklands. Once these consultations have been completed, we shall be drafting a special grant report for which we intend to seek the approval of the House as soon as possible. Subjected to that approval, advance payments should be made to the authorities in this financial year.

Local Government Finance (Manchester)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations his Department has received from Manchester city council in regard to the revenue support grant for 1997–98; what action he will be taking in response; and if he will make a statement. [13083]

Sir Paul Beresford: Manchester city council made representations about a number of aspects of the proposals for the revenue support grant for 1997–98. We have considered them carefully. It expressed particular concerns about data on income support claimants. These concerns have been examined carefully by the Department for Social Security. In the light of its investigations, we are satisfied that the data can properly be used in the calculation of the revenue support grant.

Venomous Snakes

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy that those importing any non-CITES—convention on international trade in endangered species—venomous snakes into the United Kingdom should require the possession of a dangerous wild animals licence. [12627]

Mr. Clappison: The Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 makes it an offence to keep privately any animal included in the schedule to the Act, except under a licence issued by a local authority. The schedule to the Act includes a number of CITES and non-CITES venomous snakes. I am not aware of any evidence that these controls are inadequate.

Mine Safety

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the effect of the current deregulatory proposals in respect of mine safety on the responsibilities of colliery managers. [12960]

Sir Paul Beresford: No proposals are currently with me in respect of mine safety. The Health and Safety Commission published a consultative document on 20 January 1997 containing proposals for modernising the law relating to the control of ground movement in mines and the provision of ground support. Comments are invited by 19 May.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what account was taken of recent experience in the preparation of the proposed deregulation of the mine safety arrangements concerning the maximum distances allowed between roof support in collieries; and if he will consult organisations and individuals closely involved in these matters. [12961]

Sir Paul Beresford: The recently published consultative document on the control of ground movement in mines is not deregulatory. Recent experience of those closely involved in the industry was taken into account when drawing up the consultative document. The consultative document has been widely distributed and full and proper consideration will be given to the views of those who respond.

Partners in Technology Programme

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been his Department's total expenditure on the partners in technology programme in the financial year 1996–97 and projected expenditure in the financial years 1997–98 and 1998–99; and how many projects were involved in each year. [13291]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The anticipated expenditure and number of projects within the partners in technology scheme are:

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Anticipated expenditure	£8.7 million	£8.8 million	£8.9 million
Anticipated number of projects	384	341	350

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total value and number of the partners in technology projects carried out by the Building

Research Establishment in the financial year 1996–97; and what are the projected figures for *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1988–99. [13290]

Mr. Jones: Partners in technology is a challenge-based scheme, consequently there is no projected allocation to any specific organisation. The funding currently committed by the Department to BRE in respect of partners in technology projects is as follows:

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Contract value	£3.5 million	£2.4 million	£0.7 million
Number of projects	102	66	24

Planning Policy

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to clarify his policy in relation to planning gain. [13633]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: A DOE circular on planning obligations has been issued today. It clarifies and updates the guidance previously set out in DOE circular 16/91, following extensive consultation. It sets out the policies to which the Secretary of State and planning inspectors will have regard in determining applications or appeals and which local planning authorities should also take into account when considering planning applications and drafting development plan policies.

The circular emphasises that planning permissions may not be bought or sold and defines the policy tests for the proper use of planning obligations. Illustrative guidance is given on acceptable use of obligations in particular circumstances. By following this guidance, the quality of development may be enhanced and public confidence in the planning system retained.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Burma

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the United Kingdom representatives at the forthcoming European Union-Association of South-East Asian Nations summit in Singapore will raise the subject of *(a)* the situation in Burma and *(b)* relations between the EU, ASEAN, the United Kingdom and Burma. [13146]

Mr. Hanley: The agenda for the EU-ASEAN summit in Singapore has not yet been finalised. We expect that there will be discussion about Burma at some point during the summit.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact of the accession of Burma to the Association of South-East Asian Nations on EU-Burma trade. [13149]

Mr. Hanley: We have not assessed the impact that this may have on EU-Burma trade because Burma has not yet been admitted as a full member of the Association of South-East Asian Nations, nor is it known when accession will take place.

Singapore Summit

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials attending the European Unions Association of South-East Asian Nation's summit in Singapore on 14 and 15 February. [13150]

Mr. David Davis: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary plans to attend the EU/ASEAN ministerial meeting to be held in Singapore from 13 to 14 February. He will also attend the Asian/Europe ministerial meeting—ASEM—in Singapore on 15 February.

On present plans, my right hon. and learned Friend will be accompanied at these meetings by:

Mr. W.G. Ehrman: Principal Private Secretary

Mrs. F.G. Mylchreest: Private Secretary

Mr. H.N.H. Synnott: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Mr. N.E. Sheinwald: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Mr. M.A. Runacres: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Mr. D.W. Rutland: Department of Trade and Industry

Mr. J.J.H. Morrison: UK Permanent Representation to the EU Brussels

Mr. M.F. Smith: Central Office of Information

Ten other police and support staff.

Hong Kong

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Office if he will list the changes in *(a)* policy and *(b)* practice in respect of the Hong Kong visa entry scheme for non-EU nationals, including Russian nationals, after July. [13151]

Mr. Hanley: Hong Kong operates a liberal visa regime which allows nationals of more than 170 countries to enjoy visa-free visits. Nationals of some 34 states, including Russia and other eastern European and central Asian states, have to obtain a visa to visit Hong Kong. Most nationals going to Hong Kong for employment, investment, education or to take up residence need to obtain a visa.

Under the Sino-British joint declaration and China's Basic Law for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, visa policy after 30 June 1997 will fall within the autonomy of the Government of the HKSAR. The existing visa policy has served Hong Kong well and the Hong Kong Government do not see a need for any significant change in the near future.

Visas

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the level of fees paid by foreign nationals requiring United Kingdom visas since 1 April 1996; what are the visa fees charged by other major European countries; what assessment he has made of the economic advantages accruing to countries charging less than the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [12733]

Dr. Liam Fox: Details of the fees for processing applications for entry clearance for the United Kingdom from 1 April to 13 August 1996 are given in the Consular Fees Order 1995, S.I. 1995 No.1617, and since 14 August 1996 in the Consular Fees Order 1996, S.I.

1996 No. 1915. It would be possible to obtain the information requested on visa fees charged by other European countries only at disproportionate cost. We are not aware of any evidence that the UK is at an economic disadvantage because of the level of entry clearance fees. The United Kingdom is committed to achieving full cost recovery of the entry clearance operation overseas so that it functions at no cost to the taxpayer. This is in line with the Government's overall expenditure settlement.

Kuwaiti Citizens (Iraq)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what diplomatic action the United Kingdom has taken in relation to the detention of Kuwaiti citizens in Iraq; what further action he proposes; and if he will make a statement. [12734]

Mr. Hanley: We have been active in focusing international attention on this issue. We most recently raised it at the United Nations when the Security Council reviewed sanctions against Iraq on 31 December. At meetings of the tripartite commission in Geneva and its technical sub-committee, we have repeatedly made clear to the Iraqis our deep concern over the lack of progress. We shall continue to press them to provide substantive information on individual cases.

Mr. Steve Bryant

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action his Department has taken on behalf of Mr. Steve Bryant who is currently held in a Moroccan prison. [13182]

Dr. Liam Fox: We have given all possible consular assistance to Mr. Bryant from the moment of his arrest. We have translated his petition for a pardon, and delivered prison comforts and post. Consular staff visit him regularly, including six visits during his 25-day hunger strike in November.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Office of Telecommunications

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment his Department has made of the efficiency and effectiveness of Oftel. [11955]

Mr. Ian Taylor: My Department's close working relationship with Oftel does not extend to formal monitoring of Oftel's performance, since the office of Director General of Telecommunications was created by Parliament with independent statutory powers and duties under the Telecommunications Act 1984. The director general reports to Parliament annually on how he has fulfilled these duties and the use made of the resources Parliament has voted to him. In addition, the National Audit Office has recently examined the effectiveness of the regulatory process in its report, "The Work of the Directors General of Telecommunications, Gas Supply, Water Services and Electricity Regulation", published on 24 July 1996. The director general gave evidence to the Public Accounts Committee on this report on 18 November 1996. He has also appeared twice before the Trade and Industry Committee and is due to appear before it again shortly.

UK Subsidiaries Abroad

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the total contribution to the United kingdom economy of United kingdom subsidiaries abroad in the five most recent years for which figures are available. [12554]

Mr. Lang: My Department monitors developments in British overseas investment and, from time to time, evaluates relevant studies. Data on total net earnings derived from outward direct investment by UK companies in overseas subsidiaries and associates are published in "Business Monitor MA4" a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. Over the past five years, for which data are available, earnings have grown rapidly. The net earnings of UK companies' overseas subsidiaries and associates rose from £14.5 billion in 1990 to £19.6 billion in 1994.

North Sea Oil Bids

Mr. Khabra: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy that future bidding rounds for North sea oil exploration will be subject to prior environmental assessments; and if he will ensure that environmental policy statements submitted by successful bidders will be published. [12454]

Mr. Page: My officials currently consult, among others, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee before any seaward area of the United Kingdom continental shelf, including the North sea, is offered for licensing. The JNCC provides advice about the potential impact of oil and gas activities on the environmental resources of the area and, where appropriate, suggests conditions that might be applied to the licence to mitigate these impacts in the event of licence being awarded. The conditions can include requirements for environmental assessment before particular activities under the licence can take place. I expect that these arrangements, or some similar mechanism, will continue for future licensing rounds.

I do not at present have any plans to publish the environmental policy statements provided by successful applicants in support of their applications for petroleum licences, but such information may be made available for inspection to members of the public subject to prior arrangement with my officials.

Greece

Mr. Cox: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which Ministers from his Department have visited Greece to discuss trade during the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [12942]

Mr. Nelson: The then Minister of Industry visited Greece in 1994, and, over the past five years, Ministers from other Departments have also paid visits with trade promotion elements. Greece is an important market for British firms, and my Department actively promotes opportunities there. Between 1991 and 1995, our exports of goods increased by more than half.

Mr. Cox: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the last British trade fair was held in Greece; which companies took part; and if he will make a statement. [12940]

Mr. Nelson: Last year, my Department supported the attendance of UK firms at two trade fairs in Greece. They were Posidonia, in June 1996, which 26 UK firms participated, and Defendory, in October 1996, which 10 UK firms attended. A list of the companies that took part is as follows:

UK firms which exhibited at Posidonia June 1996

ATA Grinding Processes
The Baltic International Freight Futures Exchanges Ltd.
Lloyds Beal Ltd.
Bimcom Services (London) Ltd.
Brintons Ltd.
Christie Electronics
GEC Alsthom Paxman Diesels Ltd.
GEC-Marconi Communications System Ltd.
Kelvin Hughes Ltd.
Huttons International Ltd.
The Hydrographic Office
International Trade Publications Ltd.
Marine Technology International Ltd.
Marine Turbo Engineering Ltd.
MRC Business Information Group
Neotronics Scientific Ltd.
PPI Engineering Group Ltd.
RFD Ltd.
Seanet Ltd.
Renfrewshire Council Development
Stroudgate plc
Turbine Bearing and Blades Ltd.
James Walker and Co. Ltd.
Water Weights Ltd.
Whessoe Varec Ltd.
Whiterby and Co. Ltd.

Information stand

British Marine Equipment Association

UK Firms which exhibited at Defendory October 1996

AEA Technology plc
Birmingham Barbed Tape Ltd.
Diagnosys Ltd.
Graseby Dynamics Ltd.
Hiatt and Co. Ltd.
Howden Airdynamics Group
Intech Corp. Ltd.
Racal Radio Ltd.
UCC International Ltd.
Vosper Thornycroft Controls Ltd.

Information stands

Defence Export Sales Organisation
Defence Manufacturers Association Ltd.

Paid Holiday Leave

Ms Eagle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those European Union countries in which there is no statutory right to paid holiday leave for employees. [11743]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The UK is the only member state which does not have such a statutory right. However, UK employers and employees are free to agree holiday arrangements which are appropriate to their circumstances and needs. We believe that the imposition on industry of statutory requirements can only damage competitiveness, undermine flexibility and threaten jobs.

Research Establishments

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what decisions he has made about the future status of establishments supported by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, the Medical Research Council and the Natural Environment Research Council. [13632]

Mr. Ian Taylor: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade announced on 22 May that the Government were satisfied that the functions of four BBSRC establishments—Institute of Arable Crops Research, Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research, John Innes Centre, and Silsoe Research Institute—were needed, and that they should retain their separate existence, but that full independence from the public sector was a desirable option which merited further consideration. In the light of this further consideration, we have concluded that the establishments should remain in the public sector and retain their separate existence. Similarly, we have concluded that the three BBSRC animal science institutes included in the second tranche of prior options reviews, completed at the end of July—Babraham Institute, Institute for Animal Health and the Roslin Institute—and BBSRC's Institute of Food Research, which was included in the third tranche of reviews completed at the end of December, should remain in the public sector and retain their separate existence.

I shall expect the BBSRC, under the oversight of the Director General of Research Councils, to continue to look for ways of improving the establishments' value for money. Specifically, we shall explore the scope for improving control of central costs and for contracting out support services. We shall also consider targets for increased external income. In the case of the Institute of Food Research, we will be exploring further the potential benefits of greater collaboration between IFR and the research component of the Central Science Laboratory at Norwich and, in the case of the Institute for Animal Health, exchanging areas of work with the Veterinary Laboratories Agency.

We are also satisfied that the functions of the three NERC establishments—British Geological Survey, Centre for Coastal and Marine Sciences and Centre for Ecology and Hydrology—covered by the second tranche of prior options reviews are needed. We have concluded that they should remain in the public sector and retain their separate identities. I shall expect NERC, under the oversight of the DGRC, to pursue the opportunities for rationalisation and restructuring identified by the reviews. I shall also look to NERC to build on its arm's length relationship with the establishments and to improve their financial and management systems.

The MRC's Dunn nutrition unit, which was covered by the third tranche of reviews, should be closed and reconstituted to take advantage of the scope for rationalisation with other MRC and university activities, which will open up when the reconstituted unit moves to a new site in 1998.

We are satisfied that the functions of the MRC's institute of virology, reproductive biology unit, mammalian genetics unit, radiation and genome stability unit and toxicology unit are needed and that there is scope for some rationalisation and introduction of private sector management. We have concluded that the MRC provision of research services and facilities at the mammalian genetics unit and the radiation and genome stability unit should be reduced through contractor management or new market testing and strategic partnerships with other bodies on the Harwell site.

A new body should be established within the private sector to commercialise the provision of research resources, information services and collaborative exploitation activities, in parallel with the mammalian genetics unit.

The virology unit should be transferred to the ownership of Glasgow university, subject to the resolution of practical issues;

The reproductive biology unit should remain under MRC management but be managed as a closure and reconstitution. The boundaries between it and the University of Edinburgh should be redrawn in areas not requiring strategic management;

the toxicology unit should remain under MRC management and should continue to improve its efficiency and performance.

The research councils have recently recruited a procurement adviser from the private sector to identify opportunities for cutting the costs of all the councils and their institutes.

Further details of the measures for the bodies listed above will be published in due course.

My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has made a statement today on the broad outcome of the programme of prior options reviews of public sector research establishments which refers to the general policy on timing of prior options reviews.

Mr. Evans: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the programme of prior options reviews of public sector research establishments. [13631]

Mr. Lang: This programme of reviews has now been completed. The final reports were submitted, as planned, at the end of December 1996. The Government are today announcing decisions on all the outstanding reviews.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Science and Technology is today making announcements on a number of establishments for which my Department has responsibility, as follows:

Institute of Arable Crops Research
Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research
John Innes Centre
Silsoe Research Institute
Babraham Institute
Institute for Animal Health
Roslin Institute
British Geological Survey
Centre for Coastal and Marine Science
Centre for Ecology and Hydrology
Dunn Nutrition Unit
Institute of Food Research
Mammalian Genetics Unit
Radiation and Genome Stability Unit
Reproductive Biology Unit
Toxicology Unit
Virology Unit

Announcements are also being made today by the Minister responsible for each of the following establishments:

Macauley Land Use Research Institute
Scottish Crop Research Institute
Moredun Research Institute
Hannah Research Institute
Rowett Research Institute
Horticulture Research International
Veterinary Laboratories Agency
Police Scientific Development Branch
Public Health Laboratory Service
National Institute for Biological Standards and Control
National Radiological Protection Board

The aim of the reviews has been to ensure that the country achieves the greatest possible benefit from the substantial resources—some £690 million annually—devoted to all the establishments. Reviews have been approached on a case-by-case basis in the context of the prior options guidelines. Decisions have been taken collectively by Ministers to ensure the reviews address the actual and potential relationships between establishments in similar or related fields. The decisions announced today are designed to ensure that establishments operate with maximum effectiveness and efficiency, and to enhance the scientific excellence for which they are renowned.

Prior options reviews are normally undertaken on a five-yearly cycle. However, the Government have a continuous requirement to assess performance and structure against evolving objectives, and reviews may in some circumstances be necessary within the five-year period. It is intended to maintain this standard arrangement for the establishments reviewed in 1996, subject to progress with the follow-up measures agreed by Ministers. These include a range of measures to improve the management and customer focus of the establishments, as set out in the individual announcements.

As with previous announcements under this programme, memorandums explaining the rationale for Ministers' decisions will be placed in the Library of the House as soon as possible.

Textile Industry

Mr. Beggs: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the effect of the imposition of anti-dumping duty on imported cotton greycloths in the United Kingdom by the European Commission on employment in the United Kingdom textile industry. [11725]

Mr. Nelson: When Sir Leon Brittan announced the imposition of the current provisional anti-dumping duties on cotton greycloth on 21 November 1996, he committed the Commission to carrying out a full assessment of their likely effects on users of the product in the EU textile finishing industry. The results of the assessment will be

made available to member states in the next few months before a decision is taken on whether the duties should be made definitive. The Government will vote against any such proposal and will encourage other member states to do so as well.

Shipbuilding Intervention Fund

Mr. Harris: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his Department's policy on the level of the shipbuilding intervention fund during 1997. [13634]

Mr. Greg Knight: Following a decision of the European Commission, I have decided that the United Kingdom's maximum level of support for large ships from 1 January 1997 shall continue to be 9 per cent. This is inclusive of shipbuilders' tax relief of 2 per cent.

I have similarly decided that the maximum level of support for small ships from 1 January 1997 shall continue to be 4.5 per cent. This is inclusive of shipbuilders' tax relief of 2 per cent. These levels are the maximum permitted by the EU shipbuilding regime.

The shipbuilding intervention fund was due to end in July 1996 on the introduction of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development agreement respecting normal competitive conditions in the commercial shipbuilding and repair industry. However, the agreement has not yet been ratified by all parties. The shipbuilding intervention fund and equivalent support in other member states will continue until 31 December 1997, pending the implementation of the OECD agreement. Shipbuilders' tax relief in respect of merchant ships will be terminated at the same time.

Departmental Publications

Ms Ruddock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the *(a)* White Papers, *(b)* Green Papers, *(c)* consultation papers, *(d)* draft regulations and *(e)* circulars, for which his Department has been responsible issued in 1996 which his Department assesses could give rise, (i) directly and (ii) indirectly to significant environmental effects. [12703]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* Most of the large number of White Papers, Green Papers, consultation papers, draft regulations and circulars my Department was responsible for publishing in 1996 have the potential for direct or indirect significant environmental effects. However, central records are not kept which classify such documents according to any environmental effects. Therefore this information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Waste Incinerator (Belevedere)

Mr. Evennett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the current status of the proposed waste to energy incinerator in Beleverdere, Kent. [13156]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 28 January 1996]:* The application for consent for the project under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 is in abeyance pending receipt of the further environmental information sought by the Department in November 1995.

TREASURY

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each year from 1984–85 to the most recent available year the cost of conditional exemption from inheritance tax of *(a)* chattels and *(b)* land, in each case indicating the number of estates granted exemption. [11938]

Mr. Jack: The relief from capital taxes for qualifying chattels, land and buildings is not an outright exemption as the tax charge is effectively deferred until the qualifying assets are sold, or the appropriate undertakings cease to apply.

The number of cases granted relief and the estimated amount of relief given are:

	(a) Chattels		*(b) Land and buildings*	
Year	*Cases*	*Amount of relief (£ million)*	*Cases*	*Amount of relief (£ million)*
1984–85	58	40	12	5
1985–86	57	10	14	20
1986–87	40	20	12	5
1987–88	30	50	13	5
1988–89	56	50	5	negligible
1989–90	38	100	12	5
1990–91	32	160	15	15
1991–92	43	15	9	5
1992–93	63	40	9	negligible
1993–94	46	40	9	negligible
1994–95	59	55	18	negligible
1995–96	40	25	29	5

(Estimates for the amount of tax deferred are particularly tentative. Negligible means less than £3 million.)

Travel Insurance

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what reports, of how many cases, he has received from Her Majesty's Customs and Excise of value shifting between insurance costs and travel costs resulting in a loss of tax revenue. [12354]

Mr. Oppenheim: Customs and Excise officials inform me that it is a common practice for the travel industry to adopt a pricing structure that results in comparatively low margins on holidays and high margins on the accompanying travel insurance. Regardless of whether the prime motivation for this pricing arrangement is commercial of fiscal, a tax loss results.

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he proposes to take to ensure there is no discrimination on rates of tax between insurance products sold through insurance providers and agents and those sold through travel agents. [12353]

Mr. Oppenheim: The higher rate of insurance premium tax will be applied only to sales of insurance by certain suppliers, including travel agents. Such tax treatment reflects the fact that this measure is designed to address the tax loss arising from the widespread practice in these sectors of inflating the price of value added tax exempt insurance when it is supplied in association with

vatable goods and services. This tax loss cannot arise when insurance is supplied in isolation by insurance companies and their agents.

Paymaster General's Office (Privatisation)

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the timetable for the completion of the privatisation of the Paymaster General's office. [12296]

Mr. Oppenheim: Privatisation of the Paymaster agency is due to be completed by 31 March 1997.

Mr. Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representative organisations of the public sector pensioners paid by the Paymaster General have been consulted about the proposed privatisation. [12298]

Mr. Oppenheim: Annexe 1 to the Paymaster prior options review report, copies of which were placed in the Libraries of both Houses last summer, lists those consulted and who responded to invitations to comment. On behalf of public sector pensioners, these included: Civil Service Pensioners Alliance; Civil Service Retirement Fellowship; NHS Pensioners Trust; NHS Retirement Fellowship; First Division Pensioners Group; Public Service Pensions Council; Council of Civil Service Unions; Royal British Legion; Civil Service Healthcare; British Medical Association and the Civil Service Benevolent Fund.

Mr. Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the anticipated pension transfer values are for staff from the privatisation of the Paymaster General's office. [12297]

Mr. Oppenheim: These will be subject to negotiation with the successful bidder.

Excise Duty

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to increase powers of search and detention by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise staff in respect of cross-border movement control of excise goods. [12555]

Mr. Oppenheim: I have no plans at present.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what legal steps his Department is taking in conjunction with other European Union member states to combat cross-border movements of goods to evade *(a)* excise duty and *(b)* value added tax. [12557]

Mr. Oppenheim: Smuggling and fraud within the European Union are taken very seriously by this Government, the Governments of other member states and the European Commission.

In a joint effort to counter such illegal activities Council directive 77/799/EEC, as amended, provides for the mutual assistance by the competent authorities of the member states in the field of direct and indirect taxation. This close co-operation has, since the completion of the single market, been further enhanced by the introduction of systems for the verification of movements and the exchange of data.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on trends in the levels of excise duty across the European Union. [12556]

Mr. Oppenheim: A number of member states have recently made excise duty changes with effect from 1 January 1997. Trends will be carefully analysed when full information becomes available.

Tobacco Products

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the additional excise and VAT revenue yield in a full year which would result from reducing the minimum guide levels set for tobacco products provided under article 9 of directive 92/12/EEC. [12565]

Mr. Oppenheim: No such estimate has been made.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to set minimum guide levels for tobacco products under article 9 of directive 92/12/EEC. [12563]

Mr. Oppenheim: Article 9 of directive 92/EEC, setting down guide levels which are used to help distinguish between commercial consignments, which must bear duty in the member state of destination, and private consignments which will have borne duty in the member state where the goods were brought, was implemented in UK legislation on 1 January 1993 by the Excise Duties (Personal Reliefs) Order 1992, SI 1992 No. 3155. For the benefit of the travelling public, these guide levels are reproduced in Customs and Excise notice No. 1 "A Guide for Travellers", copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of article 9 of directive 92/12/EEC on the United Kingdom yield of excise duty; and what plans he has to reduce the minimum guide levels set for tobacco levels. [12564]

Mr. Oppenheim: The purpose of article 9 is to help distinguish between commercial consignments, which must bear duty in the member state of destination, and personal consignments which will have borne duty in the member state where the goods were bought.

Customs' estimate of excise duty revenue lost from legitimate personal importation of duty paid alcoholic drinks for the year ending 30 June 1996 is £145 million and for tobacco products, £55 million, making a total of £200 million. Additionally, value added tax receipts of £60 million for alcoholic drinks and £15 million for tobacco products, a total £75 million, are estimated to have been lost. Thus the estimate for the total loss of tax revenues from such legitimate cross-border shopping for the year ending 30 June is £275 million.

There are no plans to reduce the minimum guide levels for tobacco products. The UK did well to negotiate, against considerable resistance, the existing levels and it would require unanimous agreement to change them. This is most unlikely to be forthcoming, given that some member states seriously doubt the need for any such indicators.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the *(a)* first-year and *(b)* full-year costs of raising tobacco duties by the equivalent of 5p per standard packet of 20 cigarettes. [12749]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* Increasing the tobacco duties by the equivalent of 5p per standard packet of 20 cigarettes plus value added tax would yield £210 million in 1997–98. The first year yield would depend on the date of implementation assumed. Costings take account of the effects on behaviour where they are likely to have a significant effect on the yield and any consequential changes in receipts from related taxes including VAT; and they are measured against a non-indexed base.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions Finance Ministers have discussed the European Commission document COM (96) 328: "A Common System of VAT"; and if he will make a statement [12480]

Mr. Oppenheim: None. The European Commission's programme for a common system of VAT, outlined in document COM(96)328, has not been discussed by EC Finance Ministers, although it was briefly presented—for information only, and with no debate or discussion—by Commissioner Monti to a meeting of the Economic and Finance Council in October 1996.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his Department's policy in respect of extending value added tax to areas *(a)* zero rated and *(b)* exempt; and if he will make a statement. [12798]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* The Government have no current plans to extend VAT to goods and services that are either zero rated or exempt from VAT. Furthermore, any changes to European Community provisions in respect of VAT require unanimity, and so there is no question of the UK being forced to alter any aspect of our current VAT system.

Income Tax

Mr. Forman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost to the Exchequer in 1997–98 of moving to a single 20 per cent. rate of income tax, assuming the abolition of all reliefs, allowances and exemptions, except for a personal allowance of £5,000 transferable between spouses. [13012]

Mr. Jack: The estimated full-year cost of introducing a single 20 per cent. rate of income tax at 1997–98 income levels would be about £11 billion. This assumes a personal allowance of £5,000 transferable between spouses and the abolition of all other income tax allowances, and mortgage interest relief, tax relief on employee's contributions to occupational pensions and personal pension schemes, reliefs for tax-exempt special savings accounts, personal equity plans and profit-related pay, national savings certificates, employee share schemes and charitable giving.

This estimate does not take into account the substantial behavioural effects which might result from the introduction of such a change, nor do they allow for any subsequent changes to the tax system, such as changes to tax relief on employer's contributions to pension schemes or relief for investment income in pension funds.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the *(a)* first-year and *(b)* full-year costs per person of raising the basic rate of income tax by 1p in the pound for (i) each adult in the United Kingdom and (ii) each income taxpayer in the United Kingdom. [12748]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* The average tax increases at 1997–98 income levels of increasing the basic rate of income tax by 1p is about £28 in the first year and £38 in a full year for each adult—aged 18 and over—and about £49 in the first year and £66 in a full year for every income taxpayer in the United Kingdom.

Vehicle Fuel Duties

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the *(a)* first year and *(b)* full year costs of raising fuel duties by 3p per litre or equivalent. [12751]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* Increasing the duty rates on petrol and diesel by 3p per litre plus VAT would yield £1,400 million in 1997–98. The first-year yield would depend on the date of implementation assumed. Costings take account of the effects on behaviour where they are likely to have a significant effect on the yield and any consequential changes in receipts from related taxes including VAT; and they are measured against a non-indexed base.

Domestic Fuel (VAT)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost of reducing the value added tax on domestic fuel from 8 per cent. to 5 per cent. [12794]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* The estimated cost of reducing VAT on domestic fuel and power is about £430 million in a full year. This estimate is based on the costings methodology explained in annexe A to chapter 6 of the 1997–98 "Financial Statement and Budget Report". It therefore incorporates assumptions about changes in behaviour in response to the reduced rate of VAT, but excludes any effect of the tax change on the overall level of income and spending.

Departmental Publications

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the *(a)* White Papers, *(b)* Green Papers, *(c)* consultation papers, *(d)* draft regulations and *(e)* circulars, for which his Department has been responsible issued in 1996 which his Department assesses could give rise, (i) directly and (ii) indirectly to significant environmental effects. [12700]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* The Government are fully committed to taking significant environmental impacts into account, where appropriate, alongside all other relevant costs and benefits during policy appraisal. The Treasury's commitment to this is demonstrated, for example, by the air quality package announced by the Chancellor as part of this year's Budget.

Mortgage Interest Tax Relief

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost to the Exchequer of mortgage interest tax relief in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99. [12792]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* The estimated total cost of mortgage interest relief in 1997–98 is £2.4 billion. This estimate is provisional. It is based on the assumption, by convention, of no change from the current estimated average building society interest rate of 6.43 per cent. The cost of the relief in 1998–99 would depend on future interest rates, the future distribution of the number and value of outstanding mortgages, and the rate and limit of relief.

National Debt

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the method of calculation of the national debt; and if he will indicate the level of national debt per person in each of the last 20 years. [10771]

Mr. Waldegrave: Estimates of a range of measures of public debt, including net public sector debt, gross general government debt and the national debt, are published in November's edition of the Bank of England quarterly bulletin. The figures are calculated using sector by sector information on debt outstanding—for example, the nominal value of government stocks and Treasury bills outstanding and notes and coins in circulation—most of which is held by the Bank of England.

The table provides figures for the level of real net public sector debt per person for the years 1976 to 1995, the last year for which population data are available.

Net public sector debt per person (figures in £s)

Year	*Real NPSD per person*
1976	5,024
1977	5,070
1978	4,847
1979	4,737
1980	4,435
1981	4,325
1982	4,340
1983	4,274
1984	4,434
1985	4,605
1986	4,511
1987	4,500
1988	4,253
1989	3,649
1990	3,346
1991	3,080
1992	3,151
1993	3,684
1994	4,390
1995	4,950

SCOTLAND

Dog Fouling (Prosecutions)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many prosecutions there have been in Scotland for dog fouling during each of the last five years. [11921]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is not separately identifiable in the Scottish Office Home Department's classification of crimes and offences.

Forestry Commission (Woodland Sales)

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all Forestry Commission woodlands currently for sale, and indicate for each *(a)* into which English or Welsh county or Scottish region it falls, *(b)* the number of hectares covered and *(c)* if an access agreement has been made with the local authority guaranteeing continuing public access.

Mr. Kynoch *[pursuant to his answer, 12 November 1996, c. 149–53]:* The chief executive of Forest Enterprise has written further to the hon. Member.

Letter from Gordon M. Cowie to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 29 January 1997:

I refer to my letter of 12 November 1996, which enclosed a list of the Forestry Commission Woodlands that were currently for sale, in response to your Parliamentary Question.

I am very sorry to say the list for Wales was incorrect due to confusion arising from the changeover from the old County Councils to the new Unitary Authorities on 1 April 1996.

I therefore enclose a revised list for Wales and I can only apologise for this error.

List of Forestry Commission woodland areas currently for sale

Name of property	*Wales Area (ha)*
Aberconwy and Colwyn	
Blackthorn Covert	21.5
Cefn Mawr	81.7
Cerrigellgwm	20.0
Coed Bryn Kenrick	8.0
Coed Plas Isaf	6.0
Coed Salisbury	4.0
Gwrych Castle Woodlands	49.0
Rhiwbach and Tyddyn Bach[1]	106.0
Blaenau, Gwent	
Craig Yr Arail	58.0
Caerphilly	
Bedwas	2.0
Hafodrisclawdd	24.0
Carmarthenshire	
Allt Cil Y Llyn Fawr	2.5
Allt Maes Yr Awdy	6.0
Allt Pant Glas	9.0
Allt Parc Y Dilfa	14.0
Allt Y Fron-Abermarlais 2	5.6
Cathilas	51.4
Coed Caeau Gwynion-Abermarlais	4.8
Cwmllannarch	32.0
Edwinsford Estate[2]	50.0
Gallt Fydr	33.0
Nant Ffrwd	26.0
Penhill Wood	4.0
Pentre Mawr Trebwi	10.0
Rosehill Wood-Abermarlais 3	3.9
Tannerdy and Allt Y Fan Glansefi	22.0
Ceredigion	
Allt Wig Wen	8.2
Cefn Wig	19.0
Falcondale Big Wood	10.0
Henfeddau Ty Hen and Long Wood	23.0

List of Forestry Commission woodland areas currently for sale

Name of property	*Wales Area (ha)*
Denbighshire	
Coed Melin Y Moch	12.0
Gwynedd	
Amnodd Wood	87.5
Bodfuan	101.0
Broaaber	10.0
Bryn Hendre	10.0
Brynffynnon	7.0
Brynffynnon Coed	6.0
Caeau Bodfel	28.0
Cefn Glas	12.0
Coed Cefn	16.0
Coed Mynydd Mawr	24.0
Cwm Prysor	56.0
Cymerau[1]	87.5
Dolymoch[1]	22.0
Flat Covert	15.0
Frochas 1	7.5
Frochas 2	3.1
Frochas 3	5.4
Frochas 4	7.4
Gelli Dywyll[1]	25.0
Grianog[1]	19.0
Hafotty Covert	35.0
Pengwern	15.0
Tan Y Clawdd[1]	13.0
Ty Coch North	7.1
Ynys Creua	67.0
Ynys Galed	22.0
Neath and Port Talbot	
Graig Ynysgollen	10.0
Nant Y Stalwyn[1]	44.0
Pembrokeshire	
Coed Glyn Aeron[1]	57.0
Farthings Hook	18.0
Maesgwyn	20.0
Martletwy Wood	18.0
Ty Rhyg[1]	120.0
Powys	
Cefn Derw Cil Owen	10.0
Cefn Perfa Wood	3.4
Cil Llwyn[1]	15.0
Freezeland[1]	10.5
Geufron	10.1
Gloddfa Nursery	5.2
Gorther Rough	8.0
Husky Hall	1.8
Llys Coppice and Penllys	16.0
Lower Ceulannau	3.8
Lower Wig	2.2
New Forest Plantation[2]	9.0
Penycarreg East	3.0
Penycarreg West	11.0
Penycastle Wood	10.4
Pool Plantation and Kerry Hill	12.7
Rock Wood and Fronfraith Wood[1]	30.5
Tack Wood[2]	63.0
The Smatcher[1]	35.5
Tyn Y Cwm	3.5
Y Wern[1]	453.0
Rhondda Cynon Taff	
Craig Y Parc	16.0
Wrexham	
Gelli Wood	6.0

[1] CPA agreement/completed.
[2] CPA agreement being negotiated.

Scottish Enterprise

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures have been introduced by the Scottish Enterprise network during the last two years to promote greater openness in its operations. [12132]

Mr. Kynoch: This is a matter for Scottish Enterprise. I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mrs. Liddell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many extra assisted places he is planning to make available to children between the ages of five and 11 years; what is the estimated cost of the extra places; and what will be the timetable for making them available. [12650]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The age of assisted pupils is not collected centrally.

We plan to provide funding in the 1997–98 school session sufficient for around 500 additional assisted places, so that there will be around 4,000 assisted places in total. It is for participating schools to determine to whom, and at what stage level, assisted places can be given, dependent on actual applications received and the availability of fee remission grants. The estimated total cost of the scheme for the 1997–98 school session will be around £15.4 million. Within that figure, the cost of the additional 500 places is estimated at around £2 million.

We plan to expand provision in subsequent school sessions so that, in time, around 6,000 assisted places can be provided in Scotland.

Mrs. Liddell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of families of pupils receiving help from the assisted places scheme had household incomes of *(a)* more than £18,000 per annum and *(b)* less than £9,522 per annum in Scotland in the last academic year. [12654]

Mr. Robertson: Provisional statistics for the 1995–96 school session indicate that 20.8 per cent. of assisted pupils came from families whose relevant income was greater than £18,000 per annum. The relevant income point at which full fee remission was applicable in that session is £9,711 per annum, and 46.8 per cent. of assisted pupils came from families whose relevant income was less than that level.

Mrs. Liddell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many pupils attended each school taking part in the assisted places scheme in Scotland in the last academic year; how many pupils in each case were on the assisted places scheme; and what was the percentage of pupils on the assisted places scheme in each case. [12652]

Mr. Robertson: The information requested is in the table:

School	*Total roll 1995–96 school session*	*Number of assisted pupils*	*Percentage of assisted places*
Aberlour School	111	8	7.2
Albyn School	429	24	5.6
Ardvreck School	120	3	2.5
Beaconhurst School	275	15	5.5
Belhaven Hill School	71	3	4.2
Belmont House School	366	30	8.2

School	Total roll 1995–96 school session	Number of assisted pupils	Percentage of assisted places
Butterstone School	58	6	10.3
Cademuir International School	71	0	0
Cargilfield School	197	3	1.5
Clifton Hall School	103	6	5.8
Craigclowan School	240	9	3.8
Craigholme School	474	47	9.9
Croftinloan School	84	8	9.5
Stewart's Melville College and the Mary Erskine School	2,571	301	11.7
Dollar Academy	1,105	73	6.6
Drumley House School	96	1	1.0
Edinburgh Academy	786	56	7.1
Fernhill School	345	32	9.3
Fettes College	486	39	8.0
George Heriot's School	1,506	240	15.9
George Watson's College	2,075	246	11.9
The Glasgow Academy	989	82	8.3
Glenalmond College	296	43	14.5
Gordonstoun School	421	31	7.4
Hamilton College	738	25	3.4
High School of Dundee	1,126	199	17.7
The High School of Glasgow	986	50	5.1
Hutcheson's Grammar School	1,870	157	8.4
Keil School	210	64	30.5
Kelvinside Academy	520	94	18.1
Kilgraston School	241	56	23.2
Kilquhanity House School	32	12	37.5
Lathallan Preparatory School	158	6	3.8
Laurel Bank School	335	64	19.1
Lomond School	465	55	11.8
Loretto School	388	32	8.3
Merchiston Castle School	399	65	16.3
Morrison's Academy	537	133	24.8
New Park School	113	6	5.3
Park Lodge School	54	3	5.6
The Park School	259	65	25.1
Rannoch School	235	39	16.6
Robert Gordon's College	1,354	70	5.2
Rudolf Steiner School	261	59	22.6
St. Aloysius College	1,088	167	15.4
St. Columba's School	554	32	5.8
St. Denis and Cranley School	128	29	22.7
St. George's School	883	57	6.5
St. Leonard's School	329	35	10.6
St. Margaret's School, Aberdeen	417	16	3.8
St. Margaret's School, Edinburgh	658	73	11.1
St. Mary's School	94	5	5.3
Strathallan School	492	40	8.1
Wellington School	362	51	14.1

Mrs. Liddell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each year in which the assisted places scheme has been operating *(a)* the number of places available, *(b)* the number taken up, *(c)* the amount budgeted each year for the scheme and *(d)* the amount actually spent in Scotland. [12651]

Mr. Robertson: Participating schools are not allocated a specific number of assisted places which they may award. Each school is allocated a specific level of fee remission grant within which it may assist such pupils as can be afforded. In addition, schools can reclaim the cost of incidental expenses grants to which assisted pupils are entitled. The table therefore provides information on the number of pupils assisted each year and the actual costs incurred, including the costs of incidental expenses grants.

School session	Number of assisted pupils	Total cost (£)
1981–82	790	799,023
1982–83	1,450	1,718,485
1983–84	1,900	2,454,386
1984–85	2,265	3,298,461
1985–86	2,620	4,217,234
1986–87	2,626	4,861,150
1987–88	2,680	5,310,061
1988–89	2,695	5,758,542
1989–90	2,841	6,681,213
1990–91	2,861	7,641,895
1991–92	2,911	8,706,443
1992–93	3,038	9,755,844
1993–94	3,045	10,083,778
1994–95[1]	3,046	10,439,522
1995–96[1]	3,065	10,947,173

[1] Provisional.

Mrs. Liddell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the schools which have participated in the assisted palces scheme in each year since the scheme began; and what are the number of placements at each school in each year. [12655]

Mr. Robertson: The schools which have participated each school session and the number of pupils assisted at each school in each session are listed in the table:

School	1981–82	1982–83	1983–84	1984–85	1985–86	1986–87	1987–88	1988–89
Aberlour School	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Albyn School	4	6	9	10	10	16	15	16
Ardvreck School	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Beaconhurst School	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Belhaven Hill School	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Belmont School	3	3	2	5	11	15	17	18
Blairmore School	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Butterstone School	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cademuir School	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cargilfield School	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Clifton Hall School	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Craigclowan School	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Craigholme School	8	23	27	24	25	25	30	31
Crawfordton House	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Croftinloan School	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dollar Academy	22	30	35	41	52	52	57	63
Drumley House	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Edinburgh Academy	9	20	22	30	42	38	38	43
Fernhill School	5	13	22	30	40	45	42	40
Fettes College	8	18	20	20	26	28	26	26

School	1981–82	1982–83	1983–84	1984–85	1985–86	1986–87	1987–88	1988–89
Fort Augustus	9	14	27	33	39	43	43	38
George Heriot's	48	95	142	184	221	224	221	226
George Watson's	(see note)							
Glasgow Academy	11	20	34	41	44	38	42	41
Glenalmond College	7	13	23	31	34	33	35	36
Gordonstoun School	6	8	12	18	20	21	22	23
Hamilton College	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
H. S. of Dundee	63	106	126	139	159	165	170	164
H. S. of Glasgow	17	30	35	51	57	61	58	46
Hutchesons'	82	103	133	139	150	143	148	143
Keil School	11	18	41	53	57	56	57	60
Kelvinside Academy	27	39	36	45	50	52	54	54
Kilgraston School	4	10	26	35	48	49	51	57
Kilquhanity School	—	7	11	13	17	16	17	19
Lathallan School		—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Laurel Bank School	21	39	51	47	52	56	60	63
Lomond School	8	13	20	35	37	40	43	42
Loretto School	5	11	22	22	22	23	23	24
Merchiston Castle	8	18	25	33	46	47	49	50
Morrison's Academy	39	86	120	139	165	154	156	166
New Park School	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Oxenfoord Castle	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Park Lodge School	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
The Park School	19	35	44	47	44	49	55	63
Rannoch School	5	11	16	18	25	26	25	26
Robert Gordon's	11	20	39	55	57	53	53	61
Rudolf Steiner (Edin)	6	22	36	51	56	56	58	60
St. Aloysius College	51	102	128	133	141	139	137	139
St. Columba's School	19	34	33	34	37	45	47	36
St. Denis and Cranley	5	7	11	16	18	18	20	25
St. George's School	—	—	7	10	13	16	16	18
St. Hilary's School	6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
St. Leonard's School	2	6	14	21	22	21	22	23
St. Margaret's Convent	5	9	10	13	8	—	—	—
St. Margaret's (AB)	2	4	8	14	14	14	13	13
St. Margaret's (Edinburgh)	10	18	41	48	54	56	54	59
St. Mary's Melrose	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Stewart's Melville and	194	362	390	455	548	543	560	542
Mary Erskine School	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Strathallan School	—	7	12	21	32	33	34	35
Wellington School	—	3	18	27	39	40	41	43
Westbourne School	30	67	72	84	88	77	71	63
Totals	790	1,450	1,900	2,265	2,620	2,626	2,680	2,695

School	1989–90	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	[1]1994–95	[1]1995–96
Aberlour School	5	8	7	10	11	9	8
Albyn School	20	23	20	18	19	24	24
Ardvreck School	1	2	3	3	5	6	3
Beaconhurst School	3	6	6	10	13	10	15
Belhaven Hill School	4	3	3	2	1	2	3
Belmont School	21	20	23	23	26	25	30
Blairmore School	2	5	4	3		closed	
Butterstone School	2	4	5	2	4	5	6
Cademuir School							0
Cargilfield School	3	4	4	4	4	4	3
Clifton Hall School	6	7	7	8	7	6	6
Craigclowan School	6	9	9	9	12	10	9
Craigholme School	39	39	36	38	45	45	47
Crawfordton House	8	6	6	6	6	6	closed
Croftinloan School	4	4	5	6	6	4	8
Dollar Academy	63	68	59	71	72	69	73
Drumley House	6	5	3	3	2	2	1
Edinburgh Academy	46	48	50	52	54	53	56
Fernhill School	28	29	30	34	34	30	32
Fettes College	32	32	33	40	39	36	39
Fort Augustus	34	33	34	28		closed	
George Heriot's	237	236	247	247	250	250	240
George Watson's	240	243	238	234	238	243	246
Glasgow Academy	42	37	89	98	98	90	82
Glenalmond College	34	30	33	33	38	41	43
Gordonstoun School	24	26	29	28	28	31	31
Hamilton College	11	12	14	15	14	14	25

School	1989–90	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	[1]1994–95	[1]1995–96
H. S. of Dundee	174	182	180	197	193	193	199
H. S. of Glasgow	40	38	39	45	49	49	50
Hutchesons'	135	135	138	152	157	167	157
Keil School	71	66	67	66	65	69	64
Kelvinside Academy	58	58	67	80	85	87	94
Kilgraston School	52	51	53	59	52	54	56
Kilquhanity School	18	18	18	20	20	11	12
Lathallan School	6	5	5	6	6	6	6
Laurel Bank School	59	54	53	53	60	64	64
Lomond School	43	39	44	49	54	54	55
Loretto School	29	31	33	35	33	33	32
Merchiston Castle	56	60	62	65	68	69	65
Morrison's Academy	177	164	168	169	157	140	133
New Park School	3	3	3	4	5	4	6
Oxenfoord Castle	5	11	13	11		closed	
Park Lodge School	1	0	1	1	0	0	3
The Park School	61	72	68	68	69	70	65
Rannoch School	27	28	30	31	35	38	39
Robert Gordon's	58	63	64	63	64	70	70
Rudolf Steiner (Edin)	61	56	57	59	63	62	59
St. Aloysius College	154	160	166	165	172	169	167
St. Columba's School	40	32	42	39	36	34	32
St. Denis and Cranley	28	30	28	31	29	31	29
St. George's School	17	20	25	29	31	42	57
St Hilary's School							
St. Leonard's School	24	31	35	37	36	36	35
St. Margaret's Convent.							
St. Margaret's (AB.)	18	19	22	22	20	20	16
St. Margaret's (Edinburgh)	65	68	70	72	71	74	73
St Mary's, Melrose	2	4	1	2	2	4	5
Stewart's Melville and Mary Erskine School	291	274	276	282	284	282	301
Strathallan School	41	42	42	46	47	46	40
Wellington School	49	48	44	55	56	53	31
Westbourne School	57	60					
Totals	2,841	2,861	2,911	3,038	3,045	3,046	3,065

[1] Provisional figures.
George Watson's included in Stewart's Melville etc. totals from 1981–82 to 1988–89 inclusive as Edinburgh Merchant's Company.

Mrs. Liddell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the fees charged by each school taking part in the assisted places scheme in Scotland in the last academic year. [12653]

Mr. Robertson: The fees charged in respect of assisted pupils in each of the participating schools in the 1995–96 school session are set out in the table:

School	Fees charged for assisted pupils 1995–96 (£ per annum)
Aberlour School	4,923
Albyn School	3,534–3,642
Ardvreck School	4,725
Beaconhurst School	4,116–4,245
Belhaven Hill School	5,190
Belmont House School	3,215–3,628
Butterstone School	5,076
Cademuir International School	5,460
Cargilfield School	5,865
Clifton Hall School	4,965
Craigclowan School	3,600
Craigholme School	3,212–3,429
Croftinloan School	5,639
Dollar Academy	3,349–3,831
Drumley House	4,545
Edinburgh Academy	5,013–5,082
Fernhill School	2,735–2,851
Fettes College	4,722–7,524
George Heriot's School	2,787–3,732
George Watson's College	2,886–3,993
Glasgow Academy	3,850–4,134
Glenalmond College	5,858–7,802
Gordonstoun School	6,756
Hamilton College	2,341
High School of Dundee	2,608–3,716
High School of Glasgow	3,564–4,104
Hutchesons' Grammar School	3,491
Keil School	3,909–4,614
Kelvinside Academy	3,414–4,259
Kilgraston School	3,840–4,287
Kilquhanity School	2,503
Lathallan School	4,760
Laurel Bank School	3,492–4,131
Lomond School	4,134–4,242
Loretto School	5,759–7,451
Merchiston Castle School	4,665–6,675
Morrison's Academy	3,258–3,453
New Park School	4,071
Park Lodge School	2,829
Rannoch School	5,490
Robert Gordon's College	3,654
Rudolf Steiner School, Edinburgh	2,796–3,702
St. Aloysius College	3,068
St. Columba's School	3,525–3,801
St. Denis and Cranley School	4,330
St. George's School	3,842–4,221
St. Leonard's School	4,488–5,853
St. Margaret's School, Aberdeen	3,141–3,454
St. Margaret's School, Edinburgh	3,028–4,012
St. Mary's School, Melrose	4,761
Stewart's Melville College and the Mary Erskine School	2,934–4,029
Strathallan School	6,345–7,710
The Park School	3,432–3,822
Wellington School	4,068–4,419

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many families benefiting from the assisted places scheme are self-employed; and what proportion of the total they form. [13171]

Mr. Robertson: This information is not held centrally.

Erskine Bridge (Collision)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects the report on the Erskine bridge collision to be published. [12964]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I will issue a full statement on the findings of the report shortly.

Housing Capital Provision

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each local authority in Scotland its gross housing capital provision in 1996–97 and 1997–98, broken down in each case by *(a)* borrowing consent and *(b)* estimated sale receipts. [13039]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The information is contained in the table. For 1997–98, the estimate of useable capital receipts is based on information provided by local authorities; the Scottish Office no longer issues receipts estimates to individual authorities. The final outturn will vary from the figures shown in accordance with the actual receipts achieved by each council.

Housing revenue account allocations and receipts for 1996–97 to 1997–98

£ million

Authority	*Net allocation*	*[1]1996–97 Estimated useable receipts*	*Estimated gross provision*	*Net allocation*	*[2]1997–98 Estimated useable[3] receipts*	*Estimated gross provision*
Aberdeen city council	1.691	11.409	13.100	5.210	3.305	8.515
Aberdeenshire council	3.901	6.399	10.300	4.424	2.271	6.695
Angus council	1.048	3.052	4.100	1.513	1.152	2.665
Argyll and Bute council	0.984	2.716	3.700	1.582	0.823	2.405
Clackmannanshire council	0.926	2.374	3.300	1.573	0.572	2.145
Dunfries and Galloway council	3.892	5.408	9.300	4.186	1.859	6.045
Dundee city council	10.012	4.488	14.500	8.305	1.120	9.425
East Ayrshire council	2.888	4.512	7.400	3.435	1.375	4.810
East Dunbartonshire council	2.571	2.029	4.600	2.351	0.639	2.990
East Lothian council	1.911	3.289	5.200	2.472	0.908	3.380
East Renfrewshire council	0.693	1.207	1.900	0.949	0.286	1.235
City of Edinburgh council	16.512	9.488	26.000	14.686	2.214	16.900
Falkirk council	4.750	6.050	10.800	5.286	1.734	7.020
Fife council	1.963	13.538	15.501	6.900	3.176	10.076
City of Glasgow council	58.001	16.999	75.000	43.074	5.676	48.750
Highland council	7.269	7.431	14.700	7.119	2.436	9.555
Inverclyde council	4.072	3.328	7.400	3.904	0.906	4.810
Midlothian council	2.144	2.256	4.400	2.090	0.770	2.860
Moray council	0.537	3.363	3.900	1.819	0.716	2.535
North Ayrshire council	2.943	3.757	6.700	2.915	1.440	4.355
North Lanarkshire council	11.925	14.775	26.700	12.139	5.216	17.355
Orkney council	0.000	0.636	0.636	0.220	0.205	0.425
Perth and Kinross council	1.813	3.387	5.200	2.076	1.304	3.380
Renfrewshire council	8.832	6.068	14.900	8.434	1.251	9.685
Scottish Borders council	2.231	2.669	4.900	2.362	0.823	3.185
Shetland council	2.217	1.183	3.400	1.951	0.259	2.210
South Ayrshire council	1.499	4.101	5.600	2.862	0.778	3.640
South Lanarkshire council	1.222	12.377	13.599	5.767	3.103	8.870
Stirling council	2.756	3.344	6.100	3.002	0.963	3.965
West Dunbartonshire council	6.078	3.222	9.300	5.569	0.476	6.045
West Lothian council	1.496	4.704	6.200	2.065	1.965	4.030
Comhairle nan Eilean (WIIC)	2.223	0.577	2.800	1.675	0.145	1.820
Scotland	171.000	170.136	341.136	171.915	49.866	221.781

[1] Net allocations and receipt estimates notified to authorities on 28 March 1996.
[2] Net allocations notified to authorities on 23 December 1996.
[3] Derived from local authority estimates.

National Galleries

Mr. Eric Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place copies of the reports commissioned by his Department in the last five years concerning the financial management of the national galleries of Scotland in the Library; and if he will make a statement on the action taken as a result of those reports. [12876]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A policy and financial management review of the national galleries of Scotland was announced to the House on 10 May 1995 and was completed on 28 September 1995. The report of the review will be published along with an action plan to implement recommendations when these have been considered and agreed. A copy will then be placed in the Library.

Agricultural and Biological Institutes

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what decisions have been made about the Scottish agricultural and biological institutes following the prior options review. [13860]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Government announced on 22 May 1996 that we were satisfied that the functions of two Scottish agricultural and biological research institutes—the Macaulay Land Use Research Institute and the Scottish Crop Research Institute—were needed and that the institutes should retain their separate existence, but that the possibility of a move of the institutes from the public to the private sector merited further consideration.

In the light of this further consideration, the Government have concluded that these establishments should remain in the public sector and should each retain their separate existence. The same conclusions apply to the two animal science institutes—the Hannah Research Institute and the Moredun Research Institute—which were included in the second tranche of prior options reviews, completed at the end of July 1996; and to the Rowett Research Institute, the review of which was completed in December 1996.

The Scottish Office has been developing with the institutes measures designed to improve the value for money obtained from our funding of these establishments, and we will examine the scope for improving their efficiency and effectiveness still further. In particular, we will develop further the institutes' mechanisms for corporate planning and target setting. Details will be published in due course.

My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has made a statement today on the broad outcome of the programme of prior options reviews of public sector research establishments which refers to the general policy on the timing of prior options reviews.

TRANSPORT

Channel Tunnel (Safety)

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to receive reports of *(a)* the judicial inquiry by the French authorities into the channel tunnel fire, *(b)* Eurotunnel's inquiry and *(c)* the investigation by the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority; and if each will be published in full. [13258]

Mr. Watts: It is for the French authorities to decide to what extent the findings of the judicial inquiry into the channel tunnel fire are made public. Eurotunnel's own inquiry is a matter for the company, but I understand Eurotunnel has said it will publish its findings. The findings of the inquiry by the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority will be made public.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Tourism (Bexley)

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of the impact of the Government's tourism policy on the London borough of Bexley. [11667]

Mr. Sproat: While we have not made any specific assessment of the impact of our tourism policy on Bexley alone, Bexley is a London borough and as such is part of Britain's greatest assets in attracting overseas visitors. In 1995, over 23 million people visited the capital—an increase of nearly 1.5 million over 1994—and they contributed over £7 billion to the capital's economy. The "Focus London" initiative aims to enhance London's position as one of the world's leading tourist destinations and as international gateway to the rest of Britain. The London tourist board/London first hotel development initiative aims to identify sites for hotel development in outer-London boroughs which will help develop and spread the benefits of tourism outside the capital centre. Locally they are various initiatives which ultimately aim to maximise the benefits of tourism right across the capital. A 40-mile network of green walks spanning south-east London has been awarded the prestigious "seal of approval" by the London Walking Forum. The walk links together more than 300 public and private open spaces passing through four London boroughs including Bexley. Bexley has been praised for the colour and attractiveness of its gardens, and has been awarded the London borough Trophy as a result. I am pleased to see that Bexley council's priorities for the next five years include a drive to promote culture, heritage and the arts, play a leading role in "Thames gateway" initiatives and activities, and to improve employment prospects by exploiting tourism and heritage opportunities.

National Lottery

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what proportion of national lottery tickets sold nationally are bought from *(a)* supermarket chains, *(b)* chain newsagents and *(c)* independent newsagents; [12362]

(2) what has been the total income received from *(a)* national lottery tickets and *(b)* national lottery scratchcards in Lewisham, East; [12366]

(3) what plans she has to limit new national lottery outlets to independent newsagents only; [12369]

(4) how many new *(a)* national lottery ticket outlets and *(b)* national lottery scratchcards outlets have been opened on average each week; [12361]

(5) what proportion of the total national income from the national lottery has been represented by lottery sales in Lewisham, East; [12365]

(6) how many and what percentage of all national lottery outlets are in *(a)* supermarket chains, *(b)* chain newsagents and *(c)* independent newsagents. [12363]

Mr. Sproat: This is an operational matter for Camelot Group plc. I have therefore asked the Director General of the National Lottery, who is responsible for regulating the operation of the lottery, to write to the hon. Member, placing copies of his response in the Libraries of the House.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how her Department has used the UK indicators for sustainable development in *(a)* the production of the Department's annual report, *(b)* monitoring progress towards meeting the objectives set out in the UK sustainable development strategy and

(c) assessing the environmental implications of policy options; and what plans they have to extend their use in future within the Department. [12275]

Mr. Sproat: My Department recognises the indicators for sustainable development as a valuable tool. Although they are not applied in a formal sense either in the production of the Department of National Heritage annual report or in any monitoring system, they are taken into account where appropriate in considering policy options, in particular in the approach to sustainable tourism, to which the Department remains committed. The natural and built heritage are central to the UK's attractiveness as a visitor destination, and it is therefore essential that the tourism industry develops in a way which contributes to conserving and enhancing that heritage. The tourism strategy which we will be publishing on 5 February 1997 will set out further action to encourage sustainable tourism.

Millennium Exhibition

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the revised financial arrangements for the millennium exhibition at Greenwich. [12574]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Millennium Commission decided at its meeting on 13 January 1997 that the indicative budget it has received from the millennium exhibition operating company, Millennium Central, provided a basis on which a grant of £200 million could be made. Negotiations on terms and conditions of grant are continuing in parallel with the preparation of detailed business plan and the creation of the management team. This will be done in such a way as to drive the costs down.

In addition to the commission's grant, the exhibition will be funded through commercial income, including private sector sponsorship. The Millennium Commission has a target of £150 million for sponsorship, of which more than half has been identified. Entrance charges will be set at a level which allows as many people as possible to attend but which also maximises income.

Television Licensing

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she expects to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Beaconsfield of 15 May relating to television licensing. [12837]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer Tuesday 28 January 1997]:* My hon. Friend's original correspondence and reminder were addressed to the Home Office. On transfer of the correspondence, the relevant enclosures were missing and the Department of National Heritage did not finally receive these until 14 November last year. A reply has been sent to my hon. Friend today, and I apologise for the delay.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Magistrates and Crown Courts

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many individuals have been brought before *(a)* the magistrates and *(b)* the Crown courts in each of the last five years. [13024]

Mr. Maclean: I have been asked to reply.

The information is published annually in the Command Paper "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales". Tables 6A and 6.7 refer.

Copies are available in the Library.

Legal Aid

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department which firms of solicitors received more than £500,000 from the legal aid fund in 1995–96; how much they each received; and what sum they have received in 1996–97. [12309]

Mr. Streeter: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 22 January 1997, *Official Report*, column *603*. I shall reply in full as soon as possible.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Bosnia

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the recipient organisations and amounts they received from British Government sources in aid related to *(a)* infrastructure repair projects, *(b)* grants to UN agencies and the Red Cross and *(c)* grants to British and international non-governmental organisations in reconstruction assistance to Bosnia in each year since 1992. [12850]

Dr. Liam Fox: The information is as follows:

A) Infrastructure repair projects by financil year since 1992

	£ million
1992–93	
International Mining Consultants Ltd. (IMCL)/Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE)	0.258
1993–94	
IMCL/NIE	5.985
ODA Emergency engineering Unit (EEU)	3.005
1994–95	
International Management Group (IMG)	1.000
AMEC Gas	0.919
IMCL/NIE	4.038
EEU	4.911
IMG	2.230
AMEC Gas	0.731
European Union (Joint Action on Railways)	0.409
IMCL/NIE	0.301
EEU	5.237
1996–97	
IMG	0.327
AMEC Sarajevo Gas	0.850
NIE/IMCL	0.108
EU	9.792
Crown Agents–telecoms	0.418
ODA/British forces projects	3.503

B) Support to UN agencies, other international agencies and the Red Cross movement, by financial year

	£ million
1992–93	
UNHCR	7.500
UNICEF	1.000
WHO	0.425
IOM	0.349
Red Cross	3.000
1993–94	
UNHCR	11.00
UNICEF	2.000
WHO	5.544
WFP	2.500
Red Cross	2.110
1994–95	
UNICEF	1.000
WHO	1.525
IOM	0.107
WFP	1.500
Red Cross	0.540
1995–96	
UNHCR	6.000
WHO	2.040
IOM	0.195
WFP	2.000
FAO	0.600
Red Cross	4.020
1996–97	
UNHCR	5.000
WHO	0.206
IOM	0.052
Red Cross	0.230

ODA has also provided in-kind support to UNHCR (equipment, seconded staff, logistical support, Sarajevo airlift, convoys) to the value of £54.3 million over this period, and £1.94 million in seconded staff and logistics support to WHO.

C) As it runs its own emergency Engineering Unit in Bosnia, the British Government has not normally channelled physical reconstruction assistance to the former Yugoslavia through British and international non-governmental organisations. In financial year 1994–95 £200,000 was granted to Scottish European Aid and £50,000 to the Bosnia Aid Committee of Oxford for reconstruction projects. NGOs *have* been supported to a total of £10.3 million since 1992 for social, medical and other programmes.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Part-time Employment

14. **Mr. Eric Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the implications for employment policy of the changing balance between part-time and full-time work. [11739]

Mr. Paice: Both full and part-time jobs are increasing. We shall continue with the policies under which 900,000 more jobs have been created and unemployment has fallen by more than 1 million since 1992.

Home-school Agreements

15. **Mrs. Peacock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent representations she has received about home-school agreements. [11740]

Mrs. Gillan: My right hon. Friend continues to receive a variety of representations about home-school agreements.

17. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what research her Department has undertaken with regard to the implementation of home-school agreements. [11742]

19. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what research her Department has undertaken with regard to implementation of home-school agreements. [11745]

Mrs. Gillan: The Department has commissioned Dr. John Bastiani, an education consultant, to produce guidance to schools on developing effective home-school agreements.

Class Sizes

16. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to visit Redbridge to discuss class sizes in primary and secondary schools. [11741]

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no plans to visit Redbridge, although I recently visited South Park infants school in Ilford. Decisions about class sizes are a matter for local education authorities and schools, taking account of local circumstances.

21. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to reduce primary school class sizes in Berkshire. [11748]

Mr. Squire: Decisions about class sizes are not a matter for central Government to resolve, but one for local education authorities and schools to determine, taking account of local circumstances.

28. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent representations she has received on the link between class size and educational achievement in the early years. [11755]

Mr. Squire: The Department has received a number of representations about class size and educational achievement in the early years. The Department has also received evidence that the most important factor affecting educational attainment is the quality of teaching.

Nursery Vouchers

18. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent discussions she has had with local education authority representatives regarding the introduction of the nursery voucher scheme in 1997–98. [11744]

Mr. Robin Squire: There have been a number of representations on all aspects of the nursery voucher scheme.

Temporary Contracts

20. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of the proportion of people employed on temporary contracts in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* France and *(c)* Spain in (i) 1979 and (ii) 1996. [11747]

Mr. Forth: This information is not available for 1979. According to the latest available Eurostat figures, in 1995 less than 7 per cent. of the UK employees were on temporary contracts, compared with over 12 per cent. in France and 35 per cent. in Spain.

Mathematics Tests

22. **Mr. Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of children gained level 4 in the national curriculum tests in mathematics in 1996. [11749]

Mrs. Gillan: Fifty-four per cent. of 11-year-olds achieved level 4 or above in the 1996 national curriculum mathematics tests. This represented a 10 percentage point increase from 1995.

Teachers' Pension Scheme

23. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what consultations she has had with local education authority and teacher unions concerning the teachers' superannuation scheme; and if she will make a statement. [11750]

Mrs. Gillan: Officials have conducted consultations with representatives of employers, teacher unions and other bodies about the proposals to reform the arrangements for premature and ill health retirement in the teachers' superannuation scheme. I have personally held meetings with the National Employers Organisation for School Teachers; the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers and the National Association of Headteachers. In addition, the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) has held a joint meeting with the Association of Colleges, the Sixth Form Colleges employers forum and the Association of Principals of Colleges.

School Discipline

24. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent representations she has had regarding measures relating to school discipline in the Education Bill. [11751]

Mr. Forth: Since announcing our intention to introduce the discipline measures in the Education Bill, we have received representations from a wide range of bodies with an interest in promoting good behaviour and effective discipline in schools.

Claimant Statistics

25. **Mr. John Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the number of people who leave the claimant count but do not go into employment. [11752]

Mr. Forth: A large majority—around 70 per cent. of those who leave the claimant count—go directly into jobs. Among the remainder, the two largest categories receive Government-funded training or sickness-related benefits, while smaller numbers claim other benefits, go into full-time education, or go abroad.

Further and Higher Education

26. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent representations she has received regarding the future funding of further and higher education institutions. [11753]

Mr. Paice: A total of 52 representations have been received between the announcement in the Budget on 26 November 1996 and 27 January 1997.

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of the growth in student participation in further education in the last three years for which figures are available has been delivered through franchised provision. [12636]

Mr. Paice: Eighty-five per cent. of the growth in Further Education Funding Council funded student numbers in further education colleges between college years 1994–95 and 1995–96 was due to collaborative—franchised— provision. The vast majority of students on collaborative provision are part time, and therefore the contribution of franchising to the growth is likely to have been considerably less in full-time equivalent terms. Figures for other years are not available.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the current average staff-student ratio in further education colleges; and what it was in (i) 1992, (ii) 1993, (iii) 1994 and (iv) 1995. [12997]

Mr. Paice: The figures are as follows:

Student-staff ratio: FE sector colleges and HE (FE courses)

1992–93: 14.5:1

1993–94: 15.5:1

1994–95: 15.8:1

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the average per capita funding for students in further education in each of the last five years. [12948]

Mr. Paice: The recurrent spending per full-time equivalent student in further education colleges in each of the last five years is as follows:

Year	*LEA spending per FTE cash* £	*Government funding per FEFC funded FTE student cash*[2] £
1991–92	2,940	—
1992–93	2,970	—
1993–94	—	2,670
1994–95	—	2,650
1995–96[1]	—	2,600

[1] Provisional.

[2] From 1993–94 the FEFC was established to provide for students studying in further education. The Government funding per funded FTE student series is not comparable with the LEA spending per FTE student series.

Inner-city Schools

27. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what are the Government's principal priorities for improving standards in inner-city schools. [11754]

Mr. Robin Squire: The whole thrust of Government policy is to raise standards in all schools, be they in inner cities or in any other part of the country. This means, above all, raising levels of pupil achievement, and in particular standards of literacy and numeracy, as measured by the national assessment and testing arrangements. Our aim is for pupils to achieve the highest standards of which they are capable.

We have a wide range of measures in place to help raise these standards. They include the national curriculum and assessment, Office for Standards in Education inspection arrangements, parental information, the improving schools programme and the development of literacy and numeracy centres, to name just a few. It would be wrong to single out three as being more important than any of the others.

Secondary Education Reforms

29. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the Government's programme of reforms of secondary education. [11757]

Mr. Robin Squire: We are on track to complete a series of reforms to raise standards and increase diversity for pupils of all ages. These include greater flexibility on selection policy and more freedoms for grant-maintained schools. My right hon. Friend will shortly be announcing the first tranche of specialist sports and arts colleges.

Jobcentres (Advertisements)

30. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received on the acceptance by jobcentres of advertisements for jobs paying less than £2 an hour. [11758]

Mr. Forth: Information on the representations to the Secretary of State about vacancies accepted by jobcentres with wages of less than £2 an hour is not collected centrally.

The Employment Service, in dealing with vacancies notified by employers to jobcentres, does not have a general policing role on pay since such matters are normally for agreement between employers and workers. However, when employers are offering low wages, people in jobcentres will advise employers about the local prevailing rates of pay for the job and that their vacancy may be difficult to fill.

Since wages councils were abolished, there is now no legal reason why jobcentres could refuse to service an employer's vacancy because of low pay.

School Funding

31. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking to ensure that the increase in the educational component of the standard spending assessment for 1997–98 is passed in its entirety by local education authorities to schools. [11759]

Mr. Robin Squire: LEAs will have an extra £633 million. Ministers have consistently urged them to deliver this to classrooms. Authorities that choose to do otherwise will need to justify their decisions to local schools, parents and teachers.

Unemployment-related Benefits

32. **Mr. Berry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people have claimed an unemployment-related benefit since April 1992. [11760]

Mr. Forth: The following table shows the numbers of people who have experienced at least one spell of claimant unemployment in Great Britain in each year since 1992. The numbers rose up to 1993 but have since fallen substantially.

Year	*Claimants (million)*
1 January to 31 December 1992	5.30
1 January to 31 December 1993	5.35
1 January to 31 December 1994	5.03
1 January to 31 December 1995	4.59
13 December 1995 to 12 December 1996[1]	4.21

[1] Latest available.

The number of people who have experienced at least one spell of claimant unemployment in Great Britain since April 1992 is 10,167,860. This figure is much less than the total for individual years because people may experience unemployment in more than one year.

Teaching Methods

33. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment by what mechanisms her Department is able to exercise control over the teaching methods employed in local education authority schools. [11761]

Mr. Forth: It is for schools and teachers to choose effective teaching methods. The Government's education reforms are designed to encourage all schools to use the most effective methods to maximise pupil attainment.

Student Grants

34. **Mr. Chris Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the average annual maintenance grant paid to university undergraduates in *(a)* 1978–79 and *(b)* 1995–96. [11762]

Mr. Forth: The average net maintenance grants after means-testing paid to mandatory award holders by local education authorities in England and Wales in the academic years 1978–79 and 1994–95, the latest year for which data are available, were £840 and £1,520 respectively. These figures include awards to postgraduate certificate of education students. The average maintenance payment given is that received by non-minimum award holders. All mandatory holders in 1978–79 received a minimum grant of £200 irrespective of parental or other income. Since 1990–91, eligible students have also had access to non-means-tested student loans.

Long-term Unemployment

35. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking to reduce long-term unemployment. [11763]

Mr. Forth: The success of our economic and labour market policies has helped long-term unemployment to fall by 340,000 since January 1994. The United Kingdom has more people in jobs and fewer out of work than any other major European country, and in the last four years has created more jobs than the other major countries of Europe combined. In his November Budget statement, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a further package of measures–including an expansion of project work to every region–to help people who have been unemployed for two years or more to compete effectively for the jobs becoming available.

Schools (Financial Improprieties)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* maintained schools and *(b)* grant-maintained schools have been investigated for financial improprieties since 1992 or are being investigated. [12976]

Mr. Robin Squire: Local education authorities are responsible for monitoring financial propriety in schools which they maintain. The Department does not maintain records of investigatons by LEAs. The Funding Agency for Schools has the responsbility for the financial monitoring of grant-maintained schools in England. I have asked the chairman of the funding agency to write to the hon. Member with this information in respect of grant-maintained schools.

Nursery Inspectors (Police Checks)

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what police checks are made on inspectors employed by contractors undertaking inspections of nursery settings. [13147]

Mr. Robin Squire: This is a matter for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

GCSE Scores (Lancashire)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the percentage of 16-year-olds passing five or more GCSEs at grade C or higher in Lancashire in each year since 1992. [13268]

Mrs. Gillan: The percentage of 15-year-old[1] pupils in maintained schools passing five or more GCSEs at grade C or higher in Lancashire in each year since 1992 is:

	Percentage
1992	36.5
1993	39.4
1994	41.1
1995	41.7
1996	42.6

[1] Age at the beginning of the academic year.

Academic Selection (Bromley)

Sir John Hunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the impact of her approval of a higher level of selection by academic ability in a number of Bromley schools on the availability of places to local children living in the immediate vicinity of such schools; and if she will make a statement. [11896]

Mr. Robin Squire: The statutory proposals published by Hayes grant-maintained school, Bromley, to select up to 25 per cent. of pupils on the basis of ability were approved by the Secretary of State in December 1996. The other non-selective secondary schools in Bromley have changed their admission arrangements this year to allow them to admit 15 per cent. of children on the basis of ability from September 1997. The Secretary of State's approval was not required for these changes.

The Funding Agency for Schools has the responsibility for ensuring a sufficient supply of secondary school places in the London borough of Bromley. The agency is involved in constant discussions with Bromley schools and the local education authority in order to ensure that there are enough school places for local children.

Local Education Authorities (Administration Costs)

Sir Nicholas Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement about the powers of local education authorities to retain a percentage of education funding for administration costs before distributing funding to schools. [11953]

Mr. Robin Squire: At present, each local education authority may retain up to 15 per cent. of its potential schools budget centrally, to meet expenditure on administration and other purposes specified in its scheme for the local management of schools. The Government intend to reduce this permitted percentage to 5 per cent. of a redefined PSB. There is, however, no separate limit applicable to administrative as distinct from other central expenditure by LEAs.

Derwent Buildings

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what new proposals she has to provide additional funding to local education authorities which have Derwent buildings, with particular reference to Sheffield. [11928]

Mrs. Gillan: My right hon. Friend does not propose to base allocations on the specific types of building in an LEA. However, clearly projects at schools with Derwent buildings may meet our published criteria for capital support. Any such bids are considered on their merits against those criteria and in the light of the resources available. Since March 1996, we have allocated capital support totalling £1,833,000 to Sheffield LEA for schools with Derwent buildings.

Further Education Funding Council (Publication Pack)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was *(a)* the number of copies produced, *(b)* total cost of production and *(c)* total distribution cost of the recent publication pack comprising annual report, corporate plan and chief inspector's report from the Further Education Funding Council; and if he will make a statement. [12780]

Mr. Paice: This is a matter for the Further Education Funding Council for England. I have asked the chief executive to reply.

Career Development Loans

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many career development loan

applications *(a)* have been made, *(b)* were successful and *(c)* were unsuccessful, by ethnic category. [12832]

Mr. Paice: Information on the ethnic origin of career development loan applicants is not gathered at the application stage. Responses to questions on ethnic origin contained in a follow-up survey on 20 per cent. of successful career development loan applicants as at 31 December 1996 are listed as follows:

Black African/Caribbean: 2 per cent.

Bangladeshi: 1 per cent.

Indian: 2 per cent.

Pakistani: 1 per cent.

White: 87 per cent.

Other: 2 per cent.

Prefer not to say: 5 per cent.

The overall approval rate for career development loan applications, based on information provided by the participating banks, is 70 per cent.

Medical Students

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the ratio of teachers to medical students for each year of study in each year since 1992. [12970]

Mr. Forth: Information on student staff ratios for the years up to and including 1993–94 is contained in "University Management Statistics and Performance Indicators in the UK" published by the Universities Statistical Record, which covers institutions formerly funded by the Universities Funding Council, and in "Student staff ratios in polytechnics and colleges" published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, which covers institutions formerly funded by the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council.

Comparable information for more recent years is not available. While separate figures are available for the numbers of students and staff respectively, analysed by subject, these cannot reliably be converted to ratios of students to staff because of definitional differences between the two sets of data.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many medical students have dropped out of their studies in each year of the degree course since 1992 *(a)* in the United Kingdom, *(b)* in England and *(c)* in the west midlands; and for each year what was the percentage change on the previous year. [12972]

Mr. Forth: Information on drop-out rates analysed by subject of study is not compiled centrally.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students have started medical degrees since 1992 *(a)* in the United Kingdom, *(b)* in England and *(c)* in the west midlands; and for each year what was the percentage change on the previous year. [12971]

Mr. Forth: The available information is as follows:

Number of home domicile entrants[1] to first degree medicine and dentistry courses

Year of entry	*United Kingdom[2]*	*Percentage change on previous year*	*England[2]*	*Percentage change on previous year*	*West Midlands[2]*	*Percentage change on previous year*
1992–93[3]	4,885	—	3,677	—	244	
1993–94[3]	4,963	+2	3,744	+2	227	–7
1994–95						
Medicine	4,909		3,556		174	
Dentistry	1,017		659		68	
Total	5,926	+19	4,215	+13	242	+7
1995–96						
Medicine	5,455		3,936		178	
Dentistry	1,047		645		72	
Total	6,502	+10	4,581	+9	250	+3

The figures for 1992–93 and 1993–94 are taken from the Universities Statistical Record. The figures for 1994–95 and 1995–96 are taken from the individualised student return collected by the Higher Education Statistics Agency.

[1] Based on students who were in their first year of study.

[2] Location of institution rather than domicile of student.

[3] Figures for 1992–93 and 1993–94 cannot be disaggregated between medicine and dentistry courses.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the ratio of teachers to nursing students for each year of study during the period 1992 to present. [12966]

Mr. Forth: The information available on student staff ratios for the years up to and including 1993–94 is contained in "University Management Statistics and Performance Indicators in the UK" published by the Universities Statistical Record, which covers institutions formerly funded by the Universities Funding Council, and in "Student staff ratios in polytechnics and colleges" published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, which covers institutions formerly funded by the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council. Comparable information for more recent years is not available.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 21 January, *Official Report*, columns *544-45*, regarding the

performance of TECs, if she will provide a list of TECs in England showing to what extent each TEC has achieved 100 per cent. effectiveness in financial control. [13082]

Mr. Paice: The Department believes that it could not make public details of the effectiveness of financial controls for individual TECs without these being misinterpreted as a judgement of a TEC's overall financial position. Publication of the risk banding assessment could be misleading to those doing business with TECs and might give rise to a loss of confidence in a TEC's financial position which, while wholly unjustified, could cause serious financial difficulty. All TECs are currently assessed as low risk, it is a condition of their licence that they remain in that category.

Student Loans

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the take-up rate for student loans for each university as a percentage of the individual institution's student population in England for *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96. [13167]

Mr. Forth: The Student Loans Company has advised that data in respect of individual institutions can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The national take-up rate for England of student loans as a percentage of eligible students in publicly funded institutions was 48 per cent. in the academic year 1993–94, 55 per cent. in 1994–95 and 59 per cent. in 1995–96.

Hardship Fund

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what are the criteria determining student eligibility for the hardship fund. [13176]

Mr. Forth: It is for each further and higher education institution to determine its criteria and procedures for considering applications and making access fund payments to eligible students, in the light of its assessment of individual student need and in accordance with annually reviewed guidance from the Department for Education and Employment, the Further Eduction Funding Council and the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

Homework

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent research she has evaluated in respect of the benefits of homework. [11729]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have received a number of representations on homework from various bodies and members of the public. I published "School Performance and Extra-curricular Provision", a report on research into homework, on 14 January 1997.

Examination Results (Grant-maintained Schools)

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement about the A-level results of grant-maintained schools. [11756]

Mr. Paice: The 1996 GCE A/AS-level results show that for candidates in grant-maintained schools attempting two or more GCE A/AS-level subjects, the average point score is 18.0. The average point score for such candidates in GM comprehensive schools—that is, excluding GM selective schools—is 15.9. The average point score per A/AS-level entry for GM pupils is 5.4.

HEALTH

Social Services White Paper

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish his White Paper on social services. [12570]

Mr. Burns: We expect to publish the White Paper on social services shortly.

AIDS and Motor Neurone Disease

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding his Department has made available for *(a)* AIDS research and projects and *(b)* motor neurone disease research and projects in the last year for which figures are available. [12478]

Mr. Horam: In 1996–97, the Department's estimated spend on HIV-AIDS research will be £535,000. As yet, no specific research has been commissioned on motor neurone disease. The overall Government spending on AIDS research for 1996–97 was £13.7 million, which includes expenditure by the Medical Research Council and Government Departments; there is relatively little contribution towards HIV-AIDS research from other sources such as charities.

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the number of people suffering from *(a)* AIDS and *(b)* motor neurone disease in the last year for which figures are available. [12477]

Mr. Horam: At the end of December 1996, there were 4,040 cases of AIDS reported in the United Kingdom who were not known to have died or left the country. The data are subject to under-reporting and reporting delays and the final figure is therefore likely to be higher. The figures for the number of individuals suffering from motor neurone disease are not collected centrally.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent on *(a)* treating and *(b)* preventing AIDS in each of the last four years; and how much was spent on publicly funded research in the same period. [13042]

Mr. Horam: Table 1 shows the funding given to health authorities in England for treating and preventing AIDS.

Table 1

£ million

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Treatment	132.7	164.3	195.1	185.7
Prevention	52.3	47.6	49.6	51.3

Table 2 shows the funding for AIDS research for the United Kingdom.

Table 2

£ million

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Research	21.8	20.4	19.9	[1]13.7

[1] Estimate

These research figures include expenditure by the Medical Research Council, the Department of Health and other Government Departments. There is relatively little contribution towards HIV-AIDS research from other sources such as charities.

Mr. Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the United Kingdom *(a)* contracted AIDS and *(b)* died from AIDS in each of the last four years. [13045]

Mr. Horam: For each of the past four years, the number of diagnoses of AIDS and the number of deaths reported in the United Kingdom by the end of 1996 are given in the table:

Year	*Number of AIDS cases diagnosed*	*Number of deaths reported*
1993	1,742	1,284
1994	1,727	1,361
1995	1,556	1,259
1996	943	802

Under-reporting and reporting delays affect figures both for AIDS cases and for deaths, thus the actual numbers, particularly for more recent years, are liable to change and will be greater than those given.

Meningitis

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the United Kingdom *(a)* contracted meningitis and *(b)* died from meningitis in each of the last four years. [13040]

Mr. Horam: The number of laboratory-confirmed cases of meningococcal infection and the number of deaths are given in the table:

Laboratory confirmed cases of meningococcal infection and number of deaths, England and Wales

Year	*Confirmed cases*	*Deaths*
1993	1,298	173
1994	1,129	149
1995	1,459	196
1996[1]	1,495	230

[1] 1996 data are provisional.

Questions relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent on *(a)* treating and *(b)* preventing meningitis in each of the last four years; and how much was spent on publicly funded research in the same period. [13043]

Mr. Horam: Details of the cost of treating and preventing meningitis are not held centrally. The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council. The MRC receives its grant in aid from the Office of Science and Technology, which is part of the Department of Trade and Industry and spends approximately £1.5 million on meningitis research a year. The Department of Health commissioned a two-year clinical trial of candidate meningococcal vaccines in 1993 at a cost of £198,528. More research is needed before their suitability for widespread use can be considered. The Department of Health is currently working with the public health laboratory service, the national institute for biological standards and control and the centre for applied microbiology and research to take this work forward. The NHS is known to have spent £220,000 on a number of meningitis-related research projects since 1993.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many PFI bids, other than for building new hospitals, have been completed; [12982]

(2) if he will list the completed PFI schemes and the cost of each. [12983]

Mr. Horam: Thirty-two private finance initiative schemes with a capital value of £1 million or over have been completed since November 1992. The table shows the list of PFI schemes and the cost of each.

Trust	*Scheme*	*Capital value (£ million)*
Royal Victoria Infirmary and Associated Hospitals NHS trust (Newcastle)	Magnetic resonance imager	1.1
Yorkshire RHA	Clinical waste incinerator	5.6
St. James's University Hospital NHS trust	Combined heat and power plant	4.0
Tees HA (Brierton hospital)	Residential accommodation for elderly and elderly mentally ill	2.0
York Health Services NHS trust	MRI services	1.2
Leicester Mental Health Services NHS trust	Office accommodation	1.6
North Bedfordshire HA (Steppingley and Biggleswade hospitals)	Residential accommodation for elderly severely mentally ill	1.4
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow Health Agency	Office accommodation	3.0
West Middlesex University Hospital NHS trust	Endoscopy unit	1.0
Enfield and Haringey health authority	Office accommodation	1.9
Brent and Harrow HA (Clamp Hill)	Residential accommodation for elderly mentally ill	2.1
Hertfordshire Health	Office accommodation	4.2

Trust	Scheme	Capital value (£ million)
Agency		
Hillingdon Health Agency	Office accommodation	1.7
North Hertfordshire NHS trust	Pathology services	1.1
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham health authority	Office accommodation	11.0
Kings Healthcare NHS trust	Clinical waste incinerator	4.0
South east Kent HA (William Harvey hospital)	Clinical waste incinerator	3.0
Kent and Canterbury Hospitals NHS trust	Staff accommodation	3.3
Frimley Park Hospital NHS trust	Magnetic resonance imager	1.0
Epsom GP fundholders	Day surgery unit	1.3
Eastbourne Hospitals NHS trust	Clinical waste incinerator	3.0
Mid-Sussex NHS trust (Princess Royal hospital)	Magnetic resonance imaging	1.0
Plymouth Hospitals NHS trust	Clinical waste incinerator	2.0
Royal Bournmouth and Christchurch Hospitals NHS trust	Clinical waste incinerator	3.0
Alexandra Healthcare NHS trust	Clinical waste incinerator	3.0
Hereford Hospital NHS trust	Lithotripter	1.0
Hereford Hospital NHS trust	Magnetic resonance imager	1.0
Herefordshire Community Health NHS trust	Office accommodation	1.2
Oldham Hospital NHS trust, Rochdale NHS trust, North Manchester HA and Tameside HA	Clinical waste incinerator	2.7
Bolton HA	Clinical waste incinerator	2.6
North Manchester NHS trust	Magnetic resonance imager	1.0
Bolton Community Hospital NHS trust	Primary care resource centre	1.6

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, in respect of proposed PFI schemes to build new hospitals, *(a)* the date each scheme was agreed by the appropriate individual consortium, *(b)* the date each scheme was agreed by the appropriate health authority, *(c)* the stage each scheme has reached, *(d)* how many and which of the PFIs have signed contracts and *(e)* how many and which schemes have started construction. [12981]

Mr. Horam: Each trust involved in a private finance initiative scheme will select a preferred bidder from replies to advertisements in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*. Health authorities, as health care purchasers, are involved in a PFI scheme from outline business case stage onwards and must give formal backing to the scheme for the full business case to be approved. Information on the exact dates of selection of preferred bidder and health authority approval is not held centrally for schemes which have not yet received full business case approval.

Twenty-five proposed PFI schemes for new hospitals have reached preferred bidder stage or beyond. None of these has yet started construction. Information on the status of these schemes is listed in the table.

Trust	Scheme	Preferred bidder	Health authority approval	Full business case approval	Contract signature
Norfolk and Norwich NHS trust	Hospital 2000	✓	14 March 1996	3 April 1996	25 November 1996
South Buckinghamshire NHS trust	Hospital consolidation at High Wycombe and Amersham	✓	16 November 1995	27 November 1995	×
Swindon and Marlborough NHS trust	Princess Margaret hospital	✓	29 March 1996	3 April 1996	×
South Devon Healthcare NHS trust	Dawlish hospital	✓	29 October 1996	1 November 1996	×
Bishop Auckland Hospitals NHS trust	Redevelopment of Bishop Auckland general hospital	✓	23 August 1996	20 December 1996	×
Black Country Mental Health NHS trust	Acute psychiatric unit	✓	×	×	×
Bromley hospitals NHS trust	Rationalisation onto Farnborough hospital site	✓	×	×	×
Calderdale Healthcare NHS trust	Redevelopment of Halifax general hospital	✓	×	×	×
Carlisle Hospitals NHS trust	Centralisation of acute services at Cumberland Infirmary	✓	×	×	×
Dartford and Gravesham NHS trust	Rationalisation of services onto one site	✓	×	×	×
Gloucestershire Royal NHS trust	Gloucester Royal hospital redevelopment	✓	×	×	×
Greenwich Healthcare NHS trust	Development of Queen Elizabeth hospital	✓	×	×	×
Hereford Hospitals NHS trust	Rationalisation of services onto single site	✓	×	×	×
King's Healthcare NHS trust	Centralisation onto Denmark Hill site	✓	×	×	×
North Durham Acute	New district general hospital	✓	×	×	×

Trust	Scheme	Preferred bidder	Health authority approval	Full business case approval	Contract signature
Hospitals NHS trust					
Oxleas NHS trust	Reprovision of Bexley hospital	✓	×	×	×
Rochdale Healthcare NHS trust	Service reconfiguration and site rationalisation	✓	×	×	×
Royal Hospitals NHS trust	Acute rationalisation	✓	×	×	×
South Manchester University Hospitals NHS trust	Major extension to teaching hospital at Wythenshawe	✓	×	×	×
South Tees Acute Hospitals NHS trust	Centralisation of acute services on South Cleveland hospital	✓	×	×	×
University College London Hospitals NHS trust	Rationalisation of acute services	✓	×	×	×
Walsgrave Hospitals NHS trust	Project 2002	✓	×	×	×
Wellhouse NHS trust	Rationalisation of acute services	✓	×	×	×
West Middlesex University Hospitals NHS trust	Rationalisation of acute services	✓	×	×	×
Worcester Royal Infirmary NHS trust	New district general hospital	✓	×	×	×

Key: ✓ Approval given.
× Approval not yet given/contract not yet signed.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on compulsory competitive tendering in the national health service. [13065]

Mr. Horam: Market testing is a proven and successful vehicle for improving both value for money and quality of services to national health service patients. As a result of market testing, it is estimated that, since 1983, the NHS has saved a total in excess of £1 billion which has been made available for direct patient care.

Cardiothoracic Surgery

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines his Department issues as to the maximum time a patient should be required to wait for heart bypass surgery. [13248]

Mr. Horam: Under the patient's charter, all patients requiring heart bypass surgery and some associated procedures should be treated within 12 months of being placed on a waiting list. Patients are placed on a waiting list only if, in the opinion of the clinician responsible for their care, their condition is stable and does not require immediate attention. Exactly when a patient is admitted should be a matter for their doctor and should depend on their clinical need and the needs of other patients waiting for admission.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients died while awaiting operations for cardiothoracic procedures in the last year *(a)* in total and *(b)* by region. [13249]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Minister Without Portfolio, the then Minister for Health gave to the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) on 19 May 1994, *Official Report*, column 557.

Geriatric Services

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with *(a)* the royal colleges and *(b)* other health bodies regarding the appropriate treatment of the elderly ill. [13303]

Mr. Burns: The White Paper "The NHS: A Service with Ambitions" clearly states:

> "Older people are the major users of health services, and all services need to take account of their particular needs. Primary care is the focus of care delivery and care co-ordination. The extended primary health care team, including therapists and community pharmacists, working with local social services teams, should ensure timely assessment and diagnosis, and access to appropriate services."

We have had a number of discussion with the royal colleges and other health bodies about the health care of older people, and there was wide consultation on the development of the proposals in this White Paper, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from organisations representing elderly people regarding limitations of stay in respect of hospital care for the elderly; and what steps he is taking to ensure that elderly people who are sick obtain hospital treatment where appropriate. [13304]

Mr. Burns: A number of representations have been received from Members of Parliament, members of the medical profession and the general public regarding hospital care for elderly people. We have made it clear that elderly people throughout the country should receive national health service care on the basis of clinical need.

Prior Options Reviews

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the outcome of

the prior options reviews of the Public Health Laboratory Service, the National Radiological Protection Board and the National Biological Standards Board. [13897]

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he is making for the future of the Public Health Laboratory Service; and if he will make a statement. [12778]

Mr. Horam: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade announced today the broad outcome of the programme of prior options reviews of public sector research establishments which also refers to the general policy on the timing of prior options reviews.

The reviews of the Public Health Laboratory Service, the National Radiological Protection Board, and the National Biological Standards Board have recommended that they should remain within the public sector and that they should each retain their present status as non-departmental public bodies of the Department of Health. They also recommended action to improve their efficiency and effectiveness, in particular through setting in place new systems for managing the bodies' research programmes to better ensure value for money and customer responsiveness; through increased market testing of research; through reviews of internal efficiency and increased market testing of management support functions; and through improved costing of work for third parties.

In addition, action should be taken to strengthen the role of the NRPB's statutory board and to improve liaison with its customers on its international work; the PHLS should continue its current rationalisation programme, further increase income generation, and consider the interface between its central public health laboratory and its communicable disease surveillance centre with a view to further rationalisation; and the NBSB should clarify objectives, and funding arrangements, for its work for the World Health Organisation, and explore the scope for closer working links with a university.

The Government have accepted these recommendations. The reviews of internal efficiency will be conducted using external consultants; they will not re-open issues already settled through the prior options process or through other recent reviews—such as that which resulted in the 1994 restructuring of PHLS—but will focus clearly on whether there is scope for increasing the efficiency of each organisation.

Elective Surgery

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what factors underlie decisions by health authorities to curtail elective surgery by surgeons; what assessment he has made of the prevalence of this practice; and if he will make a statement. [12737]

Mr. Horam: It is for health authorities and trusts locally to ensure that contracts for elective surgery reflect patient flows, case mix and other priorities on hospital services.

Orthopaedic Services (South Manchester)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will investigate an urgent review of orthopaedic services in south Manchester; [12738]

(2) how many orthopaedic surgeons have left hospitals in the south Manchester area in each of the last five years; what assessment he has made of the factors underlying their departure; what assessment he has made of the impact of their departure on provision of orthopaedic services in south Manchester; what measures he proposes to address shortages in provisions at times of extreme levels of demand; and if he will make a statement. [12739]

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the level of supply relative to the level of demand for orthopaedic services in south Manchester hospitals; what steps he has taken to ensure adequate provision; and if he will take further measures urgently. [12844]

Mr. Horam: There are five consultant orthopaedic posts in south Manchester. In the past five years, two consultants have retired; one in 1992 and one in 1995. Both were of retirement age and have been replaced. A consultant based at Wythenshawe hospital will leave in March to pursue his interest in paediatric work at another trust. Another consultant has recently resigned and is expected to leave in May. Both men will be replaced and the recruitment process has already begun. South Manchester University Hospitals NHS trust expects to deliver orthopaedic activity according to its contracts with purchasers in the current financial year despite recent changes in consultant staff.

"The House Party"

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 13 January, *Official Report*, columns *181–82*, concerning funding of the game "The House Party", which of the declared financial sponsors of the game received public funds; and if his Department gave guidance on or assent to the expenditure of public money on that game. [12736]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health was not involved in any way with the production of "The House Party" and was neither approached for, nor gave guidance on, nor assented to, the expenditure of public money on the game. General guidance from the Department identifies gay and bisexual men as a key group to be targeted with HIV health promotion. In line with the Government's HIV-AIDS health promotion strategy[1] we would expect such health promotion material aimed at specific groups to be responsible in content and to be carefully targeted.

We understand that seven London health authorities provided, between them, around £8,000 towards the cost of the game. We have no information on any other sponsors who may have received public funding.

[1]"HIV and AIDS Health Promotion, A Evolving Strategy": UK Health Departments, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Intensive Care Services

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children requiring paediatric intensive care have been turned away from a paediatric intensive care unit since 10 October 1996 because the unit's beds were already occupied; and how many of these were then admitted to a *(a)* general paediatric intensive care bed, *(b)* specialist paediatric intensive care bed, *(c)* paediatric high

dependency unit bed, *(d)* adult intensive care bed, *(e)* adult high dependency unit bed and *(f)* hospital bed of another type. [12838]

Mr. Horam: Information is not collected centrally in the form requested. Since the intensive care bed state register came into operation on 1 December 1996, 45 requests to locate a paediatric intensive care bed have been received. On each occasion it was possible to direct the referring clinician to an appropriate facility with an available bed.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average annual cost of providing *(a)* an adult general intensive care bed, *(b)* an adult high dependency until bed, *(c)* a paediatric general intensive care bed and *(d)* a paediatric high dependency unit bed. [12839]

Mr. Horam: Information on adult intensive care and high dependency care is not available centrally.

The chief executive of the national health service executive reported on paediatric intensive care provision last May. Copies of his report have been placed in the Library. The report notes that each paediatric intensive care bed costs at least £250,000 a year to run. No estimate has been made of paediatric high-dependency care costs. A national co-ordinating group is currently addressing the future provision of paediatric intensive care, including its cost. The group will report to the chief executive of the national health service executive in April.

Purchasing Authorities (Buckinghamshire)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms the amount of money available to NHS purchasing authorities in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes in each year since 1992; and if he will make a statement. [12843]

Mr. Horam: The cash limits for health authorities in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes are set out in the tables.

Revenue and capital cash limits

£000

Health authority	*Final cash limit 1992–93*	*Final cash limit 1993–94*	*Final cash limit 1994–95*	*Final cash limit 1995–96*	*Initial cash limit 1996–97*
Aylesbury Vale DHA	62,342	—	—	—	—
Wycombe DHA	84,693	—	—	—	—
Milton Keynes DHA	58,956	—	—	—	—
Buckinghamshire DHA	—	190,475	196,860	202,365	—
Buckinghamshire FHSA	30,139	45,319	64,642	76,734	—
Buckinghamshire HA	—	—	—	—	257,079

General practice fundholder budgets are included in FHSA cash limits for the years 1993–94 to 1995–96.

Revenue and capital cash limits in real terms

£000

Health authority	*Final cash limit 1992–93 in 1996–97 prices*	*Final cash limit 1993–94 in 1996–97 prices*	*Final cash limit 1994–95 in 1996–97 prices*	*Final cash limit 1995–96 in 1996–97 prices*	*Initial cash limit 1996–97 in 1996–97 prices*
Aylesbury Vale DHA	68,547	—	—	—	—
Wycombe DHA	93,122	—	—	—	—
Milton Keynes DHA	64,824	—	—	—	—
Buckinghamshire DHA	—	203,546	206,684	207,424	—
Buckinghamshire FHSA	33,139	48,429	67,868	78,652	—
Buckinghamshire HA	—	—	—	—	257,079

Nurses

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many temporary and agency nurses have been used in hospitals since 1992 *(a)* in the United Kingdom, *(b)* in England and *(c)* in the west midlands; and if he will list the figures as a percentage change on the previous year. [12967]

Mr. Horam: The information is not available in the form requested.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many qualified nurses have left the United Kingdom in each year since 1992. [12968]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available.

Nursing Students

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nursing students have dropped out of their studies in each year of nursing courses during the period 1992 to present *(a)* in the United Kingdom, *(b)* in England and *(c)* in the west midlands; and if he will list these figures as a percentage change on the previous year. [12965]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is not available centrally. I refer the Hon. Member to the National Boards for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland for information relating to nursing students.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the cost per nursing student for each year of study for the period 1992 to present; and if he will list it as a percentage change on the previous year. [12969]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is not available centrally.

Xenotransplantation Interim Regulatory Authority

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the members of the Xenotransplantation Interim Regulatory Authority, and identify *(a)* their qualifications, *(b)* their other paid or voluntary employment and *(c)* their other current appointments; and if he will make a statement. [13084]

Mr. Horam: Appointments to the United Kingdom Xenotransplantation Interim Regulatory Authority will be announced when membership has been finalised.

NHS Executive

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent by the NHSE in each of the last three years on *(a)* conference registration fees, *(b)* lease cars for senior management, *(c)* air travel, *(d)* hospitality and *(e)* business travel within the United Kingdom. [8485]

Mr. Malone *[pursuant to his reply, 13 January 1997, c.185–86]:* I regret that my previous reply was incorrect. It should read as follows:

Available information is given in the table. Information on conference registration fees is not collected separately. The 1995–96 figures take account of the transfer into the national health service executive of responsibilities, and 292 people, from other parts of the Department of Health during 1995–96.

NHS Executive

£000

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Lease cars for senior management	73	68	34
Air travel (internal United Kingdom and overseas)	68	101	114
Hospitality (includes working lunches)	89	85	144
Business travel within the United Kingdom (excludes air travel)	995	1,430	1,781

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

EU Subsidies

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful applications have been made by United Kingdom organisations in the last four years to obtain EU subsidies (i) for associations and federations of European interest and (ii) for grants to organisations advancing the idea of Europe; and what funds have already been allocated to the United Kingdom for these purposes. [12346]

The Deputy Prime Minister: This information is not held centrally.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

BSE

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what provision is made for the monitoring and enforcement of regulation 14 of the Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy Order 1996; and if he will make a statement. [12779]

Mrs. Browning: Regulation 14 of the 1996 order is intended to restrict the possibility of cross contamination between mammalian meat and bone meal—MBM—and other products. To ensure no such contamination is occurring the state veterinary service has in place a surveillance programme covering farms, feed mills and any site where feed, or ingredients for feed, are produced or stored. Results of this survey are reported in "BSE Enforcement Bulletin", copies of which are in the Library of the House. Whenever a possible breach of the controls on MBM comes to light the SVS will investigate to identify the cause and, if necessary, liaise with the appropriate local authority who have responsibility for enforcement action. To help those needing to clean premises, vehicles or equipment that has been in contact with MBM a set of guidance notes has been produced and circulated widely.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the possible mechanisms for cow to calf transmission of BSE; and what assessment he has made of the most likely route. [12776]

Mrs. Browning: Whether or not maternal transmission occurs is still open to question. The final results of the cohort study, for which preliminary results were published in August 1996, will shortly be presented to the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee. It is clear, however, that if maternal transmission does occur it does so only infrequently.

To try to establish which tissues might be involved in maternal transmission, blood, constituent parts of placenta, embryos, uterine washings and milk were inoculated into mice. In separate experiments, milk was also fed to mice. None proved to be infectious. In another experiment, calves were fed the homogenised placentae of infected cows as this was considered, by extrapolation from known evidence for sheep scrapie, to be the most likely route of transmission. The exposed calves survived without developing clinical BSE for seven years, and have recently been killed so that their tissues can be examined for the presence of infectivity. Finally, another large experiment is assessing the role of the embryo itself in transmitting disease. Embryos collected from infected, and clinically affected, cows were implanted into surrogate dams imported from New Zealand, and the surviving calves and their surrogate dames remain under observation in order to determine whether they succumb

to BSE. That experiment will not end, however, until 2001, when the youngest calf reaches seven years of age.

In the circumstances, the most likely routes of transmission from cow to calf have already been examined. Should it prove necessary, however, following interpretation of the cohort study, some or all of these options will be revisited as advised by SEAC.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish the evidence he has evaluated on whether BSE-infected meat is currently present within the human food chain. [12159]

Mrs. Browning: The Government are committed to ensuring that no BSE-infected meat can enter any food chain.

All BSE suspects are slaughtered on farm and the entire carcase disposed of by incineration. The number of suspect cases is published in the BSE progress report, which is compiled in May and November of each year. Copies of this report are lodged in the Libraries of both Houses.

In addition to the controls on BSE suspects, all those tissues which are known to, or might, harbour detectable BSE infectivity in infected animals—so-called specified bovine materials—must be removed from all cattle at slaughter and disposed of under tight controls.

The Meat Hygiene Service rigorously enforces the SBM controls in slaughterhouses. Substantial additional resources have been made available to it to enable it to achieve our objective of full compliance with the controls.

The State Veterinary Service also carries out regular unannounced surveillance visits to all plants handling SBM. This surveillance is now showing a consistently high level of compliance with the controls. The results are published monthly in the "BSE Enforcement Bulletin." Copies of the bulletin are placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many confirmed cases of BSE there have been in each country in the European Community; and what assessment he has made of the likely country of origin of BSE. [12775]

Mrs. Browning: As at 21 January 1997, the following cases of BSE had been reported in the European Community:

Republic of Ireland: 188

France: 28

Portugal: 61

Germany: 5

Denmark: 1

Italy: 2

A proportion of the BSE cases in Ireland, France and Portugal have been reported in home-bred animals. All reported cases in other countries have occurred in animals which were born in the UK. Investigations are still in progress with respect to the fifth German case, which has been reported as born in Germany as the offspring of a cow imported from Great Britain.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on progress towards developing a test for BSE in live animals. [12770]

Mrs. Browning: MAFF has put considerable resources into the development of a test to detect BSE in the live animal, but so far no test suitable for use in the field has been developed. At present, BSE can only be suspected in the live animal on the basis of observations of the clinical signs exhibited; confirmation of the clinical opinion is dependent on laboratory examination of brain tissue after death. The development of a live test is particularly difficult with the transmissible spongiform encephalopathies because the specific infectious agent has not been isolated and there is no detectable immune response—normally two prerequisites for developing diagnostic tests. Additional resources are being invested into the development of a BSE diagnostic test and to stimulate research in this area MAFF recently launched an open competition for independent scientists to develop other novel approaches. MAFF is also working in collaboration with French, Dutch and American researchers in the development of tests. Although lines of investigation using urine, blood and cerebrospinal fluid show some promise on clinically affected animals, they are unlikely to be of value in diagnosing sub-clinically infected cattle.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on experiments involving feeding BSE-infected material to cattle, on the sensitivity of cattle to this infected material and on the infectivity of different organs in a BSE-infected animal. [12774]

Mrs. Browning: Cattle, experimentally challenged with BSE infected brain, at 300g, 100g, 10g and 1g have so far succumbed to BSE at the following attack rate:

Proportion of exposed cattle which have so far developed BSE	*Challenge dose*
10/10	300g
7/10	100g
5/10	10g
2/10	1g

The above results reflect the situation five years after exposure. The study is continuing.

Mice have also been inoculated with tissues from confirmed cases of BSE and from experimentally challenged cattle to identify those which contain the BSE agent. Some experiments are not yet complete, but so far: from confirmed field cases, the BSE agent has been detected only in brain, spinal cord and retina; a wide range of other tissues from clinically affected cattle has shown no detectable infectivity following this type of bioassay. These are listed in table 7 of the November BSE progress report, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House. In experimentally challenged cattle which were fed a large quantity—100g—of brain from clinically affected BSE cases, infectivity was detected in the distal ileum six months after challenge and was still detectable there, but nowhere else, after a further 12 months—that

is, up to 18 months after inoculation. The transmission studies in mice from cattle killed at later stages of incubation are still in progress.

Mice have also been challenged orally, but with a more restricted range of bovine tissues from confirmed cases of BSE. In these studies only brain tissue has proved infectious to the mice.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the current incidence of BSE in rare breeds of cattle in the United Kingdom. [12856]

Mrs. Browning: As at 1 January 1997, the number of BSE cases confirmed by breed in Great Britain is:

	Number
Aberdeen Angus	129
Aberdeen Angus X	1,269
Ankole	2
Ayrshire	1,629
Ayrshire X	85
Bazadaise	1
Belgian Blue	81
Belgian Blue X	113
Belted Galloway	2
Black Hereford X	9
Black Limousin X	1
Blonde D'aquitaine	53
Blonde D'aquitaine X	94
Blue Grey	11
Blue Grey X	3
Blue Roan	3
British White	43
British White X	9
Brown Swiss	29
Brown Swiss X	36
Canadian Angus	1
Canadian Angus X	2
Canadian Guernsey	1
Charolais	415
Charolais X	585
Chianin X	2
Chianina X	2
Devon	32
Devon X	104
Dutch Holstein	1
Friesian	130,390
Friesian X	6,599
Galloway	7
Galloway X	20
Gelbvieh X	17
Gelbvieh	17
Gloucester	1
Gloucester X	1
Guernsey	1,560
Guernsey X	38
Hereford	574
Hereford X	8,127
Highland	16
Highland X	3
Holstein	2,334
Holstein X	411
Jersey	1,537
Jersey X	83
Limousin	420
Limousin X	2,206
Lincoln Red	9
Lincoln X	3
Longhorn	9
Luing X	4
Marchigiana	2
Meuse Rhine Issel	17
Meuse Rhine Issel X	16
Murray Grey	29
Murray Grey X	25
Normandy X	2
North Devon	14
North Devon X	34
Piedmontese	5
Piedmontese X	6
Red Friesian	282
Red Friesian X	3
Red Holstein	7
Red Holstein X	1
Red Poll	36
Red Poll X	3
Romagnola	2
Romagnola X	4
Saler	5
Saler X	3
Shorthorn	244
Shorthorn X	125
Simmental	453
Simmental X	1,912
South Devon	108
South Devon X	22
South Down	1
Sussex	47
Sussex X	94
Welsh Black	54
Welsh Black X	33
White Park	2
Sub-total	162,724
Not recorded	2,599
Total	165,323

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those organisations which submitted comments on the proposed amendment to article 18(6) of the Specified Bovine Material Order and the proposed protocol for cleansing SBM rendering lines; and if he will make a statement. [13004]

Mrs. Browning: A public consultation paper proposing an amendment to Article 18(6) of the specified bovine material order and a cleansing protocol for SBM rendering lines was issued to 232 organisations and individuals on 5 December 1996. Responses were received from the following, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House:

Association of Metropolitan Authorities

British Association of Feed Supplement and Additive Manufacturers Ltd.

British Medical Association

British Veterinary Association

Consumers' Association

Humane Slaughter Association

Licensed Animal Slaughter and Salvage Association

Meat and Livestock Commission

Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons

Shropshire County Council

United Kingdom Renderers' Association

Mr. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his Department's latest estimate of the number of *(a)* residual cases of BSE in the British cattle herd and *(b)* cattle expected to develop BSE before it is finally eradicated. [12825]

Mrs. Browning: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the paper published by Professor R. M. Anderson et al, a copy of which can be found at appendix 5 of the November 1996 BSE progress report which has been placed in the Library of the House. That paper predicts that, in the absence of a cull, 6,950 cases are yet to be diagnosed during the lifetime of the epidemic.

Meat Products and Spreadable Fish Products Regulations 1984

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the *(a)* individuals and their relevant work establishment and *(b)* organisations to which copies of the recent review of the Meat Products and Spreadable Fish Products Regulations 1984 were circulated; and if he will make a statement. [13008]

Mrs. Browning: A discussion paper on the review of the Meat Products and Spreadable Fish Products Regulations 1984 was circulated on the 20 December 1996 to the following organisations:

Advertising Association
Association of County Councils
Association of District Councils
Association of Metropolitan Authorities
Association of Port Health Authorities
Association of Public Analysts
British Association of Canned and Preserved Food Importers and Distributors Ltd.
British Dietetic Association
British Hospitality Association
British Meat Manufacturers Association
British Nutrition Foundation
British Poultry Meat Federation Ltd.
British Retail Consortium
British Standards Institution
Campden and Chorleywood Food RA
Co-op Meat Trade Technical Panel
Consumers Association
Consumers in Europe Group
Co-operative Union Ltd.
Council of Welsh Districts
Federation of Bakers
Federation of Synagogues
Flour Milling and Baking Research Association
Food and Drink Federation
Food and Health Research
Food Commission
Health Food Manufacturers Association
Institute of Food Science and Technology
Institute of Trading Standards Administration
LACOTS
Leatherhead Food Research Association
Meat and Livestock Commission
National Association of Master Bakers
National Consumer Council
National Farmers Union
National Federation of Consumer Groups
National Federation of Meat and Food Traders
National Food Alliance
UK Association of Frozen Food Producers
UK Provision Trade Federation Ltd.
Welsh Consumer Council

Since the initial distribution, copies have also been sent to the following:

Analytical Services (South Wales)
Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council
Dr Bernhard Dyer and Partners
Federation of Danish Pig Producers and Slaughterhouses
Law Laboratories
RHM Technology Ltd.
Safeway Stores
Soup and Gravy Manufacturers Association
The National Federation of Meat and Food Traders
University of Reading
Waitrose Ltd.
Walker and Son

Copies of the discussion paper are freely available from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food during the consultation period, which ends on 1 March 1997. Copies of the consultation documents have been placed in the Library of the House. At the end of the consultation period, copies of the responses received will also be placed in the Library of the House.

Urban Food Production

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessments he has made of the benefits to public health of urban food growing; and if he will make a statement. [13011]

Mrs. Browning: The National Food Alliance and SAFE Alliance's joint report, "Growing Food in Cities", published last year, covered the health implications of urban food growing. Although the Department's responsibility for food growing relates primarily to food production on a commercial scale, which tends to be undertaken by agricultural and horticultural enterprises situated in predominantly rural and farming areas, we did respond to the report's recommendations. Our response focused primarily on the Government's commitment to the production of organically grown food, the measures we have taken to encourage conversion to organic farming and Government support for the local marketing of produce. Although our response did not specifically cover public health aspects, we would welcome any increase in urban food production that contributed to the uptake of a healthy and balanced diet.

Integrated Administration and Control System

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the arrangements are for integrated administration and control system applications in England and Wales in 1997. [13630]

Mr. Baldry: The deadline for submitting IACS applications in 1997 will again be the latest possible date of 15 May.

In England and Wales, the IACS explanatory booklets and forms will be issued in March. As in previous years, we have consulted closely with industry on the documentation. The separate booklet and form, introduced last year, for livestock farmers who have no interest in the

arable area payments scheme, will be retained. Farmers will again receive both a full printout of their last year's declaration of forage, arable and other land areas, which they must check carefully to ensure that all entries are still correct and enter any necessary changes, plus a copy of this printout for their retention.

The latest date for applying for new field numbers so that they can be returned in time for farmers to lodge their 1997 IACS applications will be 1 March. Where changes to field boundaries occur after this date, applications for field numbers should accompany the IACS application form.

I strongly urge farmers to consider whether they need new field numbers now and not to leave applying until the last minute.

Genetically Modified Animals

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in what circumstances his Department permits the genetic modification of animals; and if he will make a statement. [13086]

Mrs. Browning: Experiments on animals are regulated by the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, which is administered by the Secretary of State for the Home Department. MAFF's policy on the genetic modification of livestock, and our research and development programme, is guided by the "Report of the Committee to Consider the Ethical Implications of Emerging Technologies in the Breeding of Farm Animals", the Banner report, published in 1995.

Veterinary Laboratories Agency

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the future of the Veterinary Laboratories Agency. [13753]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Following the prior options review, the Government have decided that the Veterinary Laboratories Agency should remain an executive agency of MAFF.

The Government have also agreed a number of steps to help improve efficiency on a wide range of research establishments remaining in the public sector. For VLA, we shall be setting targets for increasing competition, enlarging the programme of market testing of non-research and development work and looking at the scope for exchange of areas of work with the Institute for Animal Health. Details of the revised arrangements will be announced in due course. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has made a statement today on the broad outcome of the programme of prior options reviews of public sector research establishments, which refers to the general policy on the timing of prior options reviews.

Horticulture Research International

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the future of Horticulture Research International. [13754]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Following the prior options review of Horticulture Research International , the Government have decided that the organisation should remain in the public sector, for the present, as an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by MAFF.

HRI has achieved a great deal since its creation in 1990 and its high reputation is well deserved. Nevertheless, we should strive to secure further improvements where possible for the benefit of both HRI and the horticulture industry. The Government's substantial restructuring investment in the body provides an excellent foundation. The Government have also agreed a number of steps to help improve efficiency on a wide range of research establishments remaining in the public sector. My Department will be working closely with HRI management over the coming year to resolve outstanding operational and staffing matters and to develop the body's science strategy and business plan. This will provide the basis of a report to ministers at the end of 1997. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has made a statement today on the broad outcome of the programme of prior options reviews of public sector research establishments, which refers to the general policy on the timing of prior options reviews.

Fisheries

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the impact on fish stocks of EU aid for Spanish fishermen to renew their fleet; and what proposals he has to provide assistance to the east coast fishing fleet. [12641]

Mr. Baldry: EU or national aid for the construction of fishing vessels is authorised only where member states have met the targets in their multi-annual guidance programmes for reducing fleet capacity. These targets are based on independent scientific advice aimed at improving the balance between resources and their exploitation. Performance is assessed annually in a report from the Commission to the Fisheries Council.

The last such report, in July 1996, showed that the UK still had progress to make in meeting its end 1996 targets, and was not therefore eligible for aid. Targets for the next series of MAGPs, to run from 1 January 1997, and future EU policy on fleet renewal, are still under discussion in the Fisheries Council.

Vessels and ports on the east coast are, however, eligible for the various measures in the UK sectoral plan under the EU's financial instrument for fisheries guidance and, where appropriate, the PESCA initiative.

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the impact of current levels of fish imports from the Faroe Islands with particular reference to the United Kingdom's east coast fishing fleet. [12656]

Mr. Baldry: I am aware of recent reports about the impact of supplies from the Faroes on prices for fish at markets such as Grimsby, but provided they respect EU reference price levels there are no grounds for action to be taken.

The EU market depends heavily on imports for its supplies, and fish processors in particular depend heavily on imported raw material because their needs cannot be met from EU resources.

WALES

Clwyd Interpreting and Communication Service

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what assessment he has made of the ability of local authorities to bear the costs previously borne by the Welsh Office in respect of the Clwyd interpreting and communication service after April 1997; [12666]

(2) if he will support the Clwyd interpreting and communication service to maintain current services after April 1997. [12665]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Clwyd interpreting and communication service was allocated grant of £55,530 for the period April 1992 to March 1997 under the flexible community care grant scheme. All FCC grants were of a fixed duration of up to five years. Local authorities were required to set out, at the time of application for grant, the arrangements for future funding of projects which were to continue beyond the period of Welsh Office grant.

It is for the relevant local authorities to consider whether to continue funding the service.

Assisted Places Scheme

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many children in Wales *(a)* are currently assisted under the assisted places scheme and *(b)* have been assisted under the scheme since it began; and what assessment he has made of the educational attainment of children assisted to date. [12608]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: There are currently 887 children with assisted places, more than 2,100 pupils have benefited since 1981. Examination results of assisted place pupils have been consistently high. In 1995, there was a 95 per cent. grade A to C pass rate at GCSE and a 68 per cent. grade A to C pass rate at A-level.

Unfit Housing

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his current estimate of the number of houses unfit for human habitation. [12978]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The 1993 Welsh house condition survey estimated that 151,200 occupied first homes in Wales were unfit at that time. Since the beginning of 1993–94, more than 27,300 mandatory renovation grants with a value of £467 million have been completed. A further house condition survey is under way and the results will be available in 1998.

A465 (Accidents)

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* fatalities and *(b)* accidents there have been on the A465 Aberdulais to Glynneath road since 1979. [13061]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Police records indicate that between 1 January 1979 and 31 December 1995, there were 34 fatalities and 408 personal injury accidents on the A465 between Abersdulais and Glynneath.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the surpluses carried forward or deficits incurred by the training and enterprise councils in Wales at the end of each of the last three years for which information is available; and if he will make a statement. [12841]

Mr. Hague: The information requested is contained in the table. The figures show that the reserves consist of funds which have already been used to acquire assets, or funds required to meet day to day needs, or funds which were committed to be spent over a reasonable period. The balance available for discretionary spending—£4.6 million—represents funds which have been earmarked by the TECs for planned expenditure during 1996–97 and for longer-term projects.

Officials in my Department continue to monitor closely the level of TEC reserves ensure that they are clearly related to demonstrable working capital needs or reinvestment plans.

Reserve levels in Wales are projected to fall to £18.191 million by March 1997. Of this, some £3 million will be available to support TEC discretionary spending outside the Government-funded training and enterprise programmes in 1997-98.

Welsh TEC reserve levels March 1994 to March 1996

£000s

TEC	*Total*	*Fixed assets*	*Long term loans*	*Working capital*[1]	*Amount available for utilization*
1993–94					
Gwent	3,143	147	0	1,832	1,164
Mid Glamorgan	2,643	225	0	2,216	202
North east Wales	4,586	483	0	1,085	3,018
Powys	500	38	0	468	–6
South Glamorgan	3,993	132	0	1,354	2,507
Targed	1,900	196	0	1,536	168
West Wales	3,957	682	0	3,102	173
All TECs	20,722	1,903	0	11,593	7,226

Welsh TEC reserve levels March 1994 to March 1996

£000s

TEC	Total	Fixed assets	Long term loans	Working capital[1]	Amount available for utilization
1994–95					
Gwent	1,966	168	0	1,846	–48
Mid Glamorgan	3,354	279	180	2,283	612
North East Wales	2,525	208	435	1,183	699
Powys	512	65	0	558	–111
South Glamorgan	4,085	128	0	1,573	2,384
Targed	1,070	310	0	1,666	–906
West Wales	1,881	472	0	3,108	–1,699
All TECs	15,393	1,630	615	12,217	931
1995–96					
Gwent	2,700	307	0	1,904	489
Mid Glamorgan	2,682	303	110	1,890	379
North east Wales	2,402	160	540	1,211	491
Powys	712	41	0	553	118
South Glamorgan	4,338	85	250	1,320	[2]2,452
Targed	1,768	384	108	1,543	–267
West Wales	6,341	599	0	3,517	[2]925
All TECs	20,943	1,879	1,008	11,938	4,587

Notes:
[1] Estimated at six weeks turnover.
[2] Excludes contractual commitments of £231,000 and £1,300,00 for South Glamorgan and West Wales TECs respectively.
Source:
TEC statutory accounts.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* foreign and *(b)* United Kingdom-owned companies in Wales received RSA funding for the period between January 1994 and December 1996; and if he will make a statement. [12842]

Mr. Hague: Between January 1994 and December 1996, 141 foreign-owned and 567 UK-owned companies received RSA payments towards projects in Wales. Further information on offers of assistance over £75,000 is published in "Labour Market Trends"—previously the *Employment Gazette*—following the first payment of grant.

Student Funding

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total amount of Government funding for postgraduate students for subsistence costs in *(a)* 1978–79 and *(b)* 1995–96. [13166]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Separate information for Wales is not available. Expenditure on maintenance grants for postgraduate students in the United Kingdom by the Department for Education and Employment, the British Academy, the European university institute and the research councils in financial years 1978–79 and 1994–95, the latest year available, was £31.0 million and £90.5 million respectively.

In addition, for students domiciled in England and Wales, maintenance expenditure by local education authorities on mandatory awards to postgraduate certificate of education students and discretionary awards for other postgraduate students was £11.9 million in the academic year 1978–79 and £38.0 million in 1994–95.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the take-up rate for student loans for each university as a percentage of the individual institution's student population in Wales for *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96. [13168]

Mr. Evans: The Student Loans Company has advised that data in respect of individual institutions can only be obtained at disproportionate cost. The national take-up rate for Wales of student loans as a percentage of eligible students in publicly funded institutions was 43 per cent. in the academic year 1993–94, 51 per cent. in 1994–95 and 58 per cent. in 1995–96.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of full-time university students in Cardiff are entitled to a full student grant. [13169]

Mr. Evans: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those unitary authorities in Wales that made discretionary grant awards to 18 to 25-year-old students in the year 1995–96, indicating the total amount awarded. [13177]

Mr. Evans: Information in the age categories requested is not collected. Data on discretionary awards for the academic year 1995–96 are not yet available. The numbers of, and expenditure on, discretionary awards made by local education authorities in Wales in the academic year 1994–95, before the reorganisation of local government in Wales, is published in tables 8(a) and (b), and 9(a) and (b) of "Statistics of Education, Student Support" volume 1994–95; copies of which are in the Library. Tables 8(a) and (b) show data for section 1(6) and section 2 awards in higher education; tables 9(a) and (b) show data for section 2 awards in further education and give separate data on awards to students aged 16 to 18 years and to those aged 19 and over.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total amount of expenditure on full-time university student grants in Wales in *(a)* 1978–79 and *(b)* 1995–96. [13180]

Mr. Evans: In 1978–79 local education authorities in Wales spent £28.5 million on mandatory awards for maintenance and fees for students at university and other higher education and further education institutions. A further £5 million was spent on discretionary full value and lesser value awards, some of which will have been made to higher education students. In 1994–95, the latest year for which data are available, expenditure on maintenance and fees for full-time higher education mandatory and discretionary awards was £124 million.

University Research Institutions

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list Government funding for research at university institutions in Wales, broken down to show the departments to which funding was awarded in *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94, *(c)* 1994–95 and *(d)* 1995–96. [13178]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Information is not available for individual departments within higher education institutions in Wales. Information on research income for the former public sector institutions prior to 1994–95 is not available. The available information is shown in the table.

Government funding for research at higher education institutions in Wales

£ thousands

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
The University College of Wales, Aberystwyth	4,379	3,977	4,938
Cardiff Institute of Higher Education (b)	n/a	n/a	38
University of Wales, College of Cardiff	5,183	5,867	6,532
Coleg Normal Bangor (b)	n/a	n/a	194
University of Wales College of Medicine	2,830	3,097	3,631
University of Glamorgan (b)	n/a	n/a	376
Gwent College of Higher Education (b)	n/a	n/a	1
North East Wales Institute of Higher Education	n/a	n/a	367
University of North Wales, Bangor	3,633	3,470	4,370
St. David's University College	297	121	106
Swansea Institute of Higher Education	n/a	n/a	—
University College of Swansea	4,277	5,098	5,273
Trinity College, Carmarthen	n/a	n/a	—
Welsh Agricultural College (b)	n/a	n/a	22
Welsh College of Music and Drama	n/a	n/a	—
Total	20,599	21,630	25,848

Source:
University Statistical Record and Higher Education Statistics Agency.
(a) Includes funding from research councils, UK central Government bodies and health and hospital authorities.
(b) Name of institution as at 1994–95. Some institutions have subsequently gained university status or merged with other university institutions.

Further and Higher Education

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many students registered as full-time, in higher and further education institutions in Wales in *(a)* 1978–79 and *(b)* 1995–96. [13179]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: There were 43,950 full-time and sandwich students at further and higher education institutions in Wales for 1978–79, compared to a provisional figure of 102,598 for 1995–96. The 1995–96 figure excludes a small number of students on further education courses at higher education institutions, and on higher education courses at further education institutions.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many incapacity benefit claimants in the small sample survey carried out between October 1995 and May 1996 were awarded benefit for exceptional circumstances under each of the categories of regulation 27. [10994]

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table.

Category	*Number of cases*
As a result of a specific disease or disablement, there would be a substantial risk to physical or mental health if the claimant were found fit for work	19
The claimant suffers from a severe uncontrolled or uncontrollable disease	37
The claimant has a previously undiagnosed life-threatening condition	1
The claimant is due to have a major surgical operation or other major therapeutic procedure within the next three months	1
Base[1]	1,156

[1] All cases in the survey for which full information is available.
1. Taken from a survey of incapacity benefit claimants attending for examination in November 1995 where the examining doctor advised that the claimant fell into an exceptional circumstances category.
2. Two claimants fell into two categories so that the total number of cases covered by the exceptional circumstances categories with scores below the threshold in the functional part of the test was 56.

Supported Accommodation

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the terms of reference of the interdepartmental review of the funding of supported

accommodation within the housing benefit system; when he expects the review to be completed; and if he will make a statement. [11820]

Mr. Roger Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) on 15 October, *Official Report*, column 858.

Our aim is to conclude the review as soon as possible. We have underway a major research project to assess the numbers of recipients of payments of support costs and the total amount of housing benefit paid. This research is complex and will take some time to complete. We do not rule out the possibility of interim measures during the review should they prove necessary.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security during what periods cold weather payments were made in December 1996 and in January 1997 to date. [11856]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table.

Cold weather payments periods by weather station alphabetically, 15 January 1997.

Weather station	*Trigger period*
Abbotsinch	27 December to 2 January 1997
Abbotsinch	3–9 January
Aberporth	29 December to 4 January 1997
Aviemore	19–25 November
Aviemore	26 November to 2 December
Aviemore	19–25 December
Aviemore	26 December to 1 January 1997
Aviemore	2–8 January
Aviemore	9–15 January
Bedford	21–27 December
Bedford	31 December to 6 January 1997
Bedford	4–10 January
Bingley	3–9 January
Boltshope Park	20–26 November
Boltshope Park	24–30 December
Boltshope Park	31 December to 6 January 1997
Boltshope Park	2–8 January
Boscombe Down	29 December to 4 January 1997
Boscombe Down	30 December to 5 January 1997
Bracknell	29 December to 4 January 1997
Bracknell	30 December to 5 January 1997
Braemar	20–26 November
Braemar	27 November to 3 December
Braemar	19–25 December
Braemar	26 December to 1 January 1997
Braemar	2–8 January
Braemar	9–15 January
Braemar	19–25 January
Brize Norton	24–30 December
Brize Norton	31 December to 6 January 1997
Capel Curig	25–31 December
Capel Curig	1–7 January 1997
Cardinham	31 December to 6 January 1997
Cardinham	3–9 January
Carlisle	3–9 January
Chivenor	3–9 January
Coltishall	26 December to 1 January 1997
Coltishall	2–8 January
Crosby	28 December to 3 January 1997
Culdrose	27 December to 2 January 1997
Dumfries	31 December to 6 January 1997
Dunkeswell	21–27 December
Dunkeswell	29 December to 4 January 1997
Dunkeswell	5–11 January

Cold weather payments periods by weather station alphabetically, 15 January 1997.

Weather station	*Trigger period*
Elmdon	23–29 December
Elmdon	31 December to 6 January 1997
Eskdalemuir	20–26 November
Eskdalemuir	20–26 December
Eskdalemuir	27 December to 2 January 1997
Eskdalemuir	3–9 January
Eskmeals	3–9 January
Fylingdales	1–7 January
Gatwick	29 December to 4 January 1997
Gatwick	1–7 January 1997
Great Malvern	1–7 January
Great Malvern	2–8 January
Heathrow	1–7 January
Heathrow	2–8 January
Herstmonceux	24–30 December
Herstmonceux	31 December to 6 January 1997
Hurn	25–31 December
Hurn	1–7 January
Kinloss	21–27 December
Kinloss	30 December to 5 January 1997
Kinloss	7–13 January
Linton on Ouse	25–31 December
Linton on Ouse	3–9 January
Liscombe	20–26 December
Liscombe	28 December to 3 January 1997
Liscombe	4–10 January
Loch Glascarnoch	21–27 November
Loch Glascarnoch	23–29 November
Loch Glascarnoch	20–26 December
Loch Glascarnoch	27 December to 2 January 1997
Loch Glascarnoch	3–9 January
Lyneham	21–27 December
Lyneham	28 December to 3 January 1997
Lyneham	4–10 January
Manston	31 December to 6 January 1997
Manston	2–8 January
Marham	28 December to 3 January 1997
Marham	4–10 January
Marham	6–12 January
Mumbles Head	27 December to 2 January 1997
Mumbles Head	3–9 January
Nottingham	26 December to 1 January 1997
Nottingham	2–8 January
Plymouth	3–9 January
Portland	28 December to 3 January 1997
Rhoose	1–7 January
Rhoose	3–9 January
Rhyl	28 December to 3 January 1997
Ringway	3–9 January
Sennybridge	21–27 December
Sennybridge	28 December to 3 January 1997
Sennybridge	4–10 January
Shawbury	31 December to 6 January 1997
Shawbury	7–13 January
Southampton	27 December to 2 January 1997
Southampton	3–9 January
St. Mawgan	27 December to 2 January 1997
St. Mawgan	3–9 January
St. Catherine's Point	27 December to 2 January 1997
St. Catherine's Point	3–9 January
Stansted	28 December to 3 January 1997
Stansted	4–10 January
Stansted	6–12 January
Thorney Island	27 December to 2 January 1997
Thorney Island	3–9 January
Tulloch Bridge	21–27 November
Tulloch Bridge	19–25 December
Tulloch Bridge	26 December to 1 January 1997
Tulloch Bridge	2–8 January
Waddington	31 December to 6 January 1997
Waddington	1–7 January 1997
Wattisham	28 December to 3 January 1997

Cold weather payments periods by weather station alphabetically, 15 January 1997.

Weather station	*Trigger period*
Wattisham	4–10 January
Wattisham	6–12 January
Wick Airport	17–23 November
Wick Airport	1–7 January 1997
Wittering	24–30 December
Wittering	31 December to 6 January 1997
Wittering	7–13 January
Yeovilton	29 December to 4 January 1997
Yeovilton	30 December to 5 January 1997

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the cost of extending cold weather payments to all pensioner households. [12984]

Mr. Evans: Last year's actual expenditure was £62 million. Including all pensioner households in the Scheme would have cost last year an extra £90 million to £140 million, bringing the total cost to between £150 million and £200 million.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will revise the arrangements in regard to the determination of areas as qualifying for cold weather payments; and what factors underlay the lack of cold weather payments to the most exposed areas of the Wentworth constituency. [12963]

Mr. Evans: Each year after March, the cold weather payments scheme is reviewed in consultation with the Meterological Office, making full use of its advice and expert meterological knowledge. Representations from hon. Members will be considered as part of the annual review. It is not the intention of the scheme to reflect precisely all local temperature variations, but to achieve national coverage with a reasonable degree of local sensitivity. Cold weather payments are made when the average temperature is recorded as, or forecast to be, 0 deg C or below over seven consecutive days in any weather station area.

Funeral Bonds

Mr. John Carlisle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the provision of a funeral bond certificate purchased to provide a funeral service on death is counted as an asset for the purposes of assessing means-tested social security benefits. [12598]

Mr. Roger Evans: A funeral bond will be treated as a capital asset unless it takes the form of life assurance or it cannot be redeemed by the person for whom it has been acquired. However, a funeral bond which would otherwise be disregarded in assessing benefit may still be treated as capital if it was purchased with the intention of securing benefit or increasing the amount of benefit payable.

War Pensions

Mr. Legg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes he proposes to the war pensions scheme following his consultations with the Central Advisory Committee on War Pensions on 26 November 1996; and if he will make a statement. [13845]

Mr. Lilley: The general response of committee members was that the proposals represented a sensible and balanced approach. A warm welcome was given to some of the proposals, but there was concern about a small number. After full consideration of all comments, I have decided to proceed with the package, with some modification to reflect the consultation. My right hon. Friend Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish is writing today to committee members with details of our decision.

The final form of the proposed changes to war widow's and war disablement pensions, to be implemented from 7 April 1997, is as follows:

War Widow's Pension

I intend to expand the categories of automatic entitlement to a war widow's pension. From April a war widow's pension will be awarded where the late husband was in receipt of unemployability supplement, and was assessed as at least 80 per cent. disabled due to service at the time of his death. Payment for funeral expenses will be made in the same circumstances.

A war widow's pension, which ceases on the start of cohabitation, will be restored following the cessation of cohabitation, bringing the position for cohabitees into line with that for those who remarry.

Because of the extension of restoration, war widows gratuities, currently payable when a widow remarries or starts to cohabit, are no longer appropriate and will no longer be payable.

Following representation, we will not proceed with the original proposal to abolish war widow's rent allowance for new claims.

War Disablement Pension

I intend to abolish rank differences in war disablement gratuities. The new rates will be based on those previously appropriate to an army major or equivalent.

I also intend to abolish the lower rate of clothing allowance. All payments will be made at the equivalent of the current higher rate.

I intend to introduce minimum disablement gateways for new claims to certain supplementary allowances which may be paid with the basic war disablement pension. For war pensioners mobility supplement and the allowance for lower standard of occupation the threshold will be set as proposed at 40 per cent. For unemployability supplement the threshold will be at 60 per cent., rather than the 80 per cent. originally proposed.

New awards of the allowance for lower standard of occupation and unemployability supplement will be restricted to those aged under 65 at the date of claim. Existing recipients of these allowances will not be affected by the proposed changes.

First payment for all awards of pension and allowances will be made from the first day of entitlement, rather than at present where some are made from that day, and others from the start of the first pay week following.

On backdating of awards, I intend to introduce the changes as originally proposed, with the exception of the maximum limit applying where the claimant's health had prevented him claiming earlier, or where the unavailability of classified papers has prevented an earlier

claim, or where the Ministry of Defence had overlooked arrangements to forward papers on invaliding or death in service to this Department, or where there had been a change of medical opinion or legal interpretation. We had originally proposed a maximum limit for backdating of one year prior to the date of claim in such cases. Following representation, we now propose to set the limit at three years.

The War Pensions Agency will also introduce the following changes to the administration of claims to war widow's and war disablement pensions.

The agency will cease issuing reminders to return claim forms, but will keep our procedures under review to ensure that no potential pensioner is left in doubt about the importance of returning claim forms promptly. But, following representation that it would have an adverse effect on the ability of ex-service organisations to conduct their business, the agency will not proceed with the proposal to cease issuing copies of decisions to third parties who were involved in making the claim.

The agency also will cease the issue of four-yearly continuation notices in cases which attract a long-term interim assessment. Pensioners will still be clearly told to let the War Pensions Agency know if their condition changes, and that it is possible to review assessments.

When seeking a review of their assessment, pensioners will in the first instance normally be asked to provide evidence that they have sought medical treatment or advice for their disablement since they were last assessed. The pensioner will not have to prove deterioration, simply show that there are grounds for carrying out a full review.

The changes to the original proposals are a direct result of the concerns expressed by members of the central advisory committee, and further improve the balance of a package which has found general approval. They will enable the War Pensions Agency to make savings on administration of around £1 million a year.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost to the Exchequer of applying a universal war pensions disregard in relation to the calculation of housing benefit and council tax benefit; and if he will make a statement. [13254]

Mr. Roger Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) on 29 November, *Official Report*, columns *415–16*.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications for the jobseeker's allowance have been refused since the scheme began. [11746]

Mr. Roger Evans: An estimated 96,000 claims to jobseeker's allowance have been refused since the scheme began.

Notes

1. Based on claims to jobseeker's allowance refused benefit recorded by the Benefits Agency and administered by the income support computer system and jobseeker's allowance payment system during October to December 1996. This includes claims disallowed on labour market grounds and also those refused because conditions of benefit entitlement were not met. Claims for income-based jobseeker's allowance made by claimants already in receipt of the contributory element are also included.

2. The figure does not include any claims for transitionally protected jobseeker's allowance solely administered by the NUBS2 computer system.

3. Includes claims from unemployed people refused income support up until 6 October 1996, prior to the introduction of JSA.

4. Figures may be subject to revision.

Source:

Benefits Agency management information statistics.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the level of housing benefit expenditure in Scotland for each year from 1979–80 to 1995–96, broken down for *(a)* private rented sector, *(b)* public rented sector and *(c)* housing association sector. [13037]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

Housing benefit expenditure in Scotland

£ million

Year	*Private rented sector*	*Public rented sector*	*Housing association sector*	*Total housing benefit*
1988–89	86	363	n/a	449
1989–90	113	415	n/a	528
1990–91	119	455	n/a	574
1991–92	136	505	n/a	641
1992–93	134	559	35	728
1993–94	154	600	48	802
1994–95	177	620	62	859
1995–96	196	628	78	902

Notes:

1. Housing benefit expenditure figures for Scotland not available before 1988–89.

2. Housing association expenditure was not identified separately prior to 1992–93 and is included in private rented sector figures up to 1991–92.

Sources:

1. Department of Social Security local authority expenditure claim forms.

2. Department of Social Security housing benefit management information system 1 per cent. sample.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the cost of restoring benefit entitlement to asylum seekers in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999-2000. [12803]

Mr. Roger Evans *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* The cost of restoring entitlement to income support, income-based jobseeker's allowance, housing benefit and council tax benefit for asylum seekers is estimated at £200 million in 1997–98, £240 million in 1998–99 and £250 million in 1999–2000.

Benefits Agency

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which Benefits Agency areas have been selected

to be run by the private sector; where advertisements have been placed; and what is the projected time scale for the process. [13032]

Mr. Roger Evans *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* Involvement of the private sector in Benefits Agency is part of a wider programme of change to deliver improved services at significantly reduced cost.

The following Benefits Agency areas have been selected to be run by the private sector: child benefit operations; Benefits Agency medical services; the service provider for the automation of post offices and payment of social security benefits; and, as part of the Department's Prime—private sector resource initiative for management of the estate—project, the ownership and management of the Department of Social Security's premises will be transferred to the private sector through a long term partnership.

Advertisements have been placed in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*. In addition, the advertisement for BAMS appeared in *Government Opportunities*. Current plans are that the advertisement for child benefit operations will be placed by 31 January and that the contract is to be awarded by spring 1998, while the contract for BAMS is to be awarded by the end of spring 1997. The contract for the service provider for the automation of post offices and payment of social security benefits was awarded in May last year. The Prime contract is expected to be awarded in autumn 1997.

In the Yorkshire, Westcountry, East London and Anglia Benefits Agency directorates, a further initiative involving greater collaboration with the private sector will involve three service providers working in partnership with the Benefits Agency area management teams, assisting in the day-to-day running and having input into the strategic management. The partnerships will run from the end of spring 1997 for about 12 months during which time the service providers will be expected to make specific proposals for more efficient, effective and economic delivery of the agency's business.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Castle Buildings Talks

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide a breakdown of the costs incurred in 1996 by the talks process at Castle buildings, specifying the amount which the Irish Government *(a)* has agreed to pay, *(b)* has paid and (c) is due to pay. [12174]

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is as follows:

Payments to elected delegates: £270,735.36

Payments to party support staff: £46,386.62

Party allowance research grants:

£269,964.00

Independent chairmen and aides: £392,020.49.

Block B, Castle Buildings:-

(a) Initial set-up costs: £266,000.00

(b) Operational costs £290, 435.97

Additional NIO Staff Costs: £204,389.50.

The Irish Government are bearing an equal share of the running costs of the multi-party negotiations, excluding any in respect of strand 1.

During the period 10 June 1996 to 30 November 1996, under this agreement, the Irish Government have been invoiced for, and has paid a total of £461,615.33 sterling.

The Irish Government's share of costs for the period 1 December 1996 to 31 December 1996, for which they are currently being invoiced, is £118,886.95.

Drinking Water (Fluoride and Aluminium)

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what levels of fluoride, in parts per million, have been added to the waters of Tandragee and Holywood for each month up to April 1996; [12435]

(2) if he will list the quantities of aluminium added to the drinking water in Northern Ireland indicating the quantities added in each year since it was first added; [12438]

(3) in what quantity aluminium is now added to the drinking water in Northern Ireland, given the figures by treatment plant. [12439]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Water Service under its chief executive, Mr. H. R. F. Plester. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from H. R. F. Plester to Mr. Peter Robinson, dated 28 January 1997:

You recently put down three parliamentary questions about Water Service operational matters which have been passed to me for reply as its Chief Executive. I shall answer each in turn in this letter according to the order in which they were tabled.

No 109

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what levels of fluoride, in parts per million, have been added to the waters of Tandragee and Holywood for each months up to April 1996.

The level fluoride added to the water put into public supply at Holywood and Tandragee is governed by the provisions of the following legislation:

the Water (Fluoridation) (Northern Ireland) Order 1987; and

the Water Quality Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1994.

Under the provisions of the Order fluoride levels are, so far as is reasonably practicable, to be maintained at one milligram per litre. The maximum limit permitted by the regulations is 1.5 milligrammes per litre. The water supplies at Holywood and Tandragee met the regulatory standards for the year prior to April 1996. Fluoridation takes place at the water treatment plants serving Holywood and Tandragee under arrangements with the health authorities which the Water Service inherited from the previous local authority water supply undertakers at local government reorganisation in 1973.

No 112

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if he will list the quantities of aluminium added to the drinking water in Northern Ireland indicating the quantities added in each year since it was first added.

Aluminium is not added to drinking water supplies. Various aluminium compounds are used at certain water treatment plants during the treatment of raw water supplies to make them fit to be put into the public supply. These compounds are used as coagulants to remove impurities from the raw water during the clarification phase of the treatment cycle. They are then removed by further treatment processes. Traces of these compounds may however pass into supply. Traces of naturally occurring aluminium which is abundant in many rocks and soils, such as those in the Mourne reservoir catchment, from which water supplies are derived may also pass into supply. Maximum permitted levels of aluminium for the public water supply are set by the Water Quality Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1994. These regulations, which incorporate EC and national controls and standards, set a standard of 200 microgrammes per litre, with a derogated level of 500 microgrammes per litre permitted for supplies derived from areas where aluminium is naturally occurring.

No 113

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, in what quantity aluminium is now added to the drinking water in Northern Ireland, giving the figures by treatment plant.

As the previous reply indicates aluminium is not added to drinking water supplies. It may occur in water supplies as a trace element after raw water treatment by aluminium compounds during the clarification process, or because of natural aluminium levels in the geological strata from which a water supply is derived. Water Service's performance in respect of the level of aluminium in water supplies is recorded in the first Drinking Water Quality Report issued by the Water Service in June 1996. A copy of this is enclosed for your information. A second drinking water quality annual report is due to be published in June this year.

Mr. Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of children in Northern Ireland currently have dental fluorosis. [12436]

Mr. Moss: The information requested is not available. A 1993 survey of children's dental health showed that 34 per cent. of children in Northern Ireland had enamel opacities. There are a number of possible causes of such opacities and it is not possible to determine the proportion which are due to fluorosis.

Mr. Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimates he has made of levels of dental fluorosis among children in Northern Ireland following fluoridation of the water supply. [12437]

Mr. Moss: The incidence of enamel opacities due to fluorosis in children would not be expected to increase following the fluoridation of water supplies.

Road Safety Education

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) when he received the report he commissioned on staffing levels in the road safety education branch; what were its conclusions; and what measures he has taken to implement these; [12444]

(2) what assessment he has made of the staffing levels for road safety education officers relative to those in Great Britain. [12451]

Mr. Moss: The Department received this report in October 1996. It compared staffing levels with those in Great Britain and recommended, among other things, that the number of road safety education officers be increased. I have decided, in the light of competing priorities for road safety funding, that the planned level of staffing remains appropriate and do not propose to increase their numbers. Road safety remains a priority for the Government and the overall resources allocated to it, particularly for passenger and goods vehicle enforcement and accident remedial and traffic calming measures, continue to increase year on year.

I am placing copies of the report in the Library.

Litter

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the measures his Department proposes to take in respect of the accumulation of litter during winter along the Sydenham bypass, Belfast. [12445]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Environment and Heritage Service under its chief executive, Mr. Robert C. Martin. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Robert C. Martin to Mr. Robert McCartney, dated 28 January 1997:

As Chief Executive of Environment and Heritage Service, I am responsible for all operational aspects of the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland's environmental policies. I am therefore responding to the Parliamentary Question you put down in the House of Commons on 23 January 1997:

"To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if he will make a statement on the measures his Department proposes to take in respect of the accumulation of litter during winter along the Sydenham By-pass, Belfast".

With the exception of certain designated roads such as motorways, the Litter (Northern Ireland) Order 1994 places a duty on district councils to keep roads clear and free of litter. Belfast City Council is therefore responsible for dealing with litter on the Sydenham By-pass to your recent letter was forwarded to them for action. It was gratifying to note their rapid response to the request for a clean up.

I trust you find this reply helpful.

Environmental Legislation

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what environmental legislation applicable in Great Britain since 1990 has not been applied to Northern Ireland. [12446]

Mr. Moss: The information in relation to primary legislation is set out in the table. The information does not cover legislation where there are only minor differences between Northern Ireland and Great Britain or where structural differences mean that equivalent legislation is unnecessary. A detailed comparison of all subordinate legislation could be undertaken only at disproportionate cost.

Title	Purpose	Northern Ireland position
Environmental Protection Act 1990 (c.43)		
Part I	Integrated pollution control and air pollution Control by local authorities	Draft industrial pollution control order to be laid before Parliament in early 1997
Part II	Waste on land	Draft waste and contaminated Land Order to be laid before Parliament in early 1997
Part VIII Section 140 and 142	Miscellaneous	Equivalent provisions in the draft waste and contaminated Land Order to be laid before parliament in early 1997
Noise and Statutory Nuisance Act 1993 (c.40)		Need for parallel provisions being considered as part of a comprehensive review of policy on noise and statutory nuisance
Environment Act 1995 (c.25) Part II		
Section 57	Contaminated land	Equivalent provisions in the draft waste and contaminated Land Order
Section 58	Abandoned mines	To be included in the Proposal for a Draft Water Order in Council to be published for consultation later this year
Part IV	Air quality	Similar provisions to be included in an Order-in-Council programmed for 1998–99
Part V Section 92	Miscellaneous National waste strategy	Equivalent provisions in the draft waste and contaminated Land Order
Section 93–95	Producer responsibility	Similar provisions to be included in Order-in-Council to be made in summer 1998

Scrabo High School

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at which secondary schools in Newtownards accommodation will be available for the pupils currently at Scrabo high school following its proposed closure; and if he will make a statement. [12572]

Mr. Ancram: The future of Scrabo high school is a matter for the South-Eastern education and library board to consider in the first instance. If the board wishes to proceed with the closure of the school, it would have to publish a development proposal to that effect. This procedure would allow all interests in the area full opportunity to comment on or object to the board's proposal, before any decision is taken by the Department of Education.

Disability Living Allowance and Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the cost to public funds in the last year for which figures are available of payments of *(a)* disability living allowance and *(b)* incapacity benefit, and if he will list the amount paid relative to the total number of electors in each constituency. [12447]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Social Security Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Alec Wylie. I have asked him to arrange for a response to be given.

Letter from Alec Wylie to Mr. Robert McCartney, dated 27 January 1997:

I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question on the cost to public funds for payments of Disability Living Allowance and Incapacity Benefit relative to the total number of electors in each constituency.

To provide the information in the form you requested would require a major clerical exercise generating a disproportionate cost. The two benefits concerned are paid through a GB computer system and the routine information provided on a quarterly basis is limited to the payment details of "live" cases for a selected week. For this reason I am unable to give you year ending figures broken down by constituency for 1995/96. However, the attached tables show the number of "live" cases for both benefit types per constituency and their associated costs for the week ending 29 February 1996. I have also shown the total amount paid for each benefit in that year.

Disability living allowance—expenditure and recipients in the week ending 28 February 1996

Constituency	Recipients	Expenditure[1] £	Population aged 18+[2]	Expenditure per electorate £
Belfast West	9,724	476,987.50	52,899	9.02
Foyle	9,514	480,915.75	73,779	6.52
Belfast North	7,000	336,909.95	53,311	6.32
Upper Bann	6,850	344,618.55	64,783	5.32
Mid Ulster	6,640	341,070.40	68,124	5.01
Newry and Armagh	6,100	315,223.35	65,959	4.78
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	4,823	251,093.45	67,568	3.72
South Down	5,584	280,231.50	75,590	3.71

Disability living allowance—expenditure and recipients in the week ending 28 February 1996

Constituency	Recipients	Expenditure[1] £	Population aged 18+[2]	Expenditure per electorate £
Lagan Valley	5,590	267,500.95	73,593	3.63
Belfast East	3,951	193,062.50	53,266	3.62
South Antrim	4,747	231,083.80	68,705	3.36
East Antrim	4,399	207,837.75	62,583	3.32
Belfast South	3,511	170,201.70	54,065	3.15
East Londonderry	4,614	226,156.95	75,757	2.99
Strangford	3,792	185,207.05	70,684	2.62
North Antrim	3,728	178,533.85	68,517	2.61
North Down	3,456	170,629.85	68,038	2.51
Unknown[3]	3,699	182,479.05		

Total amount of disability living allowance paid in Northern Ireland for 1995–96 was £244,175,000.
[1] Expenditure excludes administrative costs.
[2] Population aged 18+ taken from the 1991 census.
[3] Missing codes—can not be distributed evenly across constituencies.

Incapacity benefit—expenditure and recipients in the week ending 28 February 1996

Constituency	Recipients	Expenditure[1] £	Population aged 18+[2]	Expenditure per electorate £
Belfast West	6,429	363,445.92	52,899	6.87
Upper Bann	6,940	435,904.07	64,783	6.73
Foyle	8,152	480,802.78	73,779	6.52
Belfast North	5,861	343,367.63	53,311	6.44
Mid Ulster	7,068	434,729.93	68,124	6.38
Newry and Armagh	6,486	385,177.88	65,959	5.84
South Down	6,375	397,402.09	75,590	5.26
East Antrim	4,887	326,041.89	62,583	5.21
East Londonderry	5,539	355,595.12	75,757	4.69
Belfast East	3,813	248,959.20	53,266	4.67
North Antrim	4,794	312,404.04	68,517	4.56
Strangford	4,489	311,008.21	70,684	4.40
South Antrim	4,668	299,946.35	68,705	4.37
Lagan Valley	4,887	309,826.10	73,593	4.21
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	4,706	282,813.98	67,568	4.19
North Down	3,803	266,819.75	68,038	3.92
Belfast South	3,423	199,317.16	54,065	3.69
Unknown[3]	3,143	208,274.40		

Total amount of incapacity benefit paid in Northern Ireland for 1995–96 was £318,200,000.
[1] Expenditure excludes administration costs.
[2] Population aged 18+ taken from the 1991 census.
[3] Missing codes—can not be distributed evenly.

Smokeless Fuel Regulations

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress his Department has made in bringing the smokeless fuel regulations into line with Great Britain. [12448]

Mr. Moss: The regulations prescribing smokeless fuel authorised for use in smoke control areas in Northern Ireland correspond to those in Great Britain. However, only those fuels to be marketed in Northern Ireland are prescribed in the Northern Ireland regulations. Amending regulations are made periodically to meet requests from manufacturers for the inclusion of additional fuels.

Road Deaths

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many road deaths there were in *(a)* 1995 and *(b)* 1996; and how many children were killed. [12450]

Sir John Wheeler: Deaths due to road traffic accidents in 1995 totalled 144, including 19 children.

At 30 November 1996 there had been 126 deaths, including 11 children.

Royal Ulster Constabulary (Sexual Orientation)

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects the RUC's working party on the implications of sexual orientation in the RUC will complete its work; and if he will ensure that the report is made public. [12822]

Sir John Wheeler: It is anticipated that the working party examining the concept of sexual orientation and its implications for the Royal Ulster Constabulary will take approximately 12 months to complete its work. Such a period is necessary not only to consult members of the force but to facilitate appropriate research with concerned bodies within the community regarding issues such as the frequency of homophobic attacks.

It is unlikely that the final report of this working party will be made public, due to the sensitivity and confidentiality of the issues involved.

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his Department's policy on the issue of homosexuality in respect of security clearance of candidates for appointment as constables. [12823]

Sir John Wheeler: The sexual orientation of an applicant to the Royal Ulster Constabulary does not at any stage form part of the selection process. The Royal Ulster Constabulary is committed to the principle of equal treatment for all members or job applicants and will take all necessary steps to achieve it. Appointment to the RUC is based solely on merit.

Education and Library Boards

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what calculations he has made in respect of the savings that will be produced from a reduction in the number of education and library boards. [12925]

Mr. Ancram: The Government have estimated that savings of approximately 2 million per year would be produced as a result of the restructuring of the education and library boards.

Northern Ireland Water

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 21 January, *Official Report*, column *557*, with respect to water privatisation, what factors make such a privatisation impracticable in the near future. [12947]

Mr. Moss: Privatisation of water and sewerage services in Northern Ireland will require legislation and is dependent upon the collation of complex data which will enable any sale to proceed. It also requires the creation of a suitable system of regulations along with the introduction of a system of direct charging to replace the current arrangements whereby the majority of the costs of water and sewage services are recovered through the regional rate. All of this will take several years to put in place.

Criminal Damage and Criminal Injuries

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many claims in respect of *(a)* criminal damage and *(b)* criminal injuries have (i) been received and (ii) resulted in payment of compensation; and what were the (1) average and (2) total sums paid in respect of each category of claim in each of the 10 most recent years for which figures are available. [12851]

Sir John Wheeler: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Compensation Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Denis Stanley. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from D. A. Stanley to Mr. William Ross, dated 28 January 1997:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply, on behalf of the Compensation Agency, to your recent Question regarding criminal injury and criminal damage claims.

The tables below set out the details you requested. Information is only available from 1989–90 onwards.

Criminal injuries

	Claims received	*Claims cleared in year resulting in award*	*Average value of claims cleared* £	*Total compensation paid* £
1989–90	8,973	4,895	3,141	16,449,745
1990–91	9,382	5,889	3,417	19,547,358
1991–92	10,924	6,357	3,830	25,019,951
1992–93	9,689	6,673	4,217	26,569,813
1993–94	9,444	6,154	4,918	29,601,804
1994–95	8,970	6,493	5,673	34,634,993
1995–96	9,563	5,930	5,987	36,345,097

Criminal damage

	Number of claims received	*Claims cleared in year resulting in award*	*Average value of claims cleared* £	*Total compensation paid* £
1989–90	4,993	3,228	6,933	22,124,107
1990–91	3,243	3,255	5,929	22,711,159
1991–92	5,942	2,284	9,384	33,096,467
1992–93	5,530	3,554	9,171	75,927,801
1993–94	5,863	3,841	11,990	67,870,586
1994–95	2,264	3,971	20,505	53,811,825
1995–96	1,891	1,579	36,925	32,102,156

Many claims involve interim payments made over more than one year and this is reflected in the total amounts of compensation paid each year.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when regulations to comply with directive 79/923/EEC will be published in Northern Ireland. [13068]

Mr. Moss: The draft Shellfish Waters Regulations (Northern Ireland) for the transposition of directive 79/923/EEC will be published for consultation in the near future.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which Northern Ireland waters, to which the shellfish waters directive applies, have still to be designated. [13069]

Mr. Moss: An area in Stragford lough was designated under the shellfish water directive in 1983. Consideration will be given to whether there is a need for further designations when the proposed regulations to transpose the directive have been made.

Public Service Vehicle Licence Holders

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many public service vehicle licence holders, by category, there are in each constituency. [12846]

Mr. Moss: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 30 January 1997

HOME DEPARTMENT

Metropolitan Police (Vauxhall)

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 11 December, *Official Report*, columns *266–67*, on police accommodation in Lambeth, when the strategic review of the provision of police accommodation was commenced; by whom it was conducted; what its conclusions were; and what actions have been taken as a result. [12376]

Mr. Maclean: The Commissioner informs me that a review of police accommodation in Lambeth began in July 1996 to determine priorities for new police accommodation in the borough. It is being conducted by a police superintendent working to a member of the area senior management team.

The review focused initially on a feasibility study into an alternative approach to the provision of custody accommodation in Lambeth and concluded that a centralised criminal justice facility would be a more effective alternative to a traditional police station on the Grafton square site. The term "criminal justice facility" has been adopted by the Metropolitan police to describe the proposed development. The development would house all the cells, and process the related administration, for the police stations in the borough of Lambeth. It would also include an identification suite, and a sector base and station office with facilities for pubic inquiries.

This conclusion will affect other police accommodation needs in Lambeth, which are now being considered as part of the continuing review. Action to date has been confined to an amended planning application for the Clapham site.

Identity Cards

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Deaprtment what progress is being made towards introducing a national voluntary identity card; and if he will make a statement. [13070]

Mr. Sackville: My right hon. and learned Friend announced on 22 August 1996 plans to introduce a voluntary national identity card. As set out in the Queen's Speech at the opening of Parliament, we intend shortly to publish a draft Identity Cards Bill for consultation.

Youth Justice System

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to publish a Green Paper on the youth justice system; and if he will make a statement. [13199]

Mr. Maclean: The ministerial group on juveniles has been considering what more can be done to identify children at risk of offending and to address the problems which put them at risk. The Government intend to publish a Green Paper shortly, setting out a strategy for early intervention with children and young people at risk of offending.

Crime Prevention

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what percentage of his Department's budget has been spent on measures relating to crime prevention, per project, in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement; [13200]

(2) if he will make a statement on the proportion of his Department's budget which is spent on crime prevention measures. [13201]

Mr. Maclean: Home Office expenditure specifically allocated to crime prevention in 1996–97 is £22.5 million. That figure is separate from, and additional to, public expenditure of £7 billion on the police service, an increase of more than 100 per cent. since 1978–79. The prevention of crime is one of the key functions of the police service.

It is not possible to identify the level of public expenditure on the police service or other programmes within the Home Office budget which is devoted to crime prevention.

As regards Home Office support for crime prevention projects, it is estimated that, since 1988, over 3,800 crime prevention measures have been initiated under the safer cities programme. There have been 365 successful bids in the first two rounds of closed circuit television challenge, in 1994–95 and 1996–97.

Crime prevention projects have been funded under a number of other Government programmes which, since 1994, have been subsumed into the single regeneration budget.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

British Academy of Sport

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many of the shortlisted bidders to run the British academy of sport she has visited. [13518]

Mr. Sproat: None—deliberately.

Millennium

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is her Department's latest estimate of the cost of millennium projects at Greenwich; and what are the projected increases in construction costs contained within that estimate. [10870]

Mrs. Bottomley: This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I shall write to the hon. Member in my capacity as chairman of the commission and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Arts Council

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the grant in aid to the Arts Council for each year since 1993–94, together with the estimates

for *(a)* 1998–99 and *(b)* 1999–2000, (i) in cash terms and (ii) indicating the annual change in each year in (1) cash, (2) real and (3) percentage terms. [13205]

Mr. Sproat: The Arts Council of England has received grant in aid to fund its operating costs and grant programmes as follows:

£ million

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–00*
Cash	[1]189.15	185.99	191.13	186.13	186.10	184.60	183.49
Annual cash change	—	(3.16) (1.67 per cent.)	5.14 (2.76 per cent.)	(5.00) (2.62 per cent.)	(0.03) (0.02 per cent.)	(1.50) (0.81 per cent.)	(1.11) (0.60 per cent.)
1995–96 prices[2]	197.37	190.70	191.13	181.59	178.00	173.10	168.69
Annual "real terms" change	—	(6.67) (3.37 per cent.)	0.43 (0.22 per cent.)	(9.54) (4.99 per cent.)	(3.59) (4.1 per cent.)	(4.90) (1.98 per cent.)	(4.21) (2.43 per cent.)
Cumulative cash change from 1993–94	—	(3.16) (1.67 per cent.)	1.98 (1.05 per cent)	(3.02) (1.59 per cent.)	(3.05) (1.61 per cent.)	(4.55) (2.41 per cent.)	(5.66) (2.99 per cent.)
"Real terms" change from 1993–94	—	(6.67) (3.38 per cent.)	(6.24) (3.16 per cent.)	(15.78) (7.99 per cent.)	(19.37) (9.81 per cent.)	(24.27) (12.30 per cent.)	(28.68) (14.53 per cent.)

[1] The Arts Council of England came into being in April 1994. The sum shown for 1993–94 is an estimate of that attributable to England from the grant in aid to the Arts Council of Great Britain.
[2] Cash adjustment by GDP deflator (basis: 1995–96).

Sports Sponsorship

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what reports she has received on the United Kingdom sports sponsorship market for 1996; and if she will make a statement. [13996]

Mr. Sproat: The Department's sports sponsorship consultant has recently submitted his annual report on the condition of the UK sports sponsorship market. This report confirms that sports sponsorship in the UK generated more than £300 million in 1996, a real-terms increase of some 19.3 per cent. over the corresponding figure for 1995. Most people are well aware of the major sponsorship deals agreed by football, rugby, and cricket, but I am particularly pleased to see from this report that there were a large number of sponsorships agreed in 1996 involving schools and young people, most notably British Telecom's support of school sports worth £750,000. This is an excellent example of the links called for in the Government's policy statement, "Sport: Raising the Game", issued in July 1995.

The expansion in the UK sports sponsorship market is extremely good news for the sports sector, particularly given that this is additional to the thousands of national lottery projects being supported up and down the country.

Furthermore, the sportsmatch partnership between sport, business and Government continues to flourish, and was responsible for an additional £6.4 million to the overall sponsorship market. A wide range of sports have benefited from this excellent scheme.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Whitemoor Prison (Escape)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Attorney-General if he has received a report from Mr. Justice Kay regarding his decision to stop the trial of six men accused of the escape from Her Majesty's prison Whitemoor; and when he expects to decide whether proceedings for contempt of court will be instituted against the editor of the *Evening Standard* newspaper. [13411]

The Attorney-General: I expect to receive a report from Mr. Justice Kay shortly and will consider it in conjunction with any representations which may be made on behalf of Associated Newspapers Ltd., publishers of the *Evening Standard*, the editor or the journalist responsible for the particular article. Once this material has been considered a decision will be taken.

ENVIRONMENT

Landlord and Tenant Acts

Mr. Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will review the Landlord and Tenant Acts in the light of the recent judgment against Thames Ditton lawn tennis club. [12814]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We have no plans for a review, but we will keep a careful watch on any further developments in this case.

Greenfinches

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps are taken by his Department to ascertain whether greenfinches presented for export from the United Kingdom to *(a)* Malta and *(b)* the EU have not been taken illegally from the wild; and if he will make a statement. [12693]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* My Department has no authority to check greenfinches presented for export. It is an offence to take greenfinches from the wild, and to possess or sell them, without a licence. If my Department receives information that such offences may have taken place or are likely to do so, full details are passed to the police, who decide what action to take.

Local Government Finance

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was *(a)* the overall percentage increase or decrease in cash terms of the settlement for county councils in England in each financial year since 1979–80 and *(b)* the rate of inflation at the start of each of those financial years. [13424]

Mr. Curry: The information requested is in the table. From 1990–91, non-domestic rates have been pooled nationally and then redistributed between areas as a constant amount per head. These redistributed amounts are not included in the table.

	Rate support grant (£ million)	*Block grant* (£ million)	*Revenue support grant* (£ million)	*Year on year percentage change in grant*	*Percentage change in GDP deflator on previous year*
1979–80	£2,231				16.7
1980–81	£2,703			+21.2	18.3
1981–82		£4,003			9.7
1982–83		£3,956		–1.2	7.1
1983–84		£3,973		+0.4	4.6
1984–85		£4,010		+0.9	5.0
1985–86		£3,832		–4.4	5.5
1986–87		£3,614		–5.7	3.0
1987–88		£3,846		+6.4	5.3
1988–89		£3,773		–1.9	6.7
1989–90		£3,471		–8.0	7.0
1990–91			(see note 2)		8.0
1991–92			(see note 2)		6.4
1992–93			(see note 2)		4.2
1993–94			£7,108		2.9
1994–95			£7,943	+11.7	1.8
1995–96			£7,324	(see note 3)	2.5
1996–97			£6,998	(see note 3)	2.5
1997–98			£6,173	(see note 3)	2.0

Notes:

1. The figures for 1979–80 and 1980–81 include cover in respect of districts.
2. From 1990–91 to 1992–93 revenue support grant for county areas was paid into the collection funds of district councils.
3. The figures for 1995–96 1996–97 and 1997–98 relate only to payments to the county councils as they existed in the relevant year. Local government reorganisation obscures meaningful comparisons of the change in grant for these years.
4. Figures for the period 1979–80 to 1989–90 are from the most recent edition of the rate support grant (England) report.
5. Redistributed national non-domestic rates are not included in the table.

Ammonium Nitrate

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if health and safety inspectors have visited the port of Tilbury to examine the conditions for the landing, storage and subsequent carriage of imported ammonium nitrate; and if he will make a statement. [13535]

Sir Paul Beresford: Inspectors from the Health and Safety Executive have not visited the port of Tilbury to look at this particular activity. However, a visit is scheduled for the week commencing 3 February to consider the land use planning implications of the storage of ammonium nitrate and to inspect the arrangements for its safe storage and transport.

Housing Transfers

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish the names of the authorities to be included in the programme for housing transfers by councils in 1997–98; and if he will make a statement. [14082]

Mr. Curry: I am today announcing the names of the authorities which will be able to proceed, on a voluntary basis and subject to the approval of their tenants, with proposals to transfer their housing stock to private sector landlords in 1997–98. Eight authorities will be transferring all of their housing, amounting to almost 36,500 dwellings in large-scale voluntary housing transfers, generating capital receipts of over £350 million. A further nine authorities will be transferring a total of 18,572 dwellings with the aid of estates renewal challenge fund round 1 funding. The full programme involves 17 local authorities and over 55,000 dwellings.

This reflects the Government's commitment to a continuing programme of transfers as a means of generating private finance to repair and improve the condition of social housing.

The authorities which have gained a place on the programme, together with the intended recipient registered social landlord are as follows:

(i) Borough of Allerdale (4,800 dwellings) to existing housing associations

(ii) Bexley council (9,037 dwellings) to Orbit Housing Association and London and Quadrant Housing Trust

(iii) Cheltenham borough council (6,058 dwellings) to a newly created local housing company

(iv) Congleton borough council (4,258 dwellings) to a new housing association or local housing company

(v) Eden district council (1,623 dwellings) to Eden Housing Association

(vi) Kerrier district council (3,761 dwellings) to Kerrier Homes

(vii) South Oxfordshire district council (5,067 dwellings) to South Oxfordshire Housing Association

(viii) West Somerset district council (1,889 dwellings) to West Somerset Rural Housing Association.

The following nine authorities will be transferring their stock with the aid of ERCF funding and also have a place on the programme:

(i) London borough of Brent (1,505 dwellings) to a subsidiary of Ealing Family Housing Association

(ii) London borough of Hackney (3,112 dwellings) to three new local housing companies

(iii) London borough of Lambeth (500 dwellings) to Metropolitan Housing Trust

(iv) London borough of Merton (972 dwellings) to Pollards Hill Housing Association

(v) Sandwell metropolitan borough council (7,053 dwellings) to three new local housing companies

(vi) Sheffield city council (1,802 dwellings) to a new community-based local housing compnay

(vii) Stoke city council (935 dwellings) to a new community-based housing association

(viii) Tameside metropolitan borough council (904 dwellings) to West Ashton Homes

(ix) London borough of Tower Hamlets (1,789 dwellings) to Poplar Housing and Regeneration Community Association.

A further application to transfer a number of dwellings to a local housing company is presently being considered.

To date, 53 authorities have disposed of all or part of their stock to new landlords and a further three more are due to do so by 1 April 1997. The Government are committed to a continuing programme of transfers and to extending the benefits of transfer to urban and non-traditional housing. The range of recipient landlords has been widened from traditional housing associations to local housing companies, and the indications are that some authorities on the 1997 programme will take advantage of the new legislation and select a local housing company as their recipient landlord. In addition to increasing the diversity of acquiring landlords, the Exchequer levy on certain transfers has been lifted for a period of three years, the size limit has been increased to up to 12,000 dwellings, and certain restrictions on the use of capital receipts generated from transfers have been removed.

Transfers will remain voluntary and require tenant support as they do now but, as a result of these and other measures, we expect an expanding programme of transfers over the coming years.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Departmental Publications

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the *(a)* White Papers, *(b)* Green Papers, *(c)* consultation papers, *(d)* draft regulations and *(e)* circulars, for which his Department has been responsible issued in 1996 which his Department assesses could give rise, (i) directly and (ii) indirectly to significant environmental effects. [12702]

Dr. Liam Fox *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* The 1996 FCO departmental report describes those activities of both wings of the FCO connected with the environment. On 20 December, a Command Paper on the measures adopted at the 19th consultative meeting of the Antarctic treaty was presented to Parliament, CM3483. The measures include the designation of specially protected areas and their management. On 1 November, section 7 of the Antarctic Act 1967 concerning the conservation of Antarctic fauna and flora came into force, No. 2666(C77).

The ODA did not issue formal papers in the environmental area in 1996, but consulted widely on a variety of relevant issues such as forests and issued guidance papers. These include the July edition of the manual of environmental appraisal and, in August, guidance to staff, both diplomatic wing and ODA, on international environmental agreements. Copies of both are in the Libraries of the House.

European Union (Business)

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union for February; and if will list the major EU events for the next six months. [13781]

Mr. David Davis: The information is as follows:

Monthly forecast of business for February 1997

The following Councils are scheduled:

February 1-2: Industry Council (Informal)

February 5-6: Justice and Home Affairs Council (Informal)

February 17: Ecofin Council

February 17–18: Agriculture Council

February 24–25: General Affairs Council

February 28: Development Aid Council (Informal)

The following subjects are likely to be discussed:

February 1–2: Industry Council (informal)

There is no formal agenda.

February 5–6: Justice and Home Affairs Council (informal)

There is no formal agenda.

February 17: Ecofin Council

Draft Directive on taxation of energy products.

Consideration of Belgian convergence programme (possible item).

EU Balance of Payments lending to FYROM and the Ukraine (possible item).

Annual Community Economic report (possible item).

Solvency ratio Directive for credit institutions – expanded matrix (possible item).

February 17–18: Agriculture Council

Beef labelling/Cattle identification.

Presentation of Commission's proposal on olive oil (possible item).

Arable penalties (possible items).

Duram wheat (possible item).

Geographical designations (possible item).

Protection of forests against fires and atmospheric pollution (possible item).

Presentation of Commission's proposals on agricultural price fixing (possible item).

Progress report on veterinary and phytosanitary equivalence agreements and possible adoption of the agreement with the Czech Republic.

BSE (possible item).

February 24–25: General Affairs Council.

First Draft Agenda—likely to change.

Belarus.

Ex-Yugoslavia.

Middle East Peace Process.

Great Lakes Region.

Relations with South Africa.

European Obsrvatory on Racism and Xenophobia.

Mediterranean Policy:

Egypt

Libya

Palestinian Authority.

Yemen

Relations with Mexico.

Relations with Australia.

Transatlantic Relations.

Relations with Turkmenistan.

Burma/Myanmar.

Laos/Cambodia.

13th San Jose Ministerial Conference.

Association Council with Slovakia.

Association Council with Bulgaria.

Association Council with Cyprus.

February 28: Development Aid Council (informal)

There is no formal agenda.

European calendar: February–July 1997

	Venue	*Event*
February 1997		
1–2	The Hague	Industry Council (Informal)
5–6	Noordwijk	Justice and Home Affairs Council (Informal)
6	Brussels	Political Committee and meeting with CEEs Council (Informal)
17	Brussels	Political Committee and Troika meeting with OAU
17	Brussels	Ecofin Council
17–18	Brussels	Agriculture Council
17–21	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
24–25	Brussels	General Affairs Council (and IGC Ministerial)
28	Amsterdam	Development Aid Council (Informal)
March 1997		
1–2	Amsterdam	Development Aid Council (Informal)
1–3	Amsterdam	Education Council (Informal)
3–4	Brussels	Environment Council
6	Brussels	Telecommunications Council
10	Brussels	Internal Market Council
10–14	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
11–12	Brussels	Transport Council
13	Brussels	Political Committee
14–15	Rotterdam	Social Affairs Council (Informal)
15–16	Apeldoorn	Gymnich (Informal)

European calendar: February–July 1997

	Venue	*Event*
17	Brussels	Ecofin Council
17–19	Brussels	Agriculture Council
24–25	Brussels	General Affairs Council (and IGC Ministerial)
April 1997		
*4–6	Noordwijk	Ecofin Council (Informal)
*6–8	Maastricht	Informal meeting of Cultural Affairs Ministers
*7–10	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
*9–11	The Hague	Ministerial Conference on Social Integration
10	Brussels	Political Committee
10	Luxembourg	Consumer Council
14–15	Luxembourg	Fisheries Council
17	Luxembourg	Social Affairs Council
18–19	Maastricht	Post-Lomé Ministerial meeting
18–20	Amsterdam	Environment Council (Informal)
21–22	The Netherlands	Political Committee
21–22	Luxembourg	Agriculture Council
23	Brussels	European Parliament Plenary
24	Luxembourg	Industry Council
24–25	Luxembourg	ACP/EU Ministerial Conference
24–25	The Hague	International Conference on Innovative Research, and Appropriate Health Care for the People of Europe
24–26	The Hague	Ministerial Conference on Trafficking in Women
25	Brussels	European Parliament Plenary
29–30	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council and IGC Ministerial)
May 1997		
*6–7	Strasbourg	Council of Europe Ministerial
12	Brussels	Ecofin Council
12–13	Brussels	Agriculture Council
12–13	Paris	WEU Ministerial
12–16	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
14–15	Brussels	Research Council
15	Brussels	Political Committee
20	Brussels	Internal Market Council
22	Brussels	Political Committee
*25–27	Domburg	Agriculture Council (Informal)
26	Brussels	Energy Council
27–28	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council
28–29	Brussels	European Parliament Plenary
29	Brussels	Telecommunications Council
June 1997		
2–3	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council (and ICG Ministerial)
5	Luxembourg	Health Council
5	Luxembourg	Development Council
*5–6	The Hague	K4 Committee
9	Luxembourg	Ecofin Council
9–10	Luxembourg	Agriculture Council
9–13	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
10	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council (tbc)
12	Luxembourg	Social Affairs Council
16–17	Amsterdam	European Council
17–18	Luxembourg	Transport Council
19	Brussels	Political Committee
*20–22	Denver	G7
*23	Luxembourg	Fisheries Council
23–24	Luxembourg	Environment Council
25–26	Brussels	European Parliament Plenary
26	Luxembourg	Education Council

European calendar: February–July 1997

	Venue	*Event*
30	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council
30	Luxembourg	Culture Council
July 1997		
1		Luxembourg Presidency begins
*7	Brussels	Ecofin Council
*12–13	?	Labour and Social Affairs Council (Informal)
*14–18	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
*22	Brussels	Agriculture Council
*22–23	Brussels	General Affairs Council
*24	Brussels	Budget Council

This calendar is primarily concerned with European Union matters, but certain other relevant events are also included. Events and dates quoted are based on the information available on the date of issue.

Commonwealth Institute

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for future assistance to the Commonwealth Institute. [13913]

Mr. Rifkind: I value the work of the Commonwealth Institute and recognise the efforts it has made to modernise its operations, increase revenue and seek private sector investment. I am therefore pleased to confirm that we have decided to give the institute a grant in aid of £800,000 for the financial year 1997–98; and £600,000 for the year 1998–99. The question of funding beyond 1999 will be subject to normal public expenditure constraints and procedures. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office will continue to support the institute's attempts to obtain further private sector investment.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Alcohol Booster Kits

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received concerning alcohol booster kits; and if he will make a statement. [10881]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have received no representations on alcohol booster kits, other than a letter from my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Sir A. Haselhurst), which was passed to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food as the responsible Department.

EU Funds (Applications)

Mr. MacShane: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful attempts have been made by United Kingdom organisations in the last four years to obtain funds from the EU's (i) Retex, (ii) small and medium enterprises initiative, (iii) Rechar II and (iv) Resider II schemes: and what funds have been allocated to the United Kingdom under each of these schemes. [12343]

Mr. Greg Knight: The European Commission's notices for the Community initiatives to which the hon. Member refers were published on 1 July 1994. The notices stated that member states' programmes should be sent to the Commission within four months. Because of the late adoption by the Commission of many of the programmes under these initiatives in the UK and throughout the EU, the first offers of grants were not made until the second half of 1995. The latest figures for project applications from UK local authorities and other bodies for these four initiatives are:

Community initiative 1994–99	*Number of applications received since 1994*	*Number of applications approved*	*Number of applications rejected*	*Number of applications still under consideration*
Retex II	201	86	57	58
SME	437	63	67	307
Rechar II	1,509	575	557	377
Resider II	235	89	103	43
Total	2,382	813	784	785

The allocations to the UK for each of the four Initiatives are:

	£ million
(i) Retex II	26.71
(ii) SME	49.14
(iii) Rechar II	119.16
(iv) Resider II	33.18

Trade Fairs

Mr. Pearson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what research has been conducted by his Department on the effects an annual bidding competition for trade fair representation by United Kingdom companies will have on long-term planning by chambers of commerce and trade associations. [13409]

Mr. Nelson: None.

The annual trade fairs bidding competition is a long-established mechanism. In the past, we have helped industry to plan ahead by undertaking to support some large—so called "core"—events for three years. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) on 17 January, *Official Report*, columns *392–93*.

My intention is to make all support for trade fairs after the current round available through the sector challenge. This also provides industry with the opportunity to submit projects which span a three-year period.

Export Promotion

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much money the United Kingdom currently

spends per capita on export promotion; what is the European average; and if he will list the sums for each other EU country. [12863]

Mr. Nelson: As shown in the latest British Overseas Trade Board annual report, the total cost of the overseas trade services during 1994–95 was £224.7 million, or £3.83 per capita.

With regard to export promotion expenditure by other European countries, I refer the hon. Lady to the letter of 6 December 1995 from my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) to the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms Quin) a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Mr. Hendry: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what further steps he intends to take to help United Kingdom firms succeed through exporting. [13995]

Mr. Nelson: It is crucial that UK firms take full advantage of business opportunities overseas. The assistance available from Government under their overseas trade services can often play a vital role in this process.

I am therefore publishing today a new range of menus which explain clearly and concisely how the OTS can help UK firms win in each of our top 80 export markets. The menus will enable business links and the OTS to provide export information assistance tailored to the needs of individual companies. It is part of the new "winning through exporting" family of business support. I have placed copies of this material in the Library of the both Houses. It is available on the Internet and will shortly be available on CD-ROM.

Mergers

Dr. Howells: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his policy in respect of receiving representations directly from the parties to a proposed merger which has been referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in advance of the publication of the commission's report and his final decision; and if he will make a statement. [13296]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 29 January 1997]:* It is the task of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission to conduct a detailed and thorough investigation of any merger which has been referred to it. Accordingly, the policy of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade is not himself to receive representations from the parties to mergers prior to announcing his decision on the MMC's report and publishing it. While the report remains confidential, it would be inappropriate for Ministers' views to be influenced, or appear to be influenced, by lobbying by any particular interest. During an MMC inquiry, the parties are encouraged to make representations to the MMC and any representations received by the Department are forwarded to the MMC for their consideration. After the MMC's report is received, representations from the parties on the content of the report are not, except in exceptional circumstances, seen by a Minister until after the decision on the report is made.

SCOTLAND

NHS Trusts (Deficits)

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list *(a)* the NHS trusts which had a real retained deficit at the end of 1995–96 and *(b)* the size of the deficit recorded by each of these trusts in that year. [12049]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Two NHS trusts, Central Scotland Healthcare and the Victoria Infirmary, Glasgow, had a retained deficit at the end of 1995–96. In both cases, the deficits occurred as a result of book losses relating to fixed asset disposals. Only one of these trusts, Central Scotland Healthcare, had an in-year deficit—£726,000—in 1995–96.

Oil and Gas Installations

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions in 1996 and 1997 his Department's *(a)* officials and *(b)* consultants have had in connection with decommissioning of oil or gas installations in relation to the Oslo and Paris Commission; on what dates; and in what form. [12595]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Scottish Office officials have had many discussions, including interdepartmental discussions about the decommissioning of oil and gas installations. No consultants have been employed by the Scottish Office to consider this issue.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the licence for disposal of Brent Spar No. 975—SOAFD re/No. FKB/296—signed on 9 May 1995 remains in operation. [12632]

Mr. Robertson: The licence expired on 8 November 1995.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what application the *(a)* best practicable environmental option and *(b)* licence granted for disposal of the Brent Spar has outside British territorial waters. [12935]

Mr. Robertson: In seeking approval to its abandonment programme for the Brent Spar, Shell UK Ltd. was required to undertake a best practicable environmental option assessment. This concluded that the BPEO was deep-sea disposal of the installation at a site within United Kingdom-controlled waters in the north-east Atlantic. The Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 licence applied only in respect of the designated disposal site.

West Dunbartonshire Council

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the financial allocation to West Dunbartonshire council for 1997–98. [12819]

Mr. Kynoch: The grant aided expenditure assessment for West Dunbartonshire council for 1997–98 is £112.3 million, and provision of £13.7 million has been made for loan and leasing charges. Government support for the council's expenditure in 1997–98 is shown in the table.

	£ million
Basic aggregate external finance (AEF)	109.0
Additional AEF from self-financed mismatch scheme	1.9
Supplementary mismatch scheme	0.9
District equalisation scheme	0.15
Total	111.9

The council's total level of AEF is 59 per cent. per head of population higher than the average level for English local authorities.

Energy Conservation

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures he proposes to improve energy conservation in the housing stock in Scotland. [12858]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The Home Energy Conservation Act 1995, which was introduced in Scotland on 1 December 1996, will promote conservation by requiring local authorities to draw up strategies to achieve significant improvements in energy efficiency in residential accommodation. Local authorities have been set a target of a 30 per cent. improvement over the next 10 to 15 years. For new homes, the building regulations are to be amended to include a requirement for an energy rating. This will also strongly encourage conservation.

NHS Staff

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the numbers employed for the period September 1990 to 1995 inclusive expressed as whole-time equivalents and numbers, by gender and by ethnic status for the staff groups (1) chiropodists, (2) foot care assistants, (3) dietitians, (4) occupational therapists, (5) occupational therapy helpers, (6) orthoptists, (7) physiotherapists, (8) physiotherapy helpers, (9) diagnostic radiographers, (10) therapeutic radiographers, (11) radiographer helpers, (12) technical instructors in professions allied to medicine, (13) other professions allied to medicine, (14) optometrists, (15) pharmacists, (16) speech and language therapists, (17) assistant speech and language therapists, (18) whole-time chaplains, (19) assistant chaplains, (2) clinical scientists, (21) clinical psychologists, (22) clinical psychotherapists, (23) dental auxiliaries, (24) medical laboratory scientific officers, (25) laboratory support grades, (26) medical technical officers and assistants, (27) other professional and technical staff, excluding works staff, (28) administrative and clerical, (29) general managers, (30) senior managers, (31) maintenance, (32) health care assistants and (33) nursery nurses. [13240]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As the information requested is lengthy, I have arranged for it to be placed in the Library of the House.

Speech and Language Disorders

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has for centres of excellence in Scotland similar to those in England, for the assessment and diagnosis of children with specific speech and language disorders; and how the planned provision in Scotland differs from that in England and Wales. [13472]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Health boards are responsible for assessing the needs of their residents with speech and language disorders and determining, with general practitioners, the services required to meet those needs and where to purchase them. Local authorities have the responsibility to meet the therapy needs of children with special speech and language needs.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what current research into specific speech and language disorders is being sponsored by his Department and its agencies. [13449]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office is currently funding four research projects into speech and language disorders. The information is set out in the table:

Title	*Amount*
Evaluation of the Phoniatric, Psychological and General Health Status Benefits of Speech Therapy in Patients with Dysphonia	£120,300 (over three years)
Comprehension and Production of Explanations in Children with Language Impairment	£98,400 (over two years)
Towards Effective Assessment of Right Hemisphere Language and Communication in Stroke and Brain Tumour	£109,800 (over three years)
CLEFTNET SCOTLAND: Application of New Technology to the Treatment of Intractable Speech Disorders Associated with Cleft Palate Within a Scottish Context	£90,000 (over two years)

In addition to these projects, the Scottish Office is part-funding an ear, nose and throat consultant within the Medical Research Council Institute of Hearing Research in Glasgow which is co-ordinating a multi-centre trial into the potential deficits following otitis media with effusion, also known as glue ear, in children which may include disorders of speech and language. The current phase of the trial will end in about 18 months time.

The health services research unit in Aberdeen university, which is core funded by the Scottish Office, is undertaking a project looking at the problem of aphasia following stroke, by determining current practice and provision of speech and language therapy for sufferers, and assessing existing evidence about alternative forms of treatment. This project is due to end in March 1997.

Speech Therapists

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of the training of Scottish speech therapists is allocated to training in centres of excellence outside Scotland. [13448]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not held centrally.

Poll and Council Tax Arrears

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of uncollected arrears of poll tax and council tax for each local authority in total and as a percentage of each authority's current council tax revenue. [13537]

Mr. Kynoch: The table shows the amount of council tax councils have budgeted to collect for the current year and the available information on uncollected council tax and community charge income in total and expressed as a percentage of the amount budgeted to be collected for the current year. The available information on uncollected community charges and council tax includes uncollected water charges and is therefore not directly comparable with the amount of council tax which authorities budgeted to collect in 1996–97.

Council	*(1) Amount of council tax budgeted to be collected for 1996–97* (£ thousand)	*(2) Total amount of uncollected[1] community charges, council tax and water charges* (£ thousand)	*(3) Column 2 as percentage of column 1*
Aberdeen City	49,634	21,085	42.5
Aberdeenshire	47,081	9,501	20.2
Angus	23,797	8,238	34.6
Argyll and Bute	22,901	12,234	53.4
Clackmannanshire	10,616	3,530	33.3
Dumfries and Galloway	31,034	8,106	26.1
Dundee City	36,499	21,560	59.1
East Ayrshire	24,945	16,480	66.1
East Dunbartonshire	28,341	11,520	40.6
East Lothian	21,596	13,373	61.9
East Renfrewshire	21,627	6,918	32.0
Edinburgh City	139,913	107,096	76.5
Falkirk	27,476	8,897	32.4
Fife	76,268	33,369	43.8
Glasgow City	145,985	203,671	139.5
Highland	47,669	23,024	48.3
Inverclyde	19,330	14,774	76.4
Midlothian	18,575	13,892	74.8
Moray	16,808	4,596	27.3
North Ayrshire	27,831	25,131	90.3
North Lanarkshire	67,714	16,493	[2]24.4
Orkney	3,023	385	12.7
Perth and Kinross	34,144	7,887	23.1
Renfrewshire	40,879	30,135	73.7
Scottish Borders	20,993	5,256	25.0
Shetland	3,031	471	15.5
South Ayrshire	29,719	10,105	34.0
South Lanarkshire	68,696	50,805	74.0
Stirling	20,375	7,033	34.5
West Dunbartonshire	23,255	20,301	87.3
West Lothian	29,978	25,304	84.4
Western Isles	4,654	1,986	42.7
Scotland	1,184,387	743,156	62.7

Source:

1. 1996–97 Budget Estimate Returns.

2. October 1996 Council Tax and Community Charge Income Returns.

Notes:

[1] Amount uncollected as reported by councils up to end October 1996.

The figures include uncollected council water charges and community water charges.

[2] Excludes uncollected community charges which North Lanarkshire have been unable to supply.

Language Unit

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the recommended facilities and staffing levels for a language unit. [13471]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office makes no recommendations on these matters.

NHS Trust Deficits

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list *(a)* the NHS trusts which are currently forecast to show a deficit at the end of 1996–97 and *(b)* the size of the end-of-year deficit forecast for each of the trusts. [12051]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 21 January 1997]:* Fife Healthcare is the only NHS trust in Scotland projecting a retained deficit for 1996–97 as a result of a funding gap. The sum involved in £1.3 million and the trust chairman and the new chief executive are addressing it.

Two other trusts are projecting retained deficits arising from the disposal of assets at less than book value.

Dental Services

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to increase public awareness of the complaints procedure in respect of NHS dentists; and in which languages information leaflets are published. [12845]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 29 January 1997]:* All dentists were provided with stocks of the leaflet and poster publicising the new NHS complaints system for display in their practice. The leaflet is available in Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Gujarati and Cantonese.

Fossil Fuel Levy

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the projected total amount collected from the fossil fuel levy in Scotland for the first year of its operation; and what is the total figure to date. [13283]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 29 January 1997]:* The Fossil Fuel Levy (Scotland) Regulations came into effect on 16 February 1996. The amount projected to be collected by the levy from then until 31 March 1997 was £4.7 million.

Settlement of the amounts due to 31 March 1997 need not be made until the end of May 1997. The amount due to be collected so far is therefore not known.

TREASURY

Sustainable Development

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how his Department has used the UK indicators for sustainable development in *(a)* the production of the Department's annual report, *(b)* monitoring progress towards meeting the objectives set out in the UK sustainable development strategy and *(c)* assessing the environmental implications of policy options; and what plans they have to extend their use in future within the Department. [12271]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The UK sustainable development indicators published in March 1996 are preliminary, intended to stimulate discussion about how we measure whether our development is sustainable. The indicators were developed to address and monitor the key sustainable development issues highlighted in the UK sustainable development strategy published in 1994.

As such, they have been used to inform decisions about environmental priorities for action and work programmes in the year ahead, which will be reported in the annual White Paper on sustainable development.

The indicators are one of many sources of information about the way in which economic activity interacts with the environment. As the indicators are revised and refined, they should become more useful as a source of environmental information to inform consideration of the environmental implications of policy options.

Pension Age Population

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women living in the United Kingdom who are over the age of 65 years. [12172]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 30 January 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the number of men and women living in the United Kingdom who are over the age of 65 years.

The latest available population estimates relate to mid-1995. The estimated number of those resident in the United Kingdom, who are aged over 65, is 3,477.7 thousand men and 5,193.1 thousand women.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many old age pensioners there are in Wales. [12546]

Mrs. Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Barry Jones, dated 30 January 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the number of old age pensioners there are in Wales.

The latest available resident population estimates relate to mid-1995. The estimated number of people of pensionable age (65 or over for men and 60 or over for women) in Wales is 581.4 thousand.

Death Statistics

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the number of deaths resulting from *(a)* AIDS and *(b)* motor neurone disease in the latest year for which figures are available. [12568]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Spencer Batiste, dated 30 January 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to your recent question on the number of deaths from AIDS and motor neurone disease in the latest year for which figures are available.

In 1995, the latest year for which figures are available to the ONS, there were 552 deaths for which HIV infection or AIDS (ICD* 042–044) and 1,141 for which motor neurone disease (ICD* 335.2) respectively were the underlying cause of death, derived from death registration.

As it is known that many of those who complete death certificates refrain from putting AIDS and HIV infection as a cause on what is essentially a public document, the number of deaths with codes ICD 042–044 is an underestimate of the true number of deaths from these causes.

From the voluntary confidential register of AIDS cases at the Public Health Laboratory Services AIDS Centre, the number of deaths in AIDS patients in England and Wales in 1995 was 1,149. The aforementioned underestimate of deaths means that this number, too, is an underestimate.

* International Classification of Diseases, 9th Revision.

Employment Statistics

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of men aged 50 years or over were in full-time employment on 31 March for each year since 1980. [12551]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. David Hinchliffe, dated 30 January 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the percentage of men aged 50 years and over who were in full-time employment for each year since 1980.

The information for Great Britain available from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) is shown in the table below. There are no comparable figures available prior to 1984.

Men aged 50–64 working full-time[1] as a percentage of all men aged 50–64 (Great Britain)

	Per cent.
Spring 1984	67.6
Spring 1985	67.2
Spring 1986	65.8
Spring 1987	64.4
Spring 1988	65.5
Spring 1989	66.3
Spring 1990	66.0
Spring 1991	64.8
Spring 1992	61.8
Spring 1993	59.3
Spring 1994	59.2
Spring 1995	59.6
Spring 1996	59.9

Source:
ONS, Labour Force Survey.
Note:
[1] Full-time in main job based on respondents' self-assessments.
N.B. Spring covers the period March-May.

Earnings (Scotland)

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what was the proportion of full-time workers in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* each of the former regional council areas of Scotland, *(c)* each of the new unitary local authority areas in Scotland and *(d)* Great Britain with hourly earnings in term of gross pay, both including and excluding overtime, below (i) £6.31, (ii) £5.89, (iii) £4.42 and (iv) £3.00 for the categories (1) male manual, (2) male non-manual, (3) all male workers, (4) female manual, (5) female non-manual, (6) all female workers, (7) all manual, (8) all non-manual and (9) all workers; [11715]

(2) what are the average weekly earnings (i) including and (ii) excluding overtime for part-time workers in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* each of the former regional council areas of Scotland, *(c)* each of the new unitary local authority areas in Scotland and *(d)* Great Britain, broken down for (1) men and (2) women in (A) manual employment, (B) non-manual employment and (C) for all workers; [11713]

(3) if he will list the average earnings in terms of gross pay, both including and excluding overtime, for full-time workers in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* each of the former regional council areas of Scotland, *(c)* each of the new unitary authority areas in Scotland and *(d)* Great Britain for (i) manual, (ii) non-manual and (iii) all workers; [11717]

(4) what is the percentage of full-time workers in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* each of the former regional council areas of Scotland, *(c)* each of the new unitary local authority areas in Scotland and *(d)* Great Britain, earning in terms of gross pay, both including and excluding overtime, less than (i) £239.16 per week, (ii) £223.27 per week and (iii) £157.45 per week in the categories (1) male manual, (2) male non-manual, (3) all male workers, (4) female manual, (5) female non-manual, (6) all female workers, (7) all manuals, (8) all non-manual and (9) all workers; [11716]

(5) what is the percentage of workers on adult rates of pay in part-time employment whose hourly earnings *(a)* including and *(b)* excluding overtime pay are less than (i) £4.42 per hour,(ii) £5.89 per hour, (iii) £6.31 per hour and (iv) average weekly earnings in (w) Scotland, (x) each of the former regional council areas of Scotland, (y) each of the new unitary local authority areas in Scotland and (z) Great Britain, broken down in each case into (1) male manual, (2) male non-manual, (3) all male workers, (4) female manual, (5) female non-manual, (6) all female workers, (7) all manual, (8) all non-manual and (9) all workers. [11714]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The latest information, from the April 1996 new earnings survey, is contained in tables which have been placed in the Library.

Abortion

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many abortions were performed nationally in each of the last eight quarters. [12042]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Chris Smith, dated 30 January 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the number of abortions performed nationally in each of the last eight quarters.

The figures requested are shown in the table below:

Number of legal abortions performed in Great Britain, June quarter 1994 - March quarter 1996

	Number
June quarter 1994	43,930
September quarter 1994	44,773
December quarter 1994	42,974
March quarter 1995	45,695
June quarter 1995	42,444
September quarter 1995	43,566
December quarter 1995	41,885
March quarter 1996	48,425

Construction Industry

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met representatives of the housebuilding industry to discuss the employment status of building operatives; and if he will make a statement on the outcome of that meeting. [13594]

Mr. Jack: I arranged for my officials to meet representatives of the House-Builders Federation on 20 December 1996. I understand that they had a useful and constructive meeting at which the Inland Revenue was able to offer practical help for the federation's members with their reviews of the employment status of their workers. The House-Builders Federation will continue to be included in future consultations with the industry on employment status.

Company Cars

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his Department's plans to remove tax incentives to drive greater mileages. [13337]

Mr. Jack: I have nothing further to add to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) on 16 January 1997 *Official Report*, column *449*.

Economic and Finance Council

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the recent Council meeting of the Economic and Finance Ministers of the European Union. [13994]

Mr. Oppenheim: On 27 January, I attended the Economic and Finance Council of the European Union in Brussels on behalf of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The Council discussed the Dutch Presidency's work programme for ECOFIN. This emphasised the need for budget discipline in the Community, co-operation to tackle unemployment and implement structural reform and measures to combat fraud.

Over lunch, the Council held a structured dialogue with Ministers from central and eastern European countries. The discussion focused on the need to adopt medium-term budgetary frameworks in these associated countries and invited Ministers from them to share their experiences of tackling budgetary consolidation.

External lending mandates and guarantees for the European investment bank were discussed and a possible basis for agreement identified. However, no final decisions were taken as this is subject to a UK parliamentary scrutiny reserve.

The Commission reported that it would shortly be announcing the jury to shortlist designs for the common side of euro coins. The final design for the coins will be discussed again at a future ECOFIN meeting.

The Commission also agreed to produce formal proposals for lending to the Ukraine and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. These will also be discussed at a later meeting of the Council.

Income Tax

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the annual cost of exempting the first £200 of income from savings and investments from income tax. [12797]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* The full year cost at 1997–98 income levels of exempting from income tax the first £200 of income from savings and investments which are currently taxable is estimated to be around £0.5 billion. It is not possible to provide an estimate which takes into account tax-free savings instruments such as tax-exempt special savings accounts, personal equity plans and so on.

Tax and National Insurance Contributions

Ms Corston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 18 December 1996, *Official Report*, columns *637–38*, how many individuals who pay tax but do not pay national insurance contributions are pensioners or of pensionable age; and how many individuals pay national insurance contributions but do not pay income tax. [13019]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 28 January 1997]:* In 1996–97, there are 4.82 million individuals who pay income tax but who do not pay national insurance contributions, some 3.62 million of these are over pension age—65 for men, 60 for women; the remaining 1.2 million individuals do not pay NIC because their earnings or self-employment income is below the NIC threshold, but pay income tax because of their income from occupational pensions and investments. About 1 million individuals pay national insurance contributions but do not pay income tax.

Earnings

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the number of people in each region of the United Kingdom who earn below the average weekly wage by *(a)* gender and *(b)* age groups (i) under 20 years, (ii) 20 to 45 years and (iii) 45 to 65 years; and if he will make a statement. [12649]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 29 January 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Archy Kirkwood, dated 30 January 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the number of people in all regions of the UK earning below the average weekly wage by gender and age groups.

The latest information from the New Earnings Survey, April 1996, is contained in the attached tables.

NES – April 1996 (GB)

Full-time employees on adult rates, whose pay for the survey period was unaffected by absence

Percentage of employees earning less than mean gross weekly earnings (£351.5)

Standard statistical region	*South East*	*East Anglia*	*South West*	*West Midlands*	*East Midlands*
Males					
Age group					
<20	98.3	96.9	98.2	100.0	96.6
20–45	45.3	60.1	59.0	60.9	61.3
45–65	39.4	56.2	54.1	54.6	59.0
All ages	43.8	59.1	57.7	59.0	60.8
Females					
Age group					
<20	99.2	100.0	100.0	98.6	100.0
20–45	64.4	80.7	81.4	82.4	84.6
45–65	67.9	77.1	78.1	78.7	80.2
All ages	66.0	80.0	80.7	81.6	83.5

Standard statistical region	*Yorkshire and Humberside*	*North West*	*North*	*Wales*	*Scotland*	*Great Britain*
Male						
Age group						
<20	100.0	97.4	100.0	96.9	98.8	98.4
20–45	62.8	59.6	62.9	63.7	60.7	55.7
45–65	54.2	50.9	54.4	55.5	53.5	49.6
All ages	60.3	56.9	60.3	61.2	58.8	54.1
Females						
Age group						
<20	100.0	100.0	97.0	100.0	100.0	99.5
20–45	82.3	80.6	83.8	85.4	80.9	75.7
45–65	79.8	76.5	76.4	78.0	75.2	74.3
All ages	82.0	79.7	81.8	83.4	79.7	75.7

Uncollected Tax

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much uncollected tax was owed to the Inland Revenue at the end of the last financial year; and how much has been written off in each of the last five years. [13038]

Mr. Michael Jack *[holding answer 29 January 1997]:* The amount of uncollected assessed tax owed to the Inland Revenue as at the end of October 1995, the latest date for which figures are available, is £2,908.6 million or 3.3 per cent. of the net tax charged. This amount represents tax assessed and collectible but not paid as at the date.

The amounts of tax remitted or written off for each of the last five years are shown in the following table.

Year to end October	*Amount remitted/written off £ thousands*
1995	755,995
1994	1,159,694
1993	1,580,200
1992	1,694,246
1991	883,923

This information is available in the Inland Revenue Board's report.

The Board of Inland Revenue allows remissions of tax on a case-by-case basis as an aspect of responsibilities for the care and management of the various taxes.

Insolvencies, where the Inland Revenue has very little control over the amount recoverable, account for the vast majority of tax written off.

Taxation of Trusts

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the revenue effect on the Exchequer in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99 of putting the taxation of trusts on the same basis as the taxation of individuals; and if he will make a statement. [13256]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 29 January 1997]:* I regret that the information as requested is not available.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the revenue effect on the Exchequer in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99 of applying a 40 per cent. capital gains tax rate for interst in possession trusts; and if he will make a statement. [13257]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 29 January 1997]:* The capital gains tax yield is tentatively estimated to increase by around £50 million if a capital gains tax rate of 40 per cent. were applied to those gains of trusts which will be chargeable at 23 per cent. for 1997–98. The yield for later years would depend on future levels of capital gains. In practice, the revenue effect of such a change may be significantly different due to changes in taxpayers' behaviour.

The circumstances of beneficiaries of interest in possession trusts vary. Some may not be liable to capital gains tax at all, while others may be liable at 40 per cent. on their personal gains. Applying a rate equal to the basic rate to all such trusts reflects this range of potential liabilities while at the same time avoiding the need for beneficiaries to become involved in making capital gains tax computations.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Education Expenditure

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of gross domestic product has been spent on education in each year since 1991; and if she will make a statement. [13064]

Mr. Robin Squire: The latest published time series presenting the data is as follows:

Year	*Percentage of GDP spent on education*
1991–92	5.1
1992–93	5.3
1993–94	5.2
1994–95	5.2
1995–96	5.1

This table covers public expenditure on education in the United Kingdom.

Unemployment (Lancashire)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what policies have been introduced to bring down the jobless total in Lancashire since 1992. [13276]

Mr. Forth: As a result of sound macro-economic policies and a flexible deregulated labour market, unemployment has fallen over the last four years by over 1 million in the United Kingdom, and by nearly 24,000 in Lancashire.

In order to help unemployed people obtain the jobs economic growth is now delivering, a wide range of employment and training measures are available both nationally and in Lancashire. From February, a total of 31 project work pilots—one in Preston, Lancashire—will help up to 100,000 people. In addition, a new contract for work pilot initiative in Lancashire, starting in April, will explore ways in which the talents of the private sector might be used to help more very long-term unemployed people back to work.

Training (York)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the number of people aged 25 years or under living in the York parliamentary constituency attending a Government-funded training scheme *(a)* currently and *(b)* at the same date in each of the previous five years. [13581]

Mr. Paice: Information on Government-supported training programmes is not available for people living in individual constituencies.

College Funding

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment for what reasons she has decided not to fund the demand-led element of further education colleges' funding beyond the autumn term in 1996. [13564]

Mr. Paice: My right hon. Friend has made no such decision. In the light of the unprecedented rate of expansion of the further education sector after the academic year 1994–95, she has requested the Further Education Funding Council for England to consider what steps are consistent with the containment of total expenditure in future years within the Government's planned levels of expenditure on further education. She will consider the council's advice on the available options when it is received.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which TECs have been converted to chambers of commerce, enterprise and training; and which TECs are currently applying for this status. [13590]

Mr. Paice: The TECs which have become chambers of commerce, training and enterprise are those in Milton Keynes and north Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire, Sussex, South Derbyshire, Oldham, St. Helens, Rotherham, Wolverhampton, Shropshire and Hereford and Worcester. Applications to form chambers of commerce training and enterprise have been received from local partners in Greater Peterborough, Wigan, Coventry and Warwickshire, and Norfolk and Waveney.

Grant-maintained Schools

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list all the *(a)* secondary schools and *(b)* primary schools in Kent that currently have grant-maintained status and the date on which each school achieved grant-maintained status. [13423]

Mr. Forth: The information requested is shown in the tables.

Grant-maintained (GM) schools in Kent

Name of school	*Date became GM*
GM secondary schools	
The Grammar School for Girls Wilmington	1 September 1989
The Cornwallis School	1 April 1991
The Maplesden Noakes School	1 April 1991
Wilmington Grammar School for Boys	1 April 1991
Dartford Grammar School for Boys	1 September 1991
Homewood School and Sixth Form College	1 September 1991
Southlands Comprehensive School	1 September 1991
St. George's CE School	1 September 1991
Thamesview School	1 September 1991
Aylesford School	1 January 1992
Cranbrook School	1 January 1992
Dartford Grammar School for Girls	1 January 1992
Oldborough Manor Community School	1 January 1992
Senacre Technology College	1 January 1992
Simon Langton Grammar School for Boys	1 January 1992
Wrotham School	1 January 1992
Angley School	1 April 1992
Fulston Manor School	1 April 1992
Minster College	1 April 1992
Oakwood Park Grammar School	1 April 1992
Rainham Mark Grammar School	1 April 1992
Robert Napier School	1 April 1992
The Skinners' School	1 April 1992
Chatham Grammar School for Girls	1 September 1992
Sandown Court Community College	1 September 1992
Sir Roger Manwood's School	1 September 1992
The Archbishop's CE GM School	1 September 1992
The Bradbourne School	1 September 1992
The Canterbury High School	1 September 1992
The Malling School	1 September 1992
Meopham GM School	7 September 1992
St. Simon Stock School	1 January 1993
The Hugh Christie School	1 January 1993
Mascalls School	1 April 1993
St. Gregory's Catholic Comprehensive School	1 April 1993
St. John Fisher Catholic Comprehensive School	1 April 1993
The Charles Dickens School	1 April 1993
The Folkestone School for Girls	1 April 1993
The Westlands School	1 April 1993
The Wildernesse School	1 April 1993
Barton Court Grammar School	1 September 1993
Chaucer Technology School	1 September 1993
Cheyne Middle School	1 September 1993
Herne Bay High School	1 September 1993
Hillview School for Girls	1 September 1993
Queen Elizabeth's School	1 September 1993
Rochester Grammar School for Girls	1 September 1993
Southfields School	1 September 1993
St. Anselm's RC School	1 September 1993
St. Edmund's RC Comprehensive School	1 September 1993
St. George's CE High School	1 September 1993
The Montgomery School	1 September 1993
The Thomas Aveling School	1 September 1993
Tonbridge Grammar School for Girls	1 September 1993
Northfleet School for Boys	1 January 1994
The Hayesbrook School	1 January 1994
Upbury Manor High School	1 January 1994
Dane Court Grammar School	1 April 1994
Dover Grammar School for Boys	1 April 1994
Pent Valley School GM Comprehensive	1 April 1994
St. John's RC GM Comprehensive School	1 April 1994
The Howard School	1 April 1994
Chatham House Grammar School	1 September 1994
Sandwich Technology School	1 January 1995
Gravesend Grammar School for Boys	1 September 1995
Brockhill Park School	1 December 1995
Gravesend Grammar School for Girls	1 January 1996
The Bennett Memorial Diocesan School	1 January 1996
GM primary schools	
Snodland CE Primary School	1 January 1992
Borough Green Primary School	1 September 1992
Holy Trinity CE Primary School, Gravesend	1 September 1992
Roseacre Junior School	1 April 1993
Sutton at Hone CE GM Primary School	1 April 1993
Allington Primary School	1 September 1993
Ditton CE Junior School	1 September 1993
Herne Bay Junior School	1 September 1993
Holy Family RC GM Primary School	1 September 1993
Newington Junior School	1 September 1993
St. Botolph's CE Primary School	1 September 1993
St. Francis' RC Primary School	1 September 1993
Ditton Infant School	1 January 1994
Holy Trinity CE Primary School, Dartford	1 January 1994
St. Bartholomews RC Primary School	1 January 1994
Horton Kirby CE Primary School	1 April 1994
Our Lady of Hartley RC Primary School	1 April 1994
Stella Maris RC Primary School	1 April 1994
Greatstone Primary School	1 September 1994
Halfway Houses Primary School	1 September 1994
St. Joseph's RC Primary School	1 September 1994
Wilmington Primary School	1 September 1994
Wincheap Primary School	1 September 1994
Brookfield Junior School	1 July 1995
All Souls' CE Primary School	1 September 1995
Harcourt Primary School	1 September 1995
Willesborough GM Junior School	1 January 1996
Park Farm County Primary School	1 October 1996

Career Development Loans

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many career development loans have been awarded in the years 1994–95, 1995–96 and 1996–97 to date (i) in each standard region, (ii) in Great Britain as a whole and (iii) in each of the areas covered by the career development loan plus pilot scheme. [13589]

Mr. Paice: Details of approved career development loans by region and nationally for the years 1994–95, 1995–96 and 1996–97 to date are:

Standard region	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97 to date*[1]
North East	529	515	352
Merseyside	314	280	229
North West	897	878	629
Yorkshire and Humberside	1,152	1,072	712
West Midlands	924	956	563
East Midlands	819	862	574
Eastern	1,116	1,131	734
South East	2,263	1,868	1,332
London	3,880	2,890	1,972
South West	1,429	1,245	807
Wales	569	579	490
Scotland	1,277	1,011	747
Great Britain	15,169	13,287	9,141

[1] As of 31 December 1996.

The career development loan plus pilot commenced on 18 September 1995 and operates in the counties of Glamorgan, Mid Glamorgan, Gwent, Somerset and the former county of Avon. The total number of approved loans in the pilot area for 1995–96 is 412, and for 1996–97 to date 585.

Black Country Careers Services Ltd.

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment for what reasons Black Country Careers Service Ltd. was unsuccessful in re-tendering to run careers services in the black country; and if she will place in the Library a copy of the tender documents of each tender submitted and of the evaluation report on each. [13410]

Mr. Paice: Black Country Careers Services Ltd. was given the reasons why its bid was unsuccessful at a meeting on 2 January. All careers service bids were subject to competitive tendering, which involved a rigorous, fair, and unbiased assessment process against the criteria published in the prospectus. All bids are treated as commercial-in-confidence and I am therefore not able to reveal or discuss the contents or results of any bids or details of their evaluation.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the evidence from UNICEF regarding the Indonesian police referred to by the Overseas Development Administration in representative oral evidence to the Committee of Public Accounts on 22 January. [13495]

Dr. Liam Fox: Agreement to release of the letter has been sought from the UNICEF representative in Jakarta. I will write to the hon. Lady as soon as a reply has been received.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Public Trustee Service

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what consideration he has given to the continuing need for a trustee service provided by the Public Trustee, following the establishment of the Public Trust Office as a next steps agency; and if he will make a statement. [13912]

Mr. Streeter: A review of the trust functions of the Public Trustee has been carried out by a committee which included representatives from the Public Trust Office, the Official Solicitor's Office, the Treasury Solicitor's Office, the Treasury and the Law Commission. The committee examined a number of options and concluded that there was a continuing need for a trustee service provided by the public sector and that the balance of advantage for trust beneficiaries and for the Exchequer lay in maintaining the present arrangements. The committee's report recommended that some aspects of current trust law should be reviewed with the aim of making it easier for people to administer trusts and that the Public Trustee should review the literature describing the trustee service to make it more informative. The Lord Chancellor has accepted the committee's report and conclusions. The Law Commission will be reviewing aspects of trust law in due course as part of its sixth programme of law reform and the Pubic Trustee has already undertaken a review of her literature. Copies of the committee's report will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Eviction Warrants

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the consultation process relating to the introduction of fees for eviction warrants suspension hearings; and what notice was given of these fees. [12664]

Mr. Streeter: Copies of the proposed changes to civil fees were sent in July last year to the Law Society, the Bar Council, HM Council of Circuit Judges, the Association of District Judges, the Chief Taxing Master, the Civil Court Users Association, the Advice Services Alliance, the National Consumer Council, the Legal Action Group, the Federation of Small Businesses, the Association of Chambers of Commerce, the Institute of Directors, and the CBI.

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the impact of the introduction of charges for eviction warrant hearings. [12663]

Mr. Streeter: Defendants are encouraged to put their case before a possession order is granted against them, rather than to apply to suspend a possession warrant on grounds of which they could have informed the court at the proper time. Except in those cases where possession is mandatory, possession is never granted without a hearing at which the defendant has an opportunity to put his case before the court. The £10 fee is to be seen in the context that it is estimated to cost the Court Service over £30 to process and hear each application to suspend a possession warrant.

Legal Aid

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the total amount of legal aid paid to non-United Kingdom nationals in the last five years. [12552]

Mr. Streeter: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) on 18 November, *Official Report*, column *424*.

HEALTH

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many incidents of MRSA have been reported each month since January 1992 in each region of England and Wales. [8030]

Mr. Horam: Data on the occurrence of methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus are compiled by the Public Health Laboratory Service from isolates voluntarily submitted by hospitals in England and Wales for specialist typing. The number of recorded incidents of MRSA—three or more patients with the same strain of MRSA in a month from the same hospital—in 1996 for each of the old regional health authorities in England and for Wales have been placed in the Library.

Managing Winter Pressures Reports

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the fortnightly figures for the managing winter pressures reports since November 1996 *(a)* by health authority and *(b)* by region. [13247]

Mr. Horam: These reports are produced informally to reflect rapidly changing conditions as experienced in regions. They are for internal discussion and advice only and are not intended to replace the statistically valid data which the national health service executive publishes every quarter. These give a reliable indication of the performance of the NHS.

Cancer Treatment Waiting Lists

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS patients were on waiting lists for cancer treatments in *(a)* North Yorkshire, *(b)* the Yorkshire and Northern region and *(c)* England in each quarter in the last three years. [13583]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally.

Hospital Waiting Times (Leeds)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on hospital waiting times in Leeds. [13816]

Mr. Horam: Waiting times for in-patient and day case treatment in Leeds have improved considerably over the last year. Latest published figures show that only 265 patients out of 16,022 were waiting more than a year for treatment at the two main hospitals in Leeds last September compared with 1,164 out of 16,935 in September 1995. As regards first out-patient appointments, Leeds hospitals are working towards achieving the patients charter standards so that everyone is seen within 26 weeks of referral by their general practitioner, with nine out of 10 patients seen within 13 weeks.

Colonic Cancer

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on provision within the NHS for screening for colonic cancer. [12028]

Mr. Horam: Genetic testing is available for members of families with genetic syndromes such as familial adenomatous polyposis and hereditary non-polyposis colon cancer, which predispose them to colonic cancer. Recently published results of research on population screening for colonic cancer are to be considered shortly by the national screening committee to weigh effectiveness, acceptability and affordability against potential benefits of such a screening programme.

NHS Staff

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the numbers employed for the period September 1990 to 1995 inclusive expressed as whole-time equivalents and numbers, by gender and by ethnic status for the staff groups; (1) chiropodists, (2) footcare assistants, (3) dietitians, (4) occupational therapists, (5) occupational therapy helpers, (6) orthoptists, (7) physiotherapists, (8) physiotherapy helpers, (9) diagnostic radiographers, (10) therapeutic radiographers, (11) radiographer helpers, (12) technical instructors in professions allied to medicine, (13) other professions allied to medicine, (14) optometrists, (15) pharmacists, (16) speech and language therapists, (17) assistant speech and language therapists, (18) whole-time chaplains, (19) assistant chaplains, (20) clinical scientists, (21) clinical psychologists, (22) clinical psychotherapists, (23) dental auxiliaries, (24) medical laboratory scientific officers, (25) laboratory support grades, (26) medical technical officers and assistants, (27) other professional and technical staff, excluding works staff, (28) administrative and clerical, (29) general managers, (30) senior managers, (31) maintenance, (32) health care assistants and (33) nursery nurses. [13235]

Mr. Malone: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Available information about employees of the national health service hospital and community health services working in these staff groups can be found in various editions of the following Department of Health publications:

"Hospital and Personal Social Services Statistics for England";

"NHS Workforce in England";

"Statistical Bulletin NHS hospital and community health services non-medical staff in England"; and

"NHS hospital and community health services non-medical workforce census; England as at September 1994: ethnic group tables"

Copies of these publications are available in the Library. Information about people employed in these areas of work outside of the NHS HCHS is not available centrally.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 January. [12112]

The Prime Minister: This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

European Court of Human Rights (Compliance Measures)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Prime Minister what steps have been taken by him during the past decade in connection with the implementation of legislation or other compliance measures required as a result of a finding by the European Court of Human Rights of a violation by the United Government or local authorities; what reports he has requested and obtained about *(a)* the case of Graham Gaskin and *(b)* other cases; how much time has been spent by him on such compliance matters in the past 10 years; and what plans he has to improve the speed of compliance with and enforcement of findings of the European Court of Human Rights. [13470]

The Prime Minister: It is Government policy to implement judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, and to do so promptly.

We have a very good record in this respect, but we are aware that in the case of Mr. Gaskin there has been considerable delay. This is an exception and it is being dealt with.

We are content with the manner in which we deal with implementation of judgments and have no plans to alter current practice.

DEFENCE

Royal Yacht

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the *(a)* dates, *(b)* destinations, *(c)* duration, *(d)* passengers and *(e)* cost of the royal yacht Britannia's last 10 voyages; and if he will make a statement. [13223]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 28 January 1997]:* The information requested is as follows:

Date	*Location*	*Royal family member(s) embarked/engagement*
1995		
19–20 June	Rendsburg, Germany	TRH the Duke and Duchess of Kent embarked 19 June
20–23 June	Kiel	TRH the Duke and Duchess of Kent disembarked 21 June
26–27 June	Dundee	Commercial event HRH the Prince of Wales embarked 26–27 June
29 June	Portsmouth	
26 July–2 August	Cowes	HRH the Duke of Edinburgh embarked 28 July–2 August
4–14 August	Western Isles	HM the Queen embarked 4 August HRH the Duke of Edinburgh embarked 7 August Royal visit to Oban—7 August
14 August	Aberdeen	HM the Queen and HRH the Duke of Edinburgh disembarked 14 August
16–21 August	London	HM the Queen and HRH the Duke of Edinburgh and other members of the Royal Family embarked 18–20 August
22 August	Portsmouth	
28–29 September	Gibraltar	Routine visit/fuel
3–9 October	Piraeus	Commercial events
13–20 October	Palma, Balearic Islands	Informal visit
23–27 October	Lisbon, Portugal	Commercial events
30 October	Portsmouth	
1996		
20–21 February	Devonport	Sea training
27–28 February	Ponta Delgada	Routine visit/fuel
6–9 March	Bermuda	Informal visit/fuel
12–17 March	Palm Beach	HRH The Duke of Edinburgh embarked 13–17 March
18–20 March	Savannah	Commercial events
22–26 March	Baltimore, USA	Commercial events
28 March–8 April	Boston, USA	Commercial events HRH The Duke of York embarked 31 March–2 April
15–22 April	Toronto, Canada	Commercial events
26–27 April	Halifax, Canada	Routine visit/fuel
3 May	Ponta Delgada	Routine visit/fuel
7 May	Portsmouth	
22–24 June	Douglas	HRH the Prince of Wales embarked 24 June
25 June	Belfast	Royal visit
26–27 June	Londonderry	HRH the Prince of Wales disembarked 27 June
29 June	Portsmouth	
5 July	Marchwood	HM the Queen Mother embarked
6–7 July	Falmouth	Royal visit
8–10 July	Portsmouth	HM the Queen Mother disembarked 8 July
11–14 July	Amsterdam, The Netherlands	HRH the Duke of Kent embarked 11–12 July
15 July	Portsmouth	
31 July–7 August	Cowes	HRH the Duke of Edinburgh embarked 2–7 August

Date	Location	Royal family member(s) embarked/engagement
7–17 August	Western Isles	HM the Queen embarked 7 August HRH the Duke of Edinburgh embarked 12 August Royal visit to Stranraer—10 August
17 August	Aberdeen	HM the Queen and HRH the Duke of Edinburgh disembarked 17 August
19 August	Portsmouth	

Information on the marginal costs of individual deployments could be provided only at disproportionate cost. I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) on 28 January, *Official Report*, column *200*, for the total annual running costs for Britannia since 1990.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many days the royal yacht Britannia has been on *(a)* active service and *(b)* personal duty to the royal family in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [13230]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 28 January 1997]:* The information requested is as follows:

Year	Total number of days Britannia was used on active service[1,2]	Number of days Britannia was used for personal duty by the royal family[2]
1992	85	12
1993	189	11
1994	128	0
1995	143	11

The precise figures for 1996 are not yet available.

[1] Active service includes all official duties, both royal and commercial, undertaken by HMY Britannia.

[2] These figures include the transit times to and from Portsmouth.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many days in each of the last five years the royal yacht Britannia was *(a)* docked out of service in a home port, *(b)* docked in service in a home port, *(c)* docked in a foreign port and *(d)* at sea; and if he will make a statement. [13220]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 28 January 1997]:* The information requested is as follows:

Year	Docked out of service in a home port[1]	Docked in service in a home port	Docked in a foreign port	At sea
1992	171	135	16	43
1993	44	134	98	89
1994	105	167	39	54
1995	148	99	51	67

The precise figures for 1996 are not yet available.

[1] Includes maintenance and Docking and Essential Defect periods.

Rudolf Hess (Death Certificate)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what consideration he has given to reinstating *(a)* as previously completed and *(b)* with the amendments applied for by the next of kin the cancelled death certificate of Rudolf Hess; [13490]

(2) what recent representations he has received in relation to the registration of the death of Rudolf Hess; and if he will summarise his duties in this respect under *(a)* the four power agreement providing the prison regulations for Spandau Allied prison, *(b)* the Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages (Special Provisions) Act 1957 and *(c)* other provisions [13489]

Mr. Soames: The death of Rudolf Hess in Spandau prison, Berlin, was registered under the Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages (Special Provisions) Act 1957 and the Service Departments Registers Order 1959. In 1995, Herr Wolf Rüdiger Hess applied for an amendment to the register entry, and at that point it was realised that the registration of his father's death was not in accordance with statue. The Act and the Order provide for the keeping of records of births, deaths and marriages outside the United Kingdom among members of the armed forces, the civilians employed in connection with those forces and in certain organisations concerned with their welfare, or their families. The Registrar General therefore cancelled the entry.

The solicitors acting for the Hess family have asked my Department to recommend that the death should be registered in accordance with the application made in 1995, but since Rudolf Hess belonged to none of the categories specified in the legislation the question of a new entry, in any form, does not arise. This has been explained in a letter from my Department's legal advisers to the solicitors. We are not aware of any duties placed on the Secretary of State for Defence by an agreement between the four powers.

Services Recruitment

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence at what age his Department starts recruiting *(a)* males and *(b)* females in each of the services; and at what age recruits are allowed into front line duties in each of the services. [13485]

Mr. Soames: The minimum age for recruitment into the armed forces is 16 years for each service. The minimum ages at which recruits are allowed into front-line duties in each of the services are:

	Minimum age
Royal Navy	16 years 3 months
Royal Marines	17 years
Army	17 years 3 months
Royal Air Force	17 years 5 months

The age of recruitment and deployment is the same for both men and women, with the following exceptions:

(a) On submarines—males only—deployment is from age 17, and on overseas shore establishments at 18 years.

(b) In the Royal Marines—males only—those under 18 years would not be deployed on active service overseas unless serving with a unit already deployed overseas and which was redeployed on active service.

Additionally, in Northern Ireland, the minimum deployment age for the Army is seventeen and a half years for those in residential units where they are restricted to barrack guards—patrolling not allowed; and 18 years for all serving on emergency tours, and in the Royal Air Force.

Iraq

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the extent to which Iraq is rebuilding its arms industry. [13309]

Mr. Soames: Iraq is prohibited from developing or producing weapons of mass destruction and missiles with a range greater than 150 km; the United Nations Special Commission and the International Atomic Energy Agency are charged with ensuring Iraqi compliance. Beyond this, the arms industry is not subject to specific controls and we assess that Iraq is engaged in reconstruction efforts to the extent that its own resources and UN sanctions allow. It is not appropriate for reasons of national security and defence to give more precise assessments of the arms industries of foreign countries and any such information on Iraq would therefore be withheld under exemption 1 of the code of practice on access to government information.

Defence Procurement Contracts (North-West)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what proportion of MOD defence equipment, procured since 1992, has been sourced from the north-west; [13274]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of jobs created as a result of defence procurement contracts in Lancashire since 1992. [13271]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This information is not collected in the form requested. However, table 1.9 of "UK Defence Statistics 1996", a copy of which is in the Library of the House, provides a summary of "Defence Expenditure and Estimated Employment by Region", in this instance, covering Greater Manchester and Cheshire, as well as Lancashire.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many defence procurement contracts have been awarded to companies in Lancashire since 1992; [13270]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of companies which have benefited from defence procurement contracts in Lancashire since 1992. [13272]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Number of new contracts*	*Number of companies with contracts*
1992	1,930	504
1993	1,817	518
1994	1,638	469
1995	1,485	463
1996	1,237	387

This information should be regarded as indicative as it relates only to prime contracts awarded by the Ministry of Defence. It does not include defence sub-contracts or contracts placed by the various defence agencies.

RAF Personnel Management Agency

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the Royal Air Force Personnel Management Agency. [13914]

Mr. Soames: The Royal Air Force Personnel Management Agency will form as a defence agency of the Ministry of Defence on 1 February 1997. The aim of the RAF PMA is to enable the Royal Air Force to meet its manpower commitments in war, tension, crisis and peace. The RAF PMA will have a staff of about 475 of which about half are civilian. The commander-in chief, personnel and training command, will be the owner of the RAF PMA on behalf of the Secretary of State for Defence.

The RAF PMA chief executive, an air vice-marshal, will be required to manage the Royal Air Force's manpower assets in the most cost-effective manner, to initiate, develop and apply personnel policies and to manage the careers of officers and non-commissioned personnel in a manner that ensures the best return for the Royal Air Force's investment in individuals. The chief executive has been set the following key targets:

1. *Manning*

(a) To distribute the available pool of suitably qualified trained personnel to enable the Royal Air Force to meet its military tasks, as detailed in the departmental plan, during crisis, tension and war. Target for 1997–98 is greater than 95 per cent.

(b) To man the requirements in the local unit establishments, crisis establishments or unit war establishments, as appropriate, and providing specified categories of authorised non-established tasks with suitably qualified training personnel. Target for 1997–98 is greater than 90 per cent.

2. *Career management*

To ensure the percentage of personnel receiving less than the required notice of a posting that qualifies for a domestic move is less than 20 per cent.

3. *Customer Satisfaction*

To establish a system of measuring customer satisfaction and set the baseline for measurement in future years by 31 March 1998.

4. *Reserve Forces*

To meet the Air Force Board's target for an increase in the number of operational reservists. Target for 1997–98 is greater than 1,550.

5. *Manpower Planning*

To ensure that the percentage variation between the actual trained strength and the authorised trained strength, taken as an average over the financial year, is not greater than ± 1 per cent.

6. *Manpower Gapping*

To achieve an annual 2.5 per cent. reduction in the number of manpower gaps, subject to the actual trained strength meeting the trained requirement.

I am arranging for copies of the agency's framework document and corporate plan to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Sculptures and Pictures

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what advice is provided to the Committee about the compatibility of sculptures and pictures with the interior decoration of the rooms in which it is proposed that they should be placed. [13530]

Sir Raymond Powell: On behalf of the Speaker, the Advisory Committee on Works of Art recommends the location of all important works of art within the precincts of the House of Commons. Professional advice is given by the Curator of Works of Art and his staff.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what factors led to the relocation of the bust of Ramsay McDonald; and if he will make a statement. [13531]

Sir Raymond Powell: The bronze bust of Ramsey McDonald has been resited to a prominent position within the Members' Lobby. The space that it leaves in the doorway will be filled in early February by a bronze bust of Harold Macmillan, commissioned through the Advisory Committee on Works of Art.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee when the bust of the right hon. John Redmond MP was removed from display in the Palace of Westminster; and where and when it is proposed to reinstate it. [13529]

Sir Raymond Powell MP: The bust of right hon. John Redmond MP was removed from display outside the old Members' Cafeteria in 1995 prior to major refurbishment of that area. Work on the new cafeteria has now been completed and arrangements are in hand to resite the bust within the Terrace entrance area.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Tenant Farmers

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, if he will estimate the number of tenant farmers farming an area of land less than 20 hectares leased by the Church Commissioners; and if he will make a statement. [12782]

Mr. Alison: No audited figures are available, but, according to the commissioners' records, they have 162 tenanted areas of farm land of less than 20 hectares.

Mr. Jones: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what factors underlie the defining of a farm for the purpose of calculating the number of tenant farmers as an area of land over 20 hectares; and if he will make a statement. [12781]

Mr. Alison: As at 31 December 1995, the commissioners owned more than 55,000 hectares of agricultural land. For reasons of administrative convenience, the figure of 20 hectares has been used since 1973 for defining the minimum size of a farm for statistical purposes.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Animal Collection Centres

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place in the Library copies of the animal health circulars issued by him on the requirements for local veterinary inspection supervision of approved EU collection centres and certification of animals at such collection centres. [12401]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 24 January 1997]:* Guidance on the requirements for supervision of collection centres and procedures for certification at collection centres has, to date, been provided on a case-by-case basis. A written instruction is in the course of being completed. To protect the Minister's operational procedures, and to limit the scope for controls to be circumvented, the instruction will not be placed in the Library. Paragraph 7 of section II of the code of practice on access to government information provides for the non-disclosure of such information.

Certified Herds Scheme

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of beef herds will qualify for the certified herds scheme in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* England, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Northern Ireland. [12773]

Mr. Baldry: My hon. and learned Friend the Minster of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food expects to table the Government's proposal with the Commission shortly. Until agreement on the detailed entry rules of the scheme is reached, it is not possible accurately to estimate the number of qualifying cattle.

Birds (Export Certificates)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list, by species and quantity, the birds occurring naturally in the United Kingdom for which export certificates have been granted since January 1995. [12692]

Mrs Browning *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Hydrolysed Vegetable Protein

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what *(a)* technical and *(b)* non-technical advice his Department has given to industry concerning chloropropanols in hydrolysed vegetable protein in order that it ensures the removal of 3-MCPD—monochloropropanedilo—from all foods; what is the date by which this must be completed; what enforcement of this removal will be implemented; and if he will make a statement on his assessment of the toxicity of 3-MCPD. [13006]

Mrs. Browning: The Ministry has accepted the advice of the Food Advisory Committee that industry should take all necessary steps to ensure that by May 1998 3-MCPD cannot be found in any foods or ingredients, including hydrolysed vegetable protein, when using a validated method of analysis capable of detecting levels down to 0.01 mg/kg, the lowest limit of detection currently available. This is an advisory limit and the question of formal enforcement does not therefore arise. MAFF will, however, continue to monitor the situation.

The FAC's advice was based on a toxicity assessment by the European Commission's expert committee, the Scientific Committee for Food which has concluded that 3-MCPD should be regarded as a genotoxic carcinogen and that results should be undetectable in food products.

BSE

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on how the proposed amendment to article 18(6) of the Specified Bovine Material Order and the proposed protocol for cleansing SBM rendering lines will ensure the deactivation of the BSE agent; and if he will make a statement. [13005]

Mrs. Browning: An amendment to article 18(6) of the Specified Bovine Material (No. 3) Order was made on 30 December 1996 and came into force on 24 January 1997. This followed a public consultation paper issued on 5 December, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House. The amendment provides for rendering lines currently processing specified bovine material over-30-months scheme—OTMS—cattle carcases to revert to handling other forms of animal waste. A switch can take place only after a line has undergone thorough cleansing in accordance with a protocol and under the supervision of the State Veterinary Service.

Very little infective material is likely to enter rendering plants as cattle suspected of showing clinical signs suggestive of BSE are destroyed by incineration. However, some animals may be incubating disease even though they do not show clinical signs of infection. The number of such animals—based on independent research, Anderson *et al.* 1996—is estimated to be around 4,600 of the 1.1 million OTMS animals slaughtered in 1996 and on that basis the amount of brain and spinal cord, in which infectivity is most likely to be, is estimated to be about 0.0008 per cent. In addition, the rendering process itself is expected to reduce any infectivity present 50-fold.

The cleansing protocol is based on physical cleaning of plants followed by its exposure to sodium hydroxide at pH13. Sodium hydroxide is recognised as a useful decontaminating agent and has the added benefit of being a defattening agent to aid in the breakdown of any residual particulate matter not removed during initial physical cleaning. Cleansing on these lines should prove effective given the low level of infectivity that could be entering rendering plants.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to receive the final report from the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee on maternal transmission of BSE. [12821]

Mrs. Browning: The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee will consider current evidence on maternal transmission at its next meeting on 5 February. It is up to the committee to decide whether it wishes to report finally then or to consider the matter further.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the research published by Professor John Collinge in *The Lancet* on 10 January in respect of the development of a live test for BSE in cattle. [12826]

Mrs. Browning: The research published by Professor Collinge was an adaptation of his own techniques for the study of the protein PrP in brain tissue, and that of others in studying the distribution of abnormal—protease resistant—PrP in the bodies of infected animals and humans. A collaborative project is under way to assess the usefulness of Professor Collinge's approach on brain tissue after slaughter, but it is likely to be less effective in the diagnosis of BSE in the live animal following biopsy of other tissue.

Evidence has already been published from several groups of workers about the distribution of abnormal PrP and infectivity in the body of infected animals, especially sheep, and most specifically in the lymphoreticular organs such as the spleen, lymph nodes and tonsils. Abnormal PrP can be detected at certain times in these tissues in scrapie-infected sheep; consequently, we have been aware of the potential to use such accessible tissues as tonsils and superficial lymph nodes for the diagnosis of BSE.

Unfortunately it is clear that the pathogenesis of BSE is quite different from scrapie—and, it seems, Creutzfeld-Jakob disease—in this respect. It has not proved possible to detect abnormal PrP in lymphoreticular tissues of infected cattle using existing technology. This may mean that even more sensitive techniques are required for cattle, but it is also possible that these tissues simply do not contain the infectious agent.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the total amount of contaminated animal feed *(a)* consumed by British cattle in each year since 1980 and *(b)* exported during that period. [12827]

Mrs. Browning: Information is not available for estimating animal feed contamination. Local authorities are responsible for enforcing the Feeding Stuffs Regulations 1995, as amended, and certain other legislative measures that are intended to protect animal feedingstuffs against contamination.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to introduce a further selective cull based on maternal transmission. [12829]

Mr. Baldry: We do not yet have definitive advice on the results of the experiment which might indicate maternal transmission of BSE. The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee will consider this again at its February meeting and may decide that it can offer definitive advice at that point or to consider the matter further at a future meeting. We shall consider whether the selective cull currently in progress will need to be adjusted in any way when we have SEAC's advice.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what arrangements are in place to ensure the separation of cattle in the over 30-months scheme from those outside the scheme in abattoirs. [13473]

Mr. Baldry: EC regulation 716/96 requires that no bovine animals destined for human or animal consumption are present in the abattoir when animals are being slaughtered under the over-30 months scheme. To satisfy this requirement, abattoirs may not slaughter other bovine animals on the day on which scheme animals are processed.

Nitrates

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what preparations his Department has made to set limits for nitrate levels in lettuce and spinach by 15 February in line with the recent European Commission regulation; and if he will make a statement on whether the United Kingdom will be in a position to comply on time. [13007]

Mrs. Browning: The Commission regulation has not yet been published in the *Official Journal* of the European Communities. Progress on legislation to provide for its enforcement and execution is therefore delayed.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the compliance of the arrangements for the importation, storage and onward carriage of the ammonium nitrate at the port of Tilbury with the Fertilisers (Amendment) Regulations 1995. [13536]

Mrs. Browning: The Fertiliser Regulations 1991, as amended in 1995, do not contain specific controls with regard to the importation, storage and onward carriage of ammonium nitrate fertiliser. They provide labelling, compositional and packaging requirements for ammonium nitrate and other fertilisers.

Cotton Seed Oil

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what differences were established by the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes between oil from conventional cotton seed and that derived from the genetically modified cotton seed resistant to the herbicide bromoxynil; and if he will make a statement. [13009]

Mrs. Browning: After carefully considering all the data, the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes concluded that there was no difference between oil from the two sources.

Bull Testicles

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will require bull testicles to be separately identified in food labelling. [12852]

Mrs. Browning: The rule permitting such ingredients to be identified simply as "offal" in the ingredients list of products was removed when the Food Labelling Regulations 1996 were introduced on 1 July 1996. Since then, the type of offal used must be indicated. The Meat Products and Spreadable Fish Products Regulations 1984 prohibit the use of testicles of mammalian species in uncooked meat products.

Organic Farming

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of the farmed area of each member state of the EU is farmed organically. [12854]

Mr. Boswell: Available information shows that, in 1996, organically farmed land constituted less than 1 per cent. of total agricultural area in Belgium, France, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom; between 1 per cent. and 2 per cent. in Finland, Germany, Denmark and Italy; between 3 per cent. and 4 per cent. in Sweden; and between 7 per cent. and 8 per cent. in Austria.

Source:

"Impact of EC Regulations 2078/92 on the development of organic farming in the European Union", Dr. Nicolas Lampkin, Welsh Institute of Rural Studies, Aberystwyth.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much organic produce was imported from *(a)* the EU and *(b)* other countries in each year since 1990. [12853]

Mr. Boswell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) on 6 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *577*.

Food Production

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps his Department is taking to encourage more urban food growing; and if he will make a statement. [13010]

Mrs. Browning: The Department's responsibility for food growing is restricted to production on a commercial scale which, by its very nature, tends to be undertaken by agricultural and horticultural enterprises situated in predominately rural and farming areas. Urban production tends to be of the small-scale type associated with leisure, gardening and allotments and is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary for State for the Environment.

Food Premises Inspections

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *671*, what factors underlay the variation between counties in the use of informal written warnings. [13243]

Mrs. Browning: Enforcement of food safety legislation in the UK is the responsibility of local authorities and they have several courses of action open to them in dealing with breaches of food law. The use of written warnings will vary from authority to authority depending on the policies of that authority, the types of food premises in that area and the nature of breaches discovered.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what factors underlay the reduction in the number of improvement notices issued by English non-metropolitan district councils to establishments subject to food law enforcement between 1992 and 1995. [13210]

Mrs. Browning: The issue of improvement notices was a new power available to enforcement officers under the Food Safety Act 1990. These figures reflect the expectation that there would be a large number issued during the first few years of the Act coming into force, and that this would fall to a lower level as businesses and enforcement authorities gained experience in the requirements of the Food Safety Act.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *671*, what factors underlay the reduction in the number of establishments in Lancashire subject to food law enforcement between 1993 and 1995. [13241]

Mrs. Browning: The fall in the number of establishments shown for Lancashire is consistent with an overall fall in the number of establishments shown nationally. The overall decline is due to additional guidance to local authorities which resulted in establishments being excluded from the statistics. This was either because they were not required by the European Commission to be included as part of this statistical return or because they fell outside the immediate planned inspection programme of the authority. All food premises, however, are subject to enforcement procedures and can be inspected regardless of whether they are included in the statistical return or not.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *671*, what factors underlay the reduction in the number of establishments in Pendle subject to food law enforcement between 1991 and 1992. [13242]

Mrs. Browning: The year 1991 was the first year these statistics were collected. Many local authorities experienced difficulties in setting up systems for collecting the statistics. It is not uncommon, therefore, for the 1991 figures to differ significantly from the 1992 figures.

Food Safety

Dame Peggy Fenner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to improve the arrangements for the handling of food safety. [14002]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Secretary of State for Health and I are today announcing, with the Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland, the Government's intention to appoint an independent, eminent chairman of a newly created Food Safety Council who will also be an adviser on food safety. The council will advise Ministers on food safety and related matters, take a strategic view of the longer-term agenda, and identify issues cutting across the work of the existing network of independent expert advisory committees. Its membership will be drawn from a wide range of fields with an interest in the safety of the food supply, including both scientific experts and lay members.

The council and food safety adviser will report jointly to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Secretary of State for Health and the Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland. The proposed terms of reference for the adviser and the council are set out below.

Our intention is that the council and the adviser should be free to advise on any matters related to the safety, quality, labelling and authenticity of food and be available as an authoritative source of advice to the general public. These arrangements will strengthen the existing network of advisory committees, but will not detract from the role of the individual expert committees. The food safety adviser will work closely with the chief medical officers.

In addition, we are formally appointing the chief medical officer, Sir Kenneth Calman, as adviser to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on public health matters. This formalises arrangements which in practice have applied for many years. These new arrangements help to confirm the importance of public health advice in the area of food policy.

Terms of reference for the chairman of the Food Safety Council and food safety adviser.

to advise the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on any matters related to the safety, quality, labelling and authenticity of food; and the Secretaries of State for Health, for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland in the area of their Departments' responsibilities.

to chair the Food Safety Council; and

to communicate information relating to the work of the Food Safety Council to Parliament, the media and the general public.

Terms of reference for the Food Safety Council

to advice the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on any matters relating to the safety, quality, labelling and authenticity of food, and the Secretaries of State for Health, for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland in the area of their Departments' responsibilities, having regard at all times to the views of relevant export bodies and to public concerns;

to co-ordinate those areas of work of the independent advisory committees which fall within the remit of the Food Safety Council and identify issues of common interest;

to advise on how these matters are best communicated to the general public;

to report annually to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Secretaries of State for Health, for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland on food safety and related matters, and to lay a copy of the report before Parliament.

TRANSPORT

Passenger Trains (Crewe)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the average weekly number of

timetabled passenger trains between Euston and Glasgow which made a timetabled stop at Crewe for each of the last 10 years. [13198]

Mr. Watts: The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Average weekly number of passenger trains*
1986	3
1987	5
1988	5
1989	4
1990	5
1991	2
1992	2
1993	6
1994	3
1995	3
1996	3

Ammonium Nitrate

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the compliance of the arrangements for the onward movement of the ammonium nitrate at the port of Tilbury with *(a)* the regulations concerning the international carriage of dangerous goods by rail, *(b)* the European agreement concerning the international carriage of dangerous goods by road and *(c)* EC directive 80/876, as amended; and if he will make a statement. [13533]

Mr. Watts: Compliance with the regulations for the transport of dangerous goods buy rail and road is enforced by the Health and Safety Executive. Health and Safety Executive inspectors are scheduled to visit the port of Tilbury next week to inspect the arrangements for the onward transport of ammonium nitrate.

Transport Study, Leicestershire

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the costs to date of the central Leicestershire strategy transport study—carried out jointly by Leicestershire county council and Leicester city council. [13282]

Mr. Watts: The information is not held by the Department of Transport.

FirstBus

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for what reasons undertakings relating to fares, service quality and cost of tendered services were not sought from FirstBus before issuing the contract to FirstBus in respect of bus services in Glasgow. [13808]

Mr. Watts: The terms and conditions of contracts let for the running of subsidised bus services in Glasgow are matters for the Strathclyde passenger transport executive.

Boeing 737

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for transport what deadline he has set aircraft operators to carry out modifications to the rudder of Boeing 737 aircraft. [13184]

Mr. Bowis: Under the Chicago convention, the United States of America is responsible, as state of design, for the continued airworthiness of Boeing 737 aircraft. I understand that the US Federal Aviation Administration intends to issue a notice of proposed rulemaking on modifications to the Boeing 737 in February. It is likely that the FAA will require modifications to be made within three years. The United Kingdom Civil Aviation Authority will consider these proposals when published.

Passenger Rail Fares

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the total annual revenue from United Kingdom domestic passenger rail fares in the last year for which statistics are available; if he will estimate the effects on revenue of a 25 per cent. reduction in fares; and if he will indicate the assumptions regarding the elasticity of demand in relation to price which he is using. [13326]

Mr. Watts: "Transport Statistics Great Britain", 1996 edition, published by the Government statistical office, gives ticket receipts for all British Rail and franchised passenger rail services in 1995–96 as £2,379.4 million—at 1995–96 prices.

Elasticity of demand estimates are commercially confidential within the railway industry. Further, elasticity values are affected by many different factors and only hold for small real changes. It is therefore not possible to provide an accurate estimate of the effects on revenue of a 25 per cent. reduction in fares.

Airline Safety

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish airline safety league tables on a six-monthly basis. [13183]

Mr. Bowis: No. In order to hold an air operator's certificate, all United Kingdom airlines must attain the high standards of safety required by the Civil Aviation Authority. I do not therefore believe that there are any significant differences in the safety standards of UK airlines which would warrant the compilation of a safety league table.

Foreign airlines flying into the UK are regulated by the aviation authority of their home state in accordance with minimum safety standards set by the International Civil Aviation Organisation. It would not therefore be possible or appropriate for the UK Government to produce a safety league table.

British Railways Board

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which of the contracts of the directors of the British Railways Board he plans to terminate early; and how much compensation each will be entitled to. [13426]

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend will be reviewing the size and composition of the BR board in the light of its reduced responsibilities following the sale of most of the BR businesses, but he has taken no decision on the early termination of existing board appointments.

Wheelock Bypass

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what recent representations he has received concerning the proposed start date of the Wheelock bypass; what funds have been allocated for the scheme in the next financial year; and what commitments have been given to fund the scheme in the future; [13185]

(2) what criteria were used to assess competing bids for road construction projects under the transport policies and programme submissions; to what extent the proposed Wheelock bypass met those criteria; and if he will make a statement; [13186]

(3) what representations he has received concerning the difficulties experienced by local highways authorities in entering into contracts for construction of major road projects without resources of funding beyond the initial year *(a)* in respect of the proposed Wheelock bypass and *(b)* in general; and if he will make a statement. [13187]

Mr. Watts: I have received six written representations concerning the start date of the Wheelock bypass.

For 1997–98, £2 million of expenditure on the Wheelock bypass has been accepted for transport supplementary grant. Previous allocations for this scheme are £0.75 million for 1995–96 and £2 million for 1996–97. TSG is payable at a rate of 50 per cent. of the accepted expenditure, with the balance allocated as borrowing approvals.

No specific commitment about future funding have been given in respect of this scheme. Local authority circular 2/96 repeated the message that major road improvement schemes—those costing over £2 million—which have been accepted for TSG are normally funded through to completion. This is dependant upon progress and costs remaining broadly in line with those when the scheme was first accepted for TSG. The circular further explained that it might be necessary to restrict funding and spread support over a longer period.

If Cheshire county council let a construction contract before the next local transport capital settlement, then subject to these caveats it may expect funding for 1998–99 to follow.

In assessing bids for major road construction projects which had been accepted for TSG in the 1996–97 local transport capital settlement, the following points were taken into account:

whether the bid is for a relatively small amount which it would be reasonable for a local authority to fund;

whether it is for residual expenditure (later than the second year after the scheme is complete);

whether cost increases are fully justified;

whether progress on part or all of a scheme has been maintained according to earlier forecasts;

whether it appears to represent a realistic view of possible progress; and

whether, where a scheme or part had yet to start, it is imperative that the scheme go ahead without delay.

Spending on the Wheelock bypass scheme in 1995–96 was only £0.374 million, and for 1996–97 only £0.75 million is budgeted. In the light of this, I could not be certain that any allocation for the Wheelock bypass 1997–98 would be used in full for the scheme.

I have received only one recent representation from a local authority seeking assurances regarding future allocations before entering into a contractual commitment. This was not in relation to the Wheelock bypass.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Sheltered Accommodation

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what support is currently provided to those with learning disabilities, mental health and other problems who live in sheltered accommodation in the community. [11821]

Mr. Burt: Social security assistance with day-to-day living costs may be available from income support, which recognises the additional costs faced by some people with special needs whilst housing benefit can assist with reasonable accommodation costs and benefits such as attendance allowance and disability living allowance can help towards the extra costs of disability.

It is the Government's policy to encourage the development, at a local level, of a range of appropriate and co-ordinated health and social services for people with learning difficulties, mental health and other problems. Local authorities are responsible for assessing need on an individual basis and for arranging appropriate care.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the savings to his Department from the reduction in housing benefit subsidies to 95 per cent. in England in each of the years from 1991–92 to 1997–98. [13308]

Mr. Roger Evans: Until 1990–91, local authorities received 97 per cent. as direct subsidy for the majority of their private sector housing benefit expenditure; a further sum of 3.5 per cent. of estimated expenditure being fed into the revenue support grant. When this direct subsidy was reduced to 95 per cent. in 1991–92, the amount funded through the revenue support grant was increased to 5.5 per cent.

The reduction was made to increase overall incentives to improve economy and efficiency and was made on a cost neutral basis.

Disability Appeal Tribunals

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) pursuant to his answer of 23 January, *Official Report*, column *719*, from what source the independent tribunal service obtained the information that medical members of disability appeal tribunals are not normally involved in examining claimants for the purpose of the all-work test; [13324]

(2) how many medical examinations for the purpose of the all-work test were carried out in November 1996 by doctors who were members of disability appeal tribunals; [13325]

(3) in what circumstances medical members of disability appeal tribunals are involved in examining claimants for the purposes of the all-work test; [13327]

(4) how many notices issued by the clerk to the social security appeal tribunal covering the Newport, Gwent area between 21 October and 21 December 1996, directing the parties to notify him if they wished an oral hearing to be heard, have resulted in requests for oral hearings by *(a)* the claimant only, *(b)* the adjudication officer only and *(c)* both the claimant and the adjudication officer; and how many of those requests were made within 10 days of receipt of the direction; [13328]

(5) pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column 772, which tribunal venues the independent tribunal service is currently considering whether to continue using; [13329]

(6) for what reasons members of social security appeal tribunals, other than chairmen, do not receive appeal papers in advance of the hearing in cases where an appeal is decided without an oral hearing. [13330]

Mr. Roger Evans: These are matters for the president of the independent tribunal service, his honour Judge Bassingthwaighte. He will write to the hon. Member.

Benefits in Kind

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the employer-provided benefits in kind which would be affected if employers' national insurance contributions were extended to all taxable benefits in kind. [13331]

Mr. Heald: The most recent information about taxable benefits in kind was published in "Inland Revenue Statistics 1996", a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action he intends to take to prevent the avoidance of employer national insurance contributions on employee remuneration by payment of benefits in kind with particular reference to *(a)* property, *(b)* luncheon vouchers, *(c)* private medical insurance, *(d)* school fees, *(e)* supermarket vouchers, *(f)* cars, *(g)* yachts and *(h)* low-interest loans; and if he will make a statement. [13334]

Mr. Heald: We remain committed to curbing schemes aimed solely or largely at unfairly avoiding national insurance contributions. Not all payment practices using benefits in kind are aimed solely or largely at unfair avoidance. With the Inland Revenue, we continue to monitor schemes. It is not the Government's policy to give advance warning of specific action against avoidance that we may be planning to take.

War Pensions

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was *(a)* the overall cost of war pensions in each of the past 10 years at constant prices; what is his estimate for 1997–98; and how many claimants there were in each of those years. [13451]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the tables:

Thousands

	Total	*War disablement pension*	*War widow's pension*	*Other*
1986	275	210	61	4
1987	266	203	59	3
1988	258	198	58	3
1989	252	194	56	2
1990	248	192	54	2
1991	250	195	53	2
1992	260	207	52	1
1993	293	241	51	1
1994	309	259	49	1
1995	315	264	50	1
1996	328	267	60	1

All figures as at the 31 December of each year.

War pensions expenditure

£ million

Year	*Cash terms*	*Real terms*
1986–87	589	933
1987–88	599	900
1988–89	610	860
1989–90	641	844
1990–91	708	863
1991–92	967	1,108
1992–93	1,158	1,273
1993–94	1,286	1,375
1994–95	1,147	1,204
1995–96	1,258	1,289
1996–97[1]	1,420	1,420
1997–98[1]	1,461	1,433

[1] Figures are estimated.

WALES

Wheelchair Advisory Group

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about progress on his consideration of recommendations made by the wheelchair advisory group set up in August 1996. [14083]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I am today announcing an extra £500,000 a year to improve the wheelchair provision in Wales. I have given careful consideration to the views and recommendations made by the wheelchair advisory group I set up in August 1996 and I have decided to accept its recommendations that additional resources should be

targeted towards providing electrically powered indoor-outdoor wheelchairs and expanding and improving the existing range of wheelchairs in Wales.

I expect the artificial limb and appliance service to be able to provide up to 300 electrically powered indoor-outdoor wheelchairs in 1997–98.

"Government Expenditure and Review"

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to update the "Government Expenditure and Revenue, Wales" report, published in January 1996; and if he will make a statement. [14084]

Mr. Hague: I am publishing this report today; it is available in the Library of the House. Total Government expenditure on behalf of Welsh residents exceeded tax revenues raised in Wales by £5.7 billion. This estimate, which excludes privatisation proceeds, is equivalent to around 20 per cent. of Welsh gross domestic product.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the income and expenditure net surplus/deficit for the financial year to 30 December for the NHS trusts in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [12840]

Mr. Hague *[holding answer 29 January 1997]:* The latest information provided by each trust regarding actual income and expenditure for the financial year to date to 31 December is given in the following table.

Retained surplus (deficit)

	Total date actual
Bridgend and district	(265)
Cardiff community	287
Carmarthen and district	(209)
Ceredigion and mid Wales	18
Clwydian community care	110
Derwen	58
East Glamorgan	291
Clan Y Mor	392
Glan Clwyd	218
Glan Hafren	261
Gwent community	72
Gwynedd community	1,536
Gwynedd hospitals	1,084
Llandough	12
Llanelli/Dinefwr	126
Mid Glamorgan ambulance	147
Morriston hospital	(2,034)
Nevill hall and district	222
Northern Glamorgan	494
North Wales ambulance	242
Pembrokeshire	98
Powys	75
Rhondda health care	121
Swansea	12
S.E.W.A.T	(34)
University dental hospital	262
University hospital of Wales	1,214
Velindre	524
West Wales ambulance	49
Wrexham maelor	(165)
Totals	5,218

As at 31 December 1996.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many visits he has made to working farms in Flintshire. [12286]

Mr. Hague: None. I have visited a variety of farms elsewhere in Wales.

Energy Efficiency

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to improve energy efficiency in the housing stock. [12941]

Mr Jonathan Evans: Under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995, all authorities in Wales must provide me with a report by 30 November 1997 setting out measures that will lead to a significant improvement in energy efficiency of all residential accommodation. The Government have also recently announced significant changes to the home energy efficiency scheme which widens the scope of improvements available to householders.

Hospitals

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy on the future of *(a)* cottage and *(b)* community hospitals in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [13207]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer to the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis), in the House on 2 December 1996, *Official Report*, columns *651-52*.

NHS Staff

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the numbers employed for the period September 1990 to 1995 inclusive expressed as whole-time equivalents and numbers, by gender and by ethnic status for the staff groups (1) chiropodists, (2) foot care assistants, (3) dietitians, (4) occupational therapists, (5) occupational therapy helpers, (6) orthoptists, (7) physiotherapists, (8) physiotherapy helpers, (9) diagnostic radiographers, (10) therapeutic radiographers, (11) radiographer helpers, (12) technical instructors in professions allied to medicine, (13) other professions allied to medicine, (14) optometrists, (15) pharmacists, (16) speech and language therapists, (17) assistant speech and language therapists, (18) whole-time chaplains, (19) assistant chaplains, (20) clinical scientists, (21) clinical psychologists, (22) clinical psychotherapists, (23) dental auxiliaries, (24) medical laboratory scientific officers, (25) laboratory support grades, (26) medical technical officers and assistants, (26) medical technical officers and assistants, (27) other professional and technical staff, excluding works staff, (28) administrative and clerical, (29) general managers, (30) senior managers, (31) maintenance, (32) health care assistants and (33) nursery nurses. [13234]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Due to the amount of data requested, I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales in what ways the eligibility, financial and operating rules which apply to the delivery of training programmes by TECs in Wales in 1997–98 will differ from the rules outlined in the contracting documents which replace the TEC annual funding agreement in England. [13592]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The relevant contractual documents are not yet finalised either in England or Wales. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible after both sets of documents are complete and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Security

10. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what additional security measures he has introduced since the end of the IRA ceasefire. [11976]

Sir John Wheeler: The Chief Constable has responded to the security situation as it has developed and the security forces are at a high state of alert. They have been successful in preventing terrorist attacks. The Army has adopted a higher profile and in certain areas is now regularly supporting police patrols. There are more vehicle checkpoints and measures have been taken to protect vulnerable police stations.

23. **Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make an assessment of security in Northern Ireland. [11990]

Sir John Wheeler: There has been a steadily increasing number of terrorist attacks over the past few months. These have put the lives of members of the security forces and civilians at extreme risk. The police and Army are exercising all their skill and vigilance to thwart these attacks and their success has been evidenced by a number of recent arms finds and the charging of several individuals with terrorism-related offences. Their efforts will continue unremittingly.

Terrorism

11. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many terrorist incidents have occurred in Northern Ireland since 1 January. [11977]

Sir John Wheeler: Since 1 January, there have been 23 serious terrorist attacks. There were 13 shooting incidents, two PRIG mortar attacks, one Mk15 mortar attack and four Mk16 mortar attacks. One incident involved coffee jar devices being thrown and two under-car booby trap devices have exploded.

14. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the Provisional IRA's capabilities to wage a continuing terrorist campaign. [11980]

Sir John Wheeler: Our assessment is that the Provisional IRA is capable of mounting a sustained terrorist campaign both in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. The Provisional IRA has mounted a series of attacks over recent weeks intended to murder members of the security forces in the Province. The risk of further such attacks remains extremely high. Such attacks are carried out regardless of the risk to members of the public.

Targeting Social Need

12. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to modify the operation of the targeting social need policy. [11978]

Mr. Ancram: In advance of any recommendations that the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights may make in its forthcoming report on employment equality, it would not be appropriate to consider making significant changes to the targeting social need initiative. Targeting social need remains, however, one of the Government's three public expenditure priorities.

Peace Process

13. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the peace process in the Province. [11979]

24. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the latest situation in the peace process. [11991]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I refer my hon. Friends to the oral answer that I gave to the hon. Members for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) and for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) earlier today.

School Rolls

15. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the current rolls of *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools; how much was spent per head in each case (i) in 1979 and (ii) in 1996 in real terms; and if he will make a statement. [11981]

Mr. Ancram: In 1995–96, enrolments in primary schools were 192,747 and in secondary schools were 151,576.

Expenditure per pupil in real terms was £1,020 in 1979–80 and £1,699 in 1995–96 in primary and £1,591 in 1979–80 and £2,523 in 1995–96 in secondary schools.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

16. **Dame Jill Knight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how he proposes to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the RUC. [11982]

Sir John Wheeler: We are working with the RUC and the Police Authority for Northern Ireland to improve yet further the efficiency and effectiveness of the RUC. The recent report by Her Majesty's inspector of constabulary confirms the RUC as an efficient and effective police service. Legislation on structural reform leading to greater efficiency is being prepared. The fundamental review and the report by Dr. Maurice Hayes into the police complaints system have been completed and are being progressed.

Joyriding

17. **Dr. Hendron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on joy riding in west Belfast. [11983]

Sir John Wheeler: I am very concerned about the extent of car crime in west Belfast and elsewhere. I am well aware of the damage that these crimes cause to the quality of life for the general public and the consequential costs. I am therefore looking in some detail at the effectiveness of the criminal justice system to support the Royal Ulster Constabulary. The Government are backing a range of initiatives by local voluntary and statutory agencies to address the problem and are providing the RUC with the resources that it needs to tackle it.

Health and Social Services Boards

18. **Sir James Molyneaux:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the revised financial allocations to health and social services boards. [11984]

Mr. Moss: The 1997–98 board allocations reflect their current capitation shares. However, there is common agreement that the Eastern board will be a gainer when the capitation review is completed. Accordingly, I have also made available to that board an additional £4 million for 1997–98, of which £2 million are recurring funds.

Integrated Schools

19. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress is being made in establishing integrated schools in the Province. [11985]

Mr. Ancram: The Government remain fully committed to supporting the development of integrated education.

There are at present 32 grant-aided integrated schools in Northern Ireland. Development proposals for a further nine integrated schools are under consideration by my Department.

Tourism

20. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many tourist visitors there were to Northern Ireland in each of the last three years. [11987]

Mr. Ancram: In 1994, 1.29 million visitors came to Northern Ireland, an increase of 3 per cent. on 1993 levels. In 1995 record levels were achieved with 1.56 million visitors, a 20 per cent. increase on 1994. Estimates for 1996 suggest that the number of visitors has fallen by 6 per cent. on 1995 to 1.46 million. Encouragingly, the figures remain above 1994 pre-ceasefire levels.

25. **Miss Hoey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to increase the number of tourists visiting Northern Ireland in 1997. [11992]

Mr. Ancram: The Northern Ireland tourist board is continuing to market Northern Ireland vigorously in all key markets, on a stand-alone basis, as part of the new Tourism Brand Ireland campaign and in co-operation with the British Tourist Authority. The board continues to support private sector infrastructure investment to meet tourist needs.

Road Schemes

21. **Mr. John D. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which major capital road schemes will commence in the next financial year. [11988]

Mr. Moss: The major road works programme is currently being reviewed in the light of the outcome of the 1996 public expenditure survey. I will write to the right hon. Gentleman when the review is complete.

Meat and Livestock Industry

22. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent steps he has taken to support and promote the meat and livestock industry in Northern Ireland. [11989]

Mr. Ancram: It is estimated that, over this and the next three years, the Government will provide around £3.5 billion to support the beef industry in the United Kingdom. Specific figures for Northern Ireland are not available, but on a proportionate basis it is estimated that Northern Ireland should benefit from around £525 million on 15 per cent. of this total.

The Government continue to provide direct financial support to the processing sector of the industry. This support takes various forms, including capital and marketing grants. The Government also support the promotion of produce at national and international shows and exhibitions.

The Government are working closely with the beef industry in Northern Ireland to develop a strategy which will facilitate the industry regaining its export markets at the earliest opportunity after the ban on exports has been lifted.

Constitution Talks

27. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the talks on constitutional developments. [11996]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I refer my hon. Friend to the oral answer that I gave to the hon. Members for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs Fyfe) and for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) earlier today.

Education and Library Boards

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he intends to bring forward proposed legislation in relation to the education and library boards in Northern Ireland. [11994]

Mr. Ancram: I am currently considering the proposal for a draft Education and Library Boards (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 in the light of the comments received during its consultation period.

Action for Community Employment

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list ACE sponsors with their names and addresses, by size, for the most recent year available, with the number on each scheme, the number of approved places and the percentage of leavers who obtained full-time employment. [12176]

Mr. Ancram: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Ian Walters. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Ian Walters to Mr. Robert McCartney, dated 29 January 1997:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me, as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency, to reply to your question about the Action for Community Employment (ACE) scheme.

There are currently 229 organisation operating ACE projects throughout Northern Ireland.

Experience has shown that many of participants leaving ACE require further education or training to prepare them for employment. The Agency therefore records progressing into education, training and employment as positive outcomes. A representative sample of leavers from the scheme is surveyed twice during each year. The survey in 1995/96 showed that 41% of leavers achieved a positive outcome. Figures for 1996/97 will not be available until after the end of March 1997. The percentage of leavers who obtained positive outcomes at each scheme is not readily available.

Detailed information amounting to a 27 page document is being sent to you separately and a copy will be placed in the House of Commons library. I hope you find it useful.

Unemployment Review

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Training and Employment Agency review document on programmes for the long-term unemployed was completed; when it will be released to the public; and if he will make a statement. [12573]

Mr. Ancram: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Ian Walters. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Ian Walters to Mr. John D. Taylor, dated 29 January 1997:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency to reply to your question about the review document on programmes for the long-term unemployed.

Work on the document has taken longer to complete than was anticipated. However I hope to publish the document, for consultation purposes, very shortly.

I will ensure that you receive a copy.

Energy Conservation

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures he proposes to improve energy conservation in the housing stock in Northern Ireland. [12857]

Mr. Moss: The Department of Environment for Northern Ireland is currently considering amendments to the Building Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1994 which will, when implemented, improve the conservation of fuel and power in new houses. These measures will also provide the energy rating of dwellings using the Government's standard assessment procedure.

In addition, Northern Ireland's first home energy conservation report, under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995, was submitted to the Department of Environment for Northern Ireland in November 1996 by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. It proposes a number of measures to improve the energy efficiency of the existing residential sector.

Under the domestic energy efficiency scheme, the Department of Economic Development will continue to provide a comprehensive package of insulation, draught-proofing and advice on energy conservation to low-income households and householders over 60 years of age.

Electricity Interconnector

Mr. Eric Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has made to the Secretary of State for Scotland on his ruling pertaining to the proposed electricity interconnector, between Scotland and Northern Ireland and the economic effects of cancellation of this project. [12441]

Mr. Ancram: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland announced on 21 November 1996 that he was minded to grant approval for the Scottish leg of the proposed electricity interconnector subject to certain sections of the line being placed underground. Before reaching a decision, he invited representations on how a requirement of undergrounding would affect the viability of the project. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State, in responding to the invitation for written comments, reiterated the strategic importance of interconnection for the development of a competitive and efficient electricity sector in Northern Ireland.

NHS Staff

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the numbers employed for the period September 1990 to 1995 inclusive expressed as whole-time equivalents and numbers, by gender and by ethnic status for the staff groups (1) chiropodists, (2) foot care assistants, (3) dietitians, (4) occupational therapists, (5) occupational therapy helpers, (6) orthoptists, (7) physiotherapists, (8) physiotherapy helpers, (9) diagnostic radiographers, (10) therapeutic radiographers, (11) radiographer helpers, (12) technical instructors in professions allied to medicine, (13) other professions allied to medicine, (14) optometrists, (15) pharmacists, (16) speech and language therapists, (17) assistance speech and language therapists, (18) whole-time chaplains, (19) assistant chaplains, (20) clinical scientists, (21) clinical psychologists, (22) clinical psychotherapists, (23) dental auxiliaries, (24) medical laboratory scientific officers, (25) laboratory support grades, (26) medical technical officers and assistants, (27) other professional and technical staff, excluding works staff, (28) administrative and clerical, (29) general managers, (30) senior managers, (31) maintenance, (32) health care assistants and (33) nursery nurses. [13236]

Mr. Moss: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 31 January 1997

PRIME MINISTER

Cabinet Office

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Prime Minister what proposals there are to change the 1997–97 cash limit or running costs limit for the Cabinet Office other services vote. [14203]

The Prime Minister: The cash limit for the Cabinet Office, other services, class XVIII, vote 1, will be reduced by £637,000 from £42,036,000 to £41,399,000 and the running costs limit will be reduced by £637,000 from £43,153,000 to £42,516,000. This is to reflect a transfer of provision to the Office of Public Service, class XVII, vote 1, for superannuation awarding services and accommodation services, partially offset by a transfer of provision from the Office of Public Service towards the cost of early staff departures.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Written Questions

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Lord President of the Council what has been the average length of time taken by each Department to answer ordinary written questions in each of the last two sessions; and if he will make a statement. [12265]

Mr. Newton: The information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

SCOTLAND

Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the Scottish-based companies with an hon. Member as a director that have received grants or loans from Highlands and Islands Enterprise; and what was the value of the grant and loans in each case. [12986]

Mr. Kynoch: The provision of grants and loans to individual companies is an operational matter for Highlands and Islands Enterprise and I have asked the chairman of its board to write to the hon. Member.

Meat Hygiene (Retailers)

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what discussions he has had with representatives from meat retail outlets regarding the hygiene changes recommended in Professor Pennington's report; [12989]

(2) what plans he has to make *(a)* grants and *(b)* compensation available to family-run butchers to help convert their premises to meet the hygiene recommendations in Professor Pennington's report; [12987]

(3) what length of time butcher shops will be given to implement the hygiene recommendations in Professor Pennington's report. [12988]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: As I made clear in my letter of 16 January to all hon. Members, both the Government and Professor Pennington are still considering the interim recommendations regarding licensing and separation requirements. As a part of this process, I have asked my Department to examine the practical implications of these recommendations and in so doing to consult consumers, health professionals, environmental health officers, processors and retailers.

Parkhead Hospital

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many possible suicides there have been among patients attending Parkhead hospital since the hospital opened; what assessment he has made of security and staffing levels at Parkhead hospital; and if he will make a statement. [13211]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Since 1993, when formal arrangements for the recording of suicides at Parkhead hospital were introduced, there have been five in-patient suicides.

It is fundamental to the treatment of patients with mental illness that, when ever possible, a therapeutic environment is provided with a level of security appropriate to the individual. The agreed level of staffing, observation and other precautions taken to prevent suicide are matters for clinicians to determine.

Nurse staffing levels at Parkhead hospital have increased from 122 in October 1995 to a current level of 135. The hospital has 122 beds and the nurse-patient ratio is therefore at a high level.

Rural Pharmacies

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to safeguard rural pharmacies. [13262]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The essential small pharmacy scheme already provides financial support to pharmacies where the monthly volume of NHS prescriptions is not more than 1,400 and where the pharmacy is located not less than two miles from the next nearest pharmacy by the route most convenient to the public.

Cash Limits

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what changes he intends to make to the cash limits and running costs provision for 1996–97 within his responsibility. [14211]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, I intend to make changes to five voted cash limits, two non-voted cash blocks and three running costs limits.

The cash limit for class XIII, vote 2—local government, housing, transport other environmental services and European funds Scotland—will be increased by a net total of £14,857,000 from £5,602,006,000 to £5,616,863,000. The net increase reflects a transfer of £12,802,000 from SO/LA2 to Scottish Homes; a transfer of £4,000,000 from class XIII, vote 5 to revenue support grant; a reduction of £1,298,000 in housing support grant and £647,000 in Scottish new towns; and an increase in Historic Scotland gross running cost provision of £722,000 from £15,216,000 to £15,938,000 which is offset fully by increased appropriations in aid.

The cash limit for class XIII, vote 3, has been reduced by £3,514,000 from £1,613,944,000 to £1,610,430,000. £5,000,000 has been transferred to class XIII, vote 4 to support additional funding for the NHS in Scotland and £2,150,000 has been transferred to class XIII, vote 6, to meet BSE-related administration costs. These transfers have been partly offset by a transfer of £3,636,000 from SO/LA 2–Scottish Office local authorities—to enable Scottish Enterprise to acquire the residual industrial sites held by Livingston development corporation at the winding up of that body.

The cash limit for class XIII, vote 4—hospital, community health, family health, other health services and welfare food, Scotland—will be increased by a net total of £11,627,000 from £3,536,513,000 to £3,548,140,000. The increase includes a transfer of £5,000,000 from class XIII, vote 3, for additional funding for the NHS in Scotland; a transfer of £229,000 from class XVIII, vote 4 due to the reduced costs of the NHS complaints procedures; a transfer of £202,000 from class XIII, vote 6, in respect of funding not required by the Mental Welfare Commission; and a transfer of £17,000 from class VII,vote 1, for drug misuse-related issues. The NHS trusts external financing limit has also been decreased by £10,391,000 from £48,840,000 to £38,449,000.

The cash limit for class XIII, vote 5—law, order and protective services, police grant and social work services, Scotland—will be reduced by £166,000 from £631,928,000 to £631,762,000. The running costs limit will be increased by £1,416,000 from £146,304,000 to £147,720,00. The changes include transfers of £616,000 to the Scottish Prison Service from class XIII, vote 6, for general running costs and £868,000 to civil defence from class I, vote I, in respect of a severe weather warning system. The increases are partly offset by transfers of £4,000,000 to class XIII, vote 2, in respect of revenue support grant and £30,000 to class VIII, vote 7 to cover costs on the Dunblane inquiry.

The cash limit for class XIII, vote 6—Scottish Office administration—is being increased by £1,332,000 from £167,978,000 to £169,310,000. Within this total, the running cost provision for Scottish Office administration is being increased by £684,000 from £152,300,000 to £152,984,000: the changes include a transfer to the Scottish Prison Service—class XIII, vote 5—of £616,000 for general running costs, and a transfer of £1,300,000 from class XIII, vote 3, to cover expenditure associated with the Department's response to BSE. The capital provision is being increased by £648,000 from £16,623,000 to £17,271,000: the changes include a transfer of £850,000 from class XIII, vote 3, again to cover expenditure associated with the Department's response to BSE and a transfer of £202,000 to class XIII, vote 4.

The non-voted cash limit SO/LA1, which covers non-housing capital expenditure by local authorities, is to be increased by £1,079,000 from £441,920,000 to £442,999,000, which is a transfer within class XIII, vote 5, from central Government to local authority expenditure to reflect the amount which local authorities are entitled to claim under the closed circuit television scheme.

The non-voted cash limit SO/LA2 which covers housing capital expenditure by local authorities and capital expenditure by new towns will be decreased by £20,438,000 from £106,395,000 to £85,957,000. The decrease reflects transfers of provision to Scottish Homes of £12,802,000, Scottish Enterprise of £3,636,000 and the Crown Office of £1,000,000 for which corresponding increases are included in the spring supplementary estimates for class XIII, vote 2, class XIII, vote 3, and class VIII, vote 7, respectively; and a transfer of provision to the non-cash limited other environmental services element of class XIII, vote 2, of £3,000,000.

The external finance requirement for Scottish Homes increases by £80 million from £162 million to £242 million as a result of the postponement of the disposal of its portfolio of loans to housing associations.

The overall running cost limit for the Scottish Office, together with its agencies and associated Departments, is being increased by £2,822,000 from £393,399,000 to £396,221,000. This is to cover additional expenditure of £1,300,000 by The Scottish Office associated with the Department's response to BSE and of £800,000 by the Scottish courts administration in connection with the Dunblane inquiry and increased provision of £722,000 for Historic Scotland which will be covered by increased income.

The increases will be offset by savings or charged to the reserve and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what changes the Lord Advocate proposes to the Crown Office cash and running cost limits for 1996–97. [14212]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class VIII, vote 7, will be increased by £2,300,000 from £45,770,000 to £48,070,000.

Within this total, the running cost limit will be increased by £1,300,000 from £42,718,000 to £44,018,000.

The supplementary is required in order that the Crown Office can take up part—£1,270,000—of its running cost end-year flexibility entitlement of £1,898,00 as announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to the House of Commons on 12 July 1996, *Official Report*, columns *326–31*.

The supplementary estimate also includes two transfers from the Scottish Office: £1,000,000 for capital expenditure and £30,000 to assist with the cost of the Dunblane inquiry.

The increase will be charged to the reserve or met from savings and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Hedgerows

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what length of hedgerow has been lost in Scotland in each year since 1979. [12486]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 24 January 1997]:* Hedgerows are not measured annually in Scotland, but the overall change in the length of hedgerows meeting specified conditions can be estimated from sample information produced from time to time under the national countryside monitoring scheme. Between 1973 and 1988, the latest date for which a survey was carried out, rather less than 400 km of hedgerows were "lost" each year, on average, in Scotland. Current Government policy is to encourage all farmers to protect their hedgerows, and incentives for the restoration of hedges are available through my Department's agri-environment programme.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Cash Limits

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Lord President of the Council what changes he proposes to the 1996–97 cash and running costs limit for the Privy Council Office. [13170]

Mr. Newton: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XVIII, vote 3 will be increased by £96,000 from £2,483,000 to £2,579,000 and the running cost limit is increased by £96,000 from £2,509,000 to £2,605,000. The increase will be offset by reductions in the Home Office class VII, vote 1 and Customs and Excise class XVI, vote 3, of £87,000 and £9,000 respectively and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Cash Limits

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has to change the Overseas Development Administration cash limits for 1996–97 [13930]

Dr. Liam Fox: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class II, vote 5 will be reduced overall by £5,288,000 from £1,622,036,000 to £1,616,748,000 and the ODA running cost limit will be increased by £1,000,000 from £56,708,000 to £57,708,000.

The overall reduction is the net effect of outward public expenditure survey transfers to the diplomatic wing of £5,500,000 in respect of the British Council and £750,000 in respect of the Bosnia peace implementation conference and £100,000 to the Office of Science and Technology in respect of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission.

These reductions are offset by an increase of £1,000,000 to ODA running costs in respect of a partial take-up of end of year flexibility arrangements announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 12 July 1996, *Official Report*, columns *326–31*, and an increase of £61,000 for expected costs for the Crown Agents privatisation programme. The increases will be offset by transfers or charged to the reserve and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Departmental Publications

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the *(a)* White Papers, *(b)* Green Papers, *(c)* consultation papers, *(d)* draft regulations and *(e)* circulars, for which her Department has been responsible issued in 1996 which her Department assesses could give rise, (i) directly and (ii) indirectly to significant environmental effects. [12707]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* The only document issued by my Department in 1996 with potential environmental effects was the Green Paper, "Protecting Our Heritage," which was published jointly with the Welsh Office. The importance of the environmentally sustainable development of tourism is reflected in the Department's tourism strategy to be published on 5 February 1997.

Ecclesiastical Heritage

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what response Her Majesty's Government have made to the submission by the Church of England in respect of the future of the ecclesiastical heritage. [12974]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* The Government have warmly welcomed the Church's submission and reaffirmed its commitment to preservation of the ecclesiastical heritage. My Department is now having discussions with the General Synod to explore the issues raised.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Departmental Legal Costs

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were *(a)* the costs incurred by his Department and *(b)* the costs awarded against him in the case: Sri Lankan asylum—Ravichandran and Sandralingham, in April 1996. [13481]

Mr. Kirkhope *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* The available information is that, to date, the total legal costs incurred by the Home Office in the cases referred to amount to just over £24,000. This includes the hearing in April 1996 and other legal challenges in this case. At the hearing in April 1996 the appellants were awarded half the costs of the case, but the solicitors have not so far sought to enforce that order.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were *(a)* the costs incurred by his Department and *(b)* the costs awarded against him in the case: Al Fayed nationality—Mohammed al Fayed and Ali Fayed, in May 1995. [13477]

Mr. Kirkhope *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* Up to 28 January 1997, the Home Office's legal costs were £58,174.78. Details of internal Home Office administrative and other costs are not available as they have not been recorded separately. Details of the costs awarded against the Home Office have not yet been received, but would be payable only in the event of our appeal to the House of Lords being unsuccessful.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were *(a)* the costs incurred by his Department and *(b)* the costs awarded against him in the case: Director General of Prison Service dismissal—Derek Lewis, in May 1996. [13483]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* The costs incurred by the Department amounted to £16,428.95, excluding the costs of permanent Home Office staff. The sum to be paid to Mr. Lewis's legal representatives in respect of his costs has been settled at £41,000 in total.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were *(a)* the costs incurred by his Department and *(b)* the costs awarded against him in the case: granting of High Court appeal—Kenneth Richardson in October 1985. [13479]

Mr. Kirkhope *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* Legal costs to the Home Department of Mr. Richardson's judicial review proceedings were in the sum of £8,731.58. Pursuant to the order in 1995 of the divisional court, an additional sum of £5,000 towards Mr. Richardson's costs has been paid to his solicitors. I understand that they are in touch with the Treasury Solicitor about any balance still to be paid.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were *(a)* the costs incurred by his Department and *(b)* the costs awarded against him in the case: Kashmiri students' sentencing-Quayyum Raja and Mohammed Riaz in November 1994. [13475]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* The answer is *(a)* £4,359 in respect of services provided by the Treasury Solicitor and *(b)* £15,731.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were *(a)* the costs incurred by his Department and *(b)* the costs awarded against him in the case: prisoners' release for access to lawyer-Wallace Smith, in January 1995. [13476]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* Mr. Smith discontinued this action. Home Office legal expenses totalled £1,699.64 and £7,500 was paid towards Mr. Smith's legal costs.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were *(a)* the costs incurred by his Department and *(b)* the costs awarded against him in the case: Rev. Moon immigration—Rev. Sun Myung Moon, in November 1995. [13480]

Mr. Kirkhope *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* The information requested is *(a)* £12,813.97 and *(b)* £8,250.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were *(a)* the costs incurred by his Department and *(b)* the costs awarded against him in the case: Bulger sentencing—Jon Venables and Robert Thompson, in May 1996. [13482]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* The costs paid so far total £36,991 in respect of services provided by the Treasury Solicitor. The final decision on the apportionment of costs awaits the outcome of the case, which is still before the courts.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were *(a)* the costs incurred by his Department and *(b)* the costs awarded against him in the case: IRA parole-Paul Norney, Stephen Nordone, Brendan Dowd, Sean Kinsella and Noel Gibson, in September 1995. [13478]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* The costs paid so far total £20,522, in respect of services provided by the Treasury Solicitor. The issue of costs awarded against the Secretary of State has not yet been settled.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were *(a)* the costs incurred by his Department and *(b)* the costs awarded against him in the criminal injuries compensation case-ex parte Fire Brigades Union, in November 1994. [13474]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* The total costs incurred by the Home Office in this case, which started in the High Court in March 1994 and concluded in the House of Lords in April 1995, were £103,338.77. This includes the respondent's bills of costs totalling £36,025.40.

Right to Secrecy

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from *(a)* the Roman Catholic Church and *(b)* other religious denominations about the implications of new police powers of surveillance contained in the Police Bill [Lords] for the right of secrecy of the confessional and other private counselling by priests and pastors. [13312]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* We have received no representations from the Roman Catholic Church or other religious denominations on this matter.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide breakdowns of the number of asylum seekers currently detained under Immigration Act powers by *(a)* nationality, *(b)* gender, *(c)* place of detention, *(d)* length of detention and *(e)* immigration status at the time of application. [13263]

Mr. Kirkhope: The requested breakdown of detained asylum seekers is given in the tables:

Table 1: Number of people recorded as being detained[1,2] on 11 December 1996 who had sought asylum at some stage, by gender and immigration status

Gender	Port	Illegal entrants	Subject to deportation action	Total
Male	353	280	48	681
Female	52	13	8	73
Total	405	293	56	754

[1] Persons detained solely under the powers contained in Schedule 2 or 3 of the Immigration Act 1971.
[2] These figures include people who have been in detention for less than a month. Because of the delay in recording receptions into, and releases from, detention and the large number of persons detained for a short period, the figures should be used with caution.

Table 2: Number of people recorded as being detained [1,2] on 11 December 1996 who had sought asylum at some stage, by stage of application and immigration status

Stage of application	Port	Illegal entrants	Subject to deportation action	Total
Awaiting initial decision	90	54	8	152
Awaiting result of appeal	219	132	28	379
Awaiting removal after refusal	96	107	20	223
Total	405	293	56	754

[1] Persons detained solely under the powers contained in Schedule 2 or 3 of the Immigration Act 1971.
[2] These figures include people who have been in detention for less than a month. Because of the delay in recording receptions into, and releases from, detention and the large number of persons detained for a short period, the figures should be used with caution.

Table 3: Number of people recorded as being detained[1,2] on 11 December 1996 who had sought asylum at some stage, by length of detention[3] and immigration status

Length	Port	Illegal Entrants	Subject to Deportation action	Total
0–1 month[3]	74	92	7	173
1–2 months	54	57	9	120
2–6 months	169	107	26	302
6–12 months	88	30	11	129
12 months +	20	7	3	30
Total	405	293	56	754

[1] Persons detained solely under the powers contained in Schedule 2 or 3 of the Immigration Act 1971.
[2] These figures include people who have been in detention for less than a month. Because of the delay in recording receptions into, and releases from, detention and the large number of persons detained for a short period, the figures should be used with caution.
[3] In some cases the date a person enters detention may be understated due to the method of recording.

Table 4: Number of people recorded as being detained[1,2] on 11 December 1996 who had sought asylum at some stage, by nationality and immigration status

Nationality	Port	Illegal entrants	Subject to deportation action	Total
Nigeria	58	26	22	106
Algeria	26	48	5	79
India	10	64	1	75
Sri Lanka	30	19	2	51

Table 4: Number of people recorded as being detained[1,2] on 11 December 1996 who had sought asylum at some stage, by nationality and immigration status

Nationality	Port	Illegal entrants	Subject to deportation action	Total
Zaire	35	4	3	42
Ghana	20	17	3	40
Pakistan	14	21	4	39
China People's Republic of	29	9	0	38
Turkey	21	11	0	32
Romania	4	13	0	17
Cyprus	15	0	0	15
Israel	15	0	0	15
Angola	10	1	3	14
Bangaldesh	4	7	0	11
Gambia	9	1	1	11
Yugoslavia	3	6	1	10
Iran	6	2	1	9
Jamaica	1	5	3	9
Russia	4	4	0	8
Columbia	6	1	0	7
Ethiopia	4	3	0	7
Poland	6	1	0	7
Tanzania	4	1	2	7
Uganda	6	0	1	7
Kenya	5	1	0	6
Liberia	6	0	0	6
Lithuania	4	2	0	6
Sierra Leone	3	3	0	6
Ecuador	4	1	0	5
Ivory Coast	3	2	0	5
Morocco	1	3	1	5
Iraq	3	0	1	4
Lebanon	2	2	0	4
Slovakia	3	0	0	3
South Africa	2	0	1	3
Bulgaria	1	1	0	2
Cameroon	1	1	0	2
Congo	2	0	0	2
Eritrea	1	1	0	2
Philippines	0	2	0	2
Somalia	2	0	0	2
Tunisia	2	0	0	2
Zimbabwe	2	0	0	2
Other	11	7	1	19
Nationality doubtful	7	3	0	10
Total	405	293	56	754

[1] Persons detained solely under the powers contained in schedule 2 or 3 of the Immigration Act 1971.
[2] These figures include people who have been in detention for less than a month. Because of the delay in recording receptions into, and releases from, detention and the large number of persons detained for a short period, the figures should be used with caution.

Table 5: Number of people recorded as being detained[1,2] on 11 December 1996 asylum at some state, by location of detention and immigration status

	Port	Illegal entrants	Subjects to Deportation action	Total
Prisons				
HMP Rochester	74	50	13	137
HMP Haslar	34	48	4	86
HMP Birmingham	3	10	2	15
HMP Wormwood Scrubs	4	4	0	8
HMP Magilligan	0	6	0	6
HMP Manchester	0	4	1	5
HMP Brixton	0	4	1	5
HMP Greenock	0	4	0	4
HMP Wandsworth	0	0	2	2
HMP High Down	0	1	1	2
HMP Elmley	0	2	0	2
HMP Doncaster	0	2	0	2
HMP Armley	0	2	0	2

Table 5: Number of people recorded as being detained[1,2] on 11 December 1996 asylum at some state, by location of detention and immigration status

	Port	Illegal entrants	Subjects to Deportation action	Total
Other prison	7	5	4	16
Other Places of Detention				
Campsfield House	98	52	12	162
Tinsley House	66	38	8	112
Harmondsworth	62	22	3	87
Police Cells	10	22	4	36
Meadvale Buildings	25	8	0	33
Queens Building	12	2	0	14
Manchester airport detention suite	1	7	1	9
Dover Harbour	5	0	0	5
Other places of detention	4	0	0	4
Total	405	293	56	754

[1] Persons detained solely under the powers contained in schedule 2 or 3 of the Immigration Act 1971.

[2] These figures include people who have been in detention for less than a month. Because of the delay in recording receptions into, and releases from, detention and the large number of persons detained for a short period, the figures should be used with caution.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the average time currently taken to reach an initial decision on *(a)* asylum applications submitted prior to the implementation of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993, *(b)* asylum applications submitted since implementation of that Act and *(c)* all asylum applications; [13265]

(2) what is the average time currently taken to hear and determine an appeal against a refusal of asylum. [13266]

Mr. Kirkhope: Information on the times taken at the various stages of the asylum process are given in the table.

Average time involved in deciding applications for asylum (October–December 1996)

	Months
Time taken for an initial decision to be made (pre-Act applications)	48.2
Time taken for an initial decision to be made (post-Act applications)	12.7
Time taken by the Home Office to process an appeal	1.2
Time taken by the Immigration Appeals Authority to determine an appeal	10.0

Immigration Detainees

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 10 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *144*, what was the total number of cases of a person detained under Immigration Act powers that were reviewed by a director of the immigration service in 1996; and what criteria determine which cases are reviewed by the directors of the immigration service. [13280]

Mr. Kirkhope: Taking their respective caseloads together, the two directors of the immigration service reviewed detention in 718 cases in 1996. Cases are referred for review by the directors once detention exceeds six months, and monthly thereafter.

Danny McNamee

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he has taken in the case of Danny McNamee following the submission made to him in September 1994. [13301]

Mr. Kirkhope: Since receiving representations in September 1994, my officials have made inquiries of the police and Crown Prosecution Service and are currently awaiting a response from Mr. McNamee's solicitors to a request for some additional information which is needed before our consideration can be taken any further.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what new evidence he has received since mid-1994 in respect of the case of Danny McNamee; and if he will make a statement. [13302]

Mr. Kirkhope: The hon. Gentleman wrote to my right hon. and learned Friend on 7 September 1994 in support of representations from Mr. McNamee's solicitors and, in the light of those, seeking a referral of Mr. McNamee's case to the Court of Appeal. Since that time Mr. McNamee's case has been under consideration by officials, who are currently awaiting further information from Mr. McNamee's solicitors.

Cash Limits

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has for changes to the 1996–97 cash limits within his responsibilities. [14202]

Mr. Howard: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class VII, vote 1—Home Office administration, police, probation, immigration and other services. England and Wales—will be increased by £10,395,000 from £4,599,693,000 to £4,610,088,000. This increase is the net effect of the partial take-up of running costs end-year flexibility of £10,395,000, as announced by the Chief Secretary, 12 July 1996, *Official Report*, columns *326–31*, transfer of running costs to the Department of National Heritage, transfers to the Scottish Office, Welsh Office, Northern Ireland Office, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Customs and Excise and Cabinet Office central drug co-ordination unit, transfer from non-voted probation credit approvals. This transfer from non-voted provision reduces the non-voted cash limit—HO/LACAP—by £180,000 from £97,892,000 to £97,712,000.

In consequence of the above changes, the Home Office gross running cost limit will be increased by £10,383,000 from £1,813,815,000 to £1,824,198,000.

The increases will be offset by savings, transfers or charges to the reserve and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Public Record Office

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on changes to the cash limits of the Public Record Office, class VIII, vote 3 for 1996–97. [14206]

Mr. Streeter: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class VIII, vote 3, has been increased by £1,034,000 from £31,559,000 to £32,593,000. This increase reflects in the main partial take-up of end of year flexibility for running costs or £298,000 and capital expenditure or £731,000). The increase also includes a £5,000 transfer from the Security Facilities Executive—SAFE—to fund the purchase of security advice. The increase will be offset by savings or charged to the reserve and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Legal Aid

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what are the penalties for breaching legal aid regulations. [13804]

Mr. Streeter: The Legal Aid Board has power to revoke or discharge a civil legal aid certificate where information comes to light that the assisted person has intentionally failed to comply with the legal aid regulations. The assisted person may also be prosecuted under section 39 of the Legal Aid Act 1988 leading, on summary conviction, to a fine not exceeding level 4 on the standard scale—currently £2,5000—or to a term of imprisonment not exceeding three months, or to both.

Where an assisted person's solicitor has failed to comply with any provision of the legal aid regulations, and as a result the fund incurs a loss, the Legal Aid Board may defer all or part of the solicitor's profit costs until the solicitor has complied with such provisions. If the board refers the solicitor's conduct to the solicitors' disciplinary tribunal and the solicitor is disciplined, the board may retain any deferred profit costs.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department by what means his Department is able to waive costs under the statutory charge when an investigation reveals legal aid has been fraudulently claimed and made the legal liability of the assisted party. [13802]

Mr. Streeter: The Lord Chancellor does not have a power to waive costs under the statutory charge. The operation of the charge is provided for in section 16 of the Legal Aid Act 1988 and the relevant regulations, and the Legal Aid Board must comply with these provisions.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will conduct an investigation independent of the Legal Aid Board into the circumstances relating to the transfer of legal aid certificate No. 05/01/89/23181J on 10 September 1990 and subsequent amendments to that certificate through to its discharge. [13803]

Mr. Streeter: Under the Legal Aid Act 1988, the Legal Aid Board is responsible for the administration of the civil legal aid scheme in England and Wales. Neither the Lord Chancellor nor I comment on or intervene in the award of legal aid in individual cases.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department by what mechanisms his Department investigates and rectified *(a)* identified abuse of civil legal aid and *(b)* miscarriages of civil legal procedure resulting from the abuse of legal aid regulations. [13805]

Mr. Streeter: Under the Legal Aid Act 1988, the Legal Aid Board is responsible for the administration of the civil legal aid scheme in England and Wales. Investigations into the abuse of legal aid are the responsibility of the Legal Aid Board.

If abuse of the legal aid scheme is identified, the Lord Chancellor may consider changes to regulations where necessary. One recent example of this is the introduction of new regulations to assess the financial means of "apparently wealthy" applicants. The Lord Chancellor also asked the Legal Aid Board to establish a special investigations unit to investigate the means of applicants whose financial circumstances are particularly complex.

Unqualified Solicitors

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department who is responsible for investigating allegations that a person not qualified as a licensed solicitor is presented to the client, assisted party, and Legal Aid Board as the nominated and conducting solicitor; and who would be responsible for prosecuting such a case. [13801]

Mr. Streeter: If allegations are received that the nominated solicitor is not qualified to act, the board will investigate. If the unqualified person has been admitted to the roll but does not have a practising certificate, the board will refer the matter to the office for the supervision of solicitors which will take appropriate disciplinary action.

If the unqualified person has never been admitted to the roll and has held him/herself out to be a qualified solicitor, the matter will be referred to the Law Society. The Law Society will consider the case and, in conjunction with the police, decide whether to prosecute under sections 20 and 21 of the Solicitors Act 1974.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Cash Limits

Mr. Forman: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proposals there are to change the 1996–97 *(a)* cash limits and running costs limit for the Office of Public Service. [14209]

Mr. Freeman: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for the Office of Public Service, Class XVII, vote 1, will be increased by £4,223,000 from £178,627,000 to £182,850,000 and the gross running cost limit will be increased by £3,485,000 from £82,649,000 to £86,134,000.

The changes reflect the transfer of £687,000 from Cabinet Office other services, Class VXIII, vote 1, in respect of the transfer of responsibility for the superannuation awarding system and accommodation costs, an extra £486,000 to meet the cost of functions remaining in OPS following the sale of the Stationery Office, the Recruitment and Assessment/Services Agency and the Occupational Health and Safety Agency, offset by

the take-up of running cost end-year flexibility of £486,000, the transfer of Cabinet Office, other services, class XVIII, vote 2, of £50,000 to fund OPS early departures, and a claim on the reserve of £3,050,000 for the costs falling to OPS of accommodation and the vote balance left after the sale of RAS. This is partially offset by a reduction of £50,000 in the cash limit on the Stationery Office, class XVII, vote 4.

The net running cost limit for the Civil Service College has increased from nil to £300,000. This is the result of lower than expected trading.

Parliamentary and Health Service Commissioners

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proposals there are to change the 1996–97 cash limit for the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner and health service commissioners. [14210]

Mr. Freeman: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner and health service commissioners, class XVIII, vote 4, will be reduced by £2,500,000 from £16,173,000 to £13,673,000. The reduction is in response to the Health Service Commissioners (Amendment) Act 1996 generating initially a lower than anticipated workload.

ENVIRONMENT

Rural Development Commission

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environmental what is the total estimated cost in the financial year 1997–98 of redundancy payments and pay in lieu of notice for staff made redundant as a result of the winding up of the Rural Development Comission's advisory service for small businesses in rural development areas. [13886]

Mr. Clappison: I am informed by the Rural Development Commission that the total estimated cost of redundancy payments in the financial year 1997–98 for staff made redundant as a result of winding up the commission's business service is £1,096,186.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much money was distributed by the Rural Development Commission to small firms in rural areas in the financial year 1995–96 in the form of rural counselling grants; how many businesses were in receipt of these grants; and what is the proposed expenditure on rural counselling grants in 1996–97. [13888]

Mr. Clappison: I am informed by the Rural Development Commission that rural counselling grants are given to business advisory agencies, such as local enterprise agencies, not direct to small firms. In 1995–96 £301,000 was given to 39 agencies for them to provide business advice to 2,887 small firms in rural development areas. The expected expenditure on rural counselling grants in 1996–97 is £364,000.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many small firms in rural development areas are currently clients of the Rural Development Commission's business service. [13885]

Mr. Clappison: I am informed by the Rural Development Commission that there are currently 8,529 small firms in rural development areas that are clients of the commission's business service.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what savings will be achieved in 1997–98 by the winding up of the Rural Development Commission's advisory service for small businesses in rural development areas, taking into account expenditure incurred by the proposed creation of rural development officer posts. [13889]

Mr. Clappison: I am informed by the Rural Development Commission that its estimate of net savings of salary and associated costs in 1997–98 to be achieved by the winding up of the commission's business advisory service is £624,000. This allows for expenditure incurred by the creation of additional rural development officer posts. A further £1,185,000 of programme expenditure will be saved by the ending of the commission's marketing support scheme and specialist consultancy support service.

Select Committee Report

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Government will respond to the first report of the House of Lords Select Committee of the European Communities on freedom of access to information on the environment (HL9). [14041]

Mr. Clappison: Shortly.

Cash Limits

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to change the 1996–97 cash limits and running cost limits for which he is responsible. [14301]

Mr. Gummer: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class VI, vote 1—housing and construction, England—covering sections A, D to G and J to L of that vote, will be decreased by £7,172,000 from £331,468,000 to £324,296,000. An increase in the cash limit of £3,057,000 is offset by a decrease of £10,229,000. The increase consists of £557,000 to meet additional administration costs the corporation is expected to incur in preparing the loan portfolio for possible sale, funded from any receipt of the sale; a transfer of £2,000,000 from the non-voted Department of the Environment/new towns cash limit, and an offset of £500,000 from class VI, vote 8, Ordnance Survey. The decrease is a transfer from a number of programmes, principally £3,179,000 from gipsy site grant and £3,030,000 from the estates renewal challenge fund, to fund increases in Housing Corporation tax relief and supplementary management grants, which fall outside the cash limit.

The Department of the Environment/Housing Corporation non-voted cash limit will be increased by £2,000,000 from £1,035,868,000 to £1,037,868,000 in compensation for receipts which would normally have been recycled within the Housing Corporation and which may now be lost due to the proposed sale of the loans portfolio.

The Department of the Environment/new towns non-voted cash limit will be decreased by £2,000,000 from –£108,000,000 to –£110,000,000. This decrease is due to the Commission for New Towns having accelerated disposals and generated additional receipts above those already taken up in the winter supplementary estimate. Additional receipts of £3,250,000 in gross terms were generated, of which the commission expects to use £1,250,000 to increase capital spending leaving a balance of £2,000,000 which will be transferred to class VI, vote 1—housing and construction, England—to meet pressure on Housing Corporation tax relief grant.

The cash limit for class VI, vote 2—regeneration and countryside and wildlife—will be increased by £30,389,000 from £1,464,779,000 to £1,495,168,000. The increase is mainly due to the need to repay £20,000,000 advanced from the Contingencies Fund, as announced on 23 January, *Official Report*, column *680*, to enable English Partnerships to purchase the site at the Greenwich peninsula for the millennium exhibition, and an increase in provision for central Government grants and grants to local authorities in place of European Commission receipts. This extra provision will be met by a call on the reserve to meet the cost of acquiring the Greenwich site and take up of end-year flexibility entitlement for European regional development fund, old programmes and for the other environmental services block, as announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 12 July 1996, *Official Report* columns *326–31*. The balance will be made up of a transfer of £34,000 from the Department for Education and Employment and the Department of Trade and Industry as further contributions towards the Manchester bomb fund, and a transfer from the ERDF non-voted cash limit.

The DOE/ERDF non-voted cash limit will be reduced £4,995,000 from £183,295,000 to £178,300,000. This reflects transfers of £4,518,000 to sections M and N on vote 2—regeneration and Countryside and Wildlife—and £477,000 to the Department of Transport.

The cash limit for class VI, vote 3—environmental protection and water—covering sections A to H of that vote, will be increased by £500,000 from £351,610,000 to £352,110,000. This change reflects increases in provision of £76,000 for water supply and sewerage grants in rural areas; and £424,000 for water supply and sewerage in assisted areas. The increase will be matched by a reduction in the cash limit for class VI, vote 4—local government and planning—of £500,000.

The cash limit for class VI, vote 4—local government and planning, England—covering sections A to F of that vote, will be reduced by £1,050,000 from £31,128,057,000 to £31,127,007,000. This reduction is the result of reductions in the payments made to the Valuation Office Agency in section A, valuation services, and reduction in the planning and minerals research programme, section D. The savings in section A will be used within vote 4 to allow an increase to the local government research programme in section C—local government research and surveys—and to enable the payment of a special grant from section H, other grants, to those authorities affected by the terrorist bombings in Docklands and central Manchester. Section H is outside the cash limit on the vote. The savings in section D will be used to allow an increase in section E—civil defence and water and sewerage grants—of class VI, vote 3, environmental protection and water.

The DOE local government reorganisation non-voted cash limit will be reduced by £2,176,000 from £107,845,000 to £105,669,000 to offset the balance of the increase on section H of vote 4 for the payment of special grant and of emergency financial assistance under the Bellwin scheme.

The cash limit for class VI, vote 5, administration, will be increased by £5,781,000 from £463,809,000 to £469,590,000. This change reflects the expected shortfall in running cost related receipts due to the Building Research Establishment executive agency which will not be realised before it is privatised, drawdown of £600,000 running cost end year flexibility entitlement in respect of the Health and Safety Executive gross running cost limit to meet severance and other expenditure requirements, a transfer of £655,000 to the Health and Safety Commission grant in aid from the Office of Public Services, class XVII, vote 1, in respect of opportunity cost rent payments; a transfer of £40,000 from the Northern Ireland Office, class XV, vote 1, for the costs of a temporary appointment of an inspector to the Planning Appeals Commission Northern Ireland, an increase of £1,324,000 to cover the costs of the sale of the Building Research Establishment executive agency, an increase of £367,000 in respect of additional costs incurred arranging for the sale of the Housing Corporation loans portfolio. These increases are partly offset by net savings of; £545,000 by the Planning Inspectorate executive agency due to additional local plan inquiry receipts, and £510,000 operating costs by the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre executive agency.

As a result, the qualifying provision for the DOE gross running cost limit will increase by £407,000 from £229,063,000 to £229,470,000. The HSE gross running cost limit will increase by £703,000 from £157,308,000 to £158,011,000. The BRE net running cost control limit has increased from nil to £3,850,000.

All the increases will be offset either by, savings or transfers or will be charged to the reserve and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

TRANSPORT

Road Fund Licences

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the categories of vehicle currently exempt from payment of road fund licences. [13760]

Mr. Bowis: Currently, the following are exempt from vehicle excise duty:

emergency vehicles—ambulances, fire engines, fire service, mine rescue, lifeboat haulage and lighthouse authority vehicles;

police vehicles;

Crown vehicles;

NHS vehicles;

vehicles used by or on behalf of disabled persons in receipt of certain DSS allowances;

vehicles used by organisations providing transport for disabled persons;

vehicles used for short journeys between different parts of land occupied by the same person for agriculture, horticulture or forestry;

vehicles over 25 years old—except goods vehicles and buses used commercially;

diplomatic and consular vehicles;

vehicles of visiting forces and international defence organisations;

vehicles visiting the UK temporarily and for personal export.

In addition, there is temporary exemption from VED for vehicles travelling to or from a pre-arranged roadworthiness test or weighing.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what projections he has made as to the change in the number of heavy goods vehicles if 44-tonne lorries are allowed on to British roads. [13552]

Mr. Watts: Our consultation document, "Lorry Weights", published in December, explained the uncertainty of any estimates, but concludes that eventually there might be between 3,200 and 6,500 fewer heavy lorries on our roads than would otherwise have been the case, depending on the extent to which 44-tonne lorries would cause some goods to be switched from rail to road.

Bus Passenger Journeys

Mr. Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the change in the number of bus passenger journeys made outside London since 1985–86. [13666]

Mr. Watts: Local bus passenger journeys made outside London have declined by 29 per cent. since 1985–86. The following table summarises the available figures.

Million passenger journeys

Year	*London*	*Great Britain outside London*	*Great Britain*
1985–86	1,152	4,489	5,641
1986–87	1,164	4,177	5,341
1987–88	1,207	4,085	5,292
1988–89	1,211	4,004	5,215
1989–90	1,188	3,886	5,074
1990–91	1,178	3,672	4,850
1991–92	1,149	3,516	4,665
1992–93	1,129	3,351	4,480
1993–94	1,117	3,268	4,385
1994–95	1,167	3,253	4,420
1995–96	1,205	3,178	4,383
Percentage change since 1985–86	5	–29	–22

Cash Limits

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to change his Department's cash limits and running costs limits for 1996–97. [14129]

Sir George Young: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the following changes will be made:

The cash limit for class V, vote 1—Highways Agency—will be increased by £1,214,000 from £1,662,285,000 to £1,663,499,000. The increase in the cash limit reflects adjustments in running costs funding between this vote and class V, vote 2, to allow the consolidation of administrative budgets and funds for the Highways Agency's early retirement programme and also the balance of end year flexibility entitlement as announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 12 July 1996, *Official Report*, columns *326–31*. Running costs provision for this vote increases by £1,214,000 from £75,984,000 to £77,198,000.

The cash limit for class V, vote 2—administration and transport services—will be reduced by £232,000 from £154,877,000 to £154,645,000. The reduction in the cash limit arises from a claim on the reserve for track access grants of £6,000,000 and inter-vote transfer from class V, vote 5 of £500,000 for expenditure associated with the channel tunnel rail link consultancy, offset by inter-vote transfers between this vote and class V, vote 1, for expenditure consolidating administrative budgets and the Highway's Agency's early retirement programme of £1,214,000 class V, vote 3, for expenditure relating to the Croydon tramlink of £4,527,000, and class V, vote 6 for expenditure relating to the clean-up operation for the Sea Empress of £327,000, and to the Marine Agencies' early retirement programmes of £664,000. Running costs provision for this vote is reduced by £2,205,000 from £107,987,00 to £105,782,000.

The cash limit on class V, vote 3—transport industries—will be increased by £5,100,00 from £10,167,000 to £15,267,000. The increase is met by a claim on the reserve for increased expenditure and receipts associated with rail consultancies and rail privatisation offset by an inter-vote transfer to class V, vote 2 of £500,000 for expenditure associated with the channel tunnel rail link consultancy.

The cash limit on class V vote 4—Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency—will be increased by £2,125,000 from £178,326,000 to £180,451,000. The increase is met by claims on the reserve for increased expenditure on the development of photographs on driving licences at £2,274,000, and on higher volumes of vehicle licensing business generated under the terms of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency's demand financing regime of £1,024,000, offset by an inter-vote transfer of deferred expenditure for the statutory off-road notification project of £1,173,000 to class V, vote 6 for the clean-up operation for the Sea Empress. Running costs provision for this vote is increased by £3,441,000 from £173,132,000 to £176,572,000.

The cash limit on class V, vote 5—roads and local transport—will be reduced by £20,473,000 from £392,038,000 to £371,565,000. The reduction comes about because of the transfer of responsibility for the Croydon tramlink project from this vote to class V, vote 3, section H, London Transport's core business.

The cash limit on class V, vote 6—other transport agencies—will be increased by £8,164,000 from £86,065,000 to £94,229,000. The increase is met by a claim on the reserve of £6,000,000 and inter-vote transfers from class V, vote 2 of £327,000 and from class V, vote 4 of £1,173,000 for the costs associated with the clean-up operations for the Sea Empress, and a transfer for the

Marine Agencies' early retirement programmes of £664,000, also from class V, vote 2. Running costs provision for this vote increases by £664,000 from £38,841,000 to £39,505,000.

As a result of these changes, the Department of Transport gross running costs limit will be increased by £3,114,000 from £395,944,000 to £399,058,000.

The Department of Transport local authority capital cash limit will be increased by £447,000 from £312,644,000 to £313,091,000. This increase results from a transfer of funds from class VI, vote 2 of the Department of the Environment for the development of the Conway Park railway station.

In addition, the cash limit on class V, vote 7—passenger rail services—will be increased by £65,329,000, from £1,787,668,000 to £1,852,997,000. The additional provision is required to provide support for the provision of passenger rail services in 1996–97, and adviser costs in connection with the letting of franchises. The Office of Passenger Rail Franchising running costs limit will also be increased by £444,000 from £7,556,000 to £8,000,000 to take account of receipts in respect of seconded staff.

The overall increases will be offset by transfers or charged to the reserve and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Rail Industry (Performance)

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his latest assessment of the railway industry's performance in 1996–97. [14130]

Sir George Young: The railway industry's recent performance has been particularly good. For example, in the last four months, levels of punctuality and reliability have been higher than for the same period in any previous year since data for British Rail's passenger charter began to be collected in 1991–92. On average, 91.8 per cent. of trains arrived within five to 10 minutes of their schedules arrival time and 99.1 per cent. of scheduled services ran. These high levels of performance reflect the success of the new performance regimes, which give all parties direct financial incentives to ensure that services run to time. The franchising director is consequently making payments to the train operating companies for their improved performance. These payments are reflected in the additional provision for passenger rail services included in the proposals I have announced today for changing my Department's cash limits and running costs limit for 1996–97.

Railway Maintenance

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what instructions he has given to the Rail Regulator to ensure that Railtrack provides the contractual level of maintenance of the rail network. [13429]

Mr. Watts: None. The Rail Regulator's duties are contained in the Railways Act 1993. He has recently published a statement setting out the regulatory objectives for Railtrack's infrastructure renewal and investment programme.

Seafarer Training (English Language)

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received on the implementation of English language speaking requirements under EU directives on seafarer training; and what progress has been made with implementing the directives. [13425]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* We have received four representations on the draft regulations which are intended to implement the English language requirements in directive 94/58/EC. We have also received representation from the European Commission about the implementation of this remaining provision of the directive into UK law. The draft regulations covering the language provision are currently being finalised following consultation.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Maintained Schools

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimates her Department has made in respect of the changes in *(a)* pupil numbers and *(b)* primary class size levels in maintained schools in England by 2000. [12191]

Mr. Robin Squire: The number of pupils in maintained schools in England in January 1996 was 7,370,000 full-time equivalents. By the year 2000, this is expected to increase to 7,596,000.

The Department does not make estimates of class size levels. Class size is determined by the head teachers and governors of individual schools.

Higher and Further Education, Lancashire

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what policies have been introduced to encourage more people to enter *(a)* higher and *(b)* further education in Lancashire since 1992. [13278]

Mr. Forth: Government policies, as set out in the 1991 White Papers, "Education and Training for the 21st Century", CM 1536, and "Higher Education: A New Framework", CM 1541, have led to a substantial increase in participation in further and higher education since 1992. Numbers in further education in England have increased by 25 per cent. between 1992–93 and 1995–96. The proportion of young people entering higher education in Great Britain has increased from nearly 28 per cent. in 1992 to one in three. Separate figures for participation rates in Lancashire are not available.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people went into *(a)* higher and *(b)* further education in Lancashire in each year since 1992. [13277]

Mr. Forth: The information, based on location of institution rather than the domicile of students, is as follows:

Entrants[1] to further and higher education in Lancashire

Thousands

Academic year	*Entrants to FE*	*Entrants to HE*
1992–93	72.3	[2]19.9
1993–94	73.1	20.9
1994–95	76.6	20.0
1995–96	n/a	[3]21.0

n/a=not available.

[1] Full-time and part-time students in their first year of study.

[2] Excludes part-time students in "old" universities of which there were some 1,000 in 1993–94.

[3] Includes estimates of HE students in FEIs.

Medical Students

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the cost per medical student for each year of study in each year since 1992; and for each year what was the percentage change on the previous year. [12973]

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 29 January 1997]:* Figures are not available in the form requested.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England publishes each year the figures that higher education institutions report for the average council grant for teaching allocated to each academic subject category. The figures for pre-clinical and clinical medicine are shown in the table, together with figures for the average level of tuition fee for medical students.

Academic year	*1992–93* £	*1993–94* £	*1994–95* £	*1995–96* £
Average unit of council funding[1] (clinical/ pre-clinical medicine)	4,209	4,203	5,719	5,769
Tuition fees[2]	4,099	4,099	2,320	2,320
Total	8,308	8,302	8,039	8,089
Percentage change	—	–0.1	–3.2	0.6

[1] Taken from 'Average Units of Council Funding', published annually by HEFCE.

[2] Average fee for all medical students, assuming constant distribution of students across the five years of study.

Data collected on maintenance awards and student loans do not distinguish between subject of study. Hence the average expenditure on awards and loans per medical student is not available.

Nursing and Employment Service

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) for what reasons staffing reductions were made to the nursing and healthcare employment service in 1996; and which posts were affected; [13391]

(2) what professional advice was sought before the decision to make reductions at the nursing and healthcare employment service; [13393]

(3) by what method the reductions in the number of nursing consultants in the Employment Service were achieved; what was the cost to the Employment Service of these reductions in 1996–97; and where the total costs of these reductions came from; [13395]

(4) what were the staffing levels of the nursing and healthcare employment service on *(a)* 1 December 1995 and *(b)* 1 January 1997; [13390]

(5) what legal advice he has taken about how the Employment Service currently complies with the Nurses Agencies Act 1957; [13392]

(6) what are the estimated costs of purchasing contingency advice from an outside agency for the nursing and healthcare employment service. [13394]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Ray Phillips to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 31 January 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me, in the absence of the Chief Executive, to reply to your questions regarding the Nursing and Healthcare Employment Service (NHES), the reasons for reductions in the Service in 1996, the numbers of posts which were affected, the legal and professional advice sought in respect of the impact of the reductions, the ES responsibilities under the Nurses Agencies Acts 1957 (1951 Scotland) and the current service levels and the costs of purchasing contingency advice from an outside agency in support of the NHES.

On 1 December 1995 the staff levels of the NHES were:

1 Chief Nursing Consultant (Head Office based)

4 Nursing Consultants (regional—outstationed)

1 Personal Secretary

1 Administrative Assistant

On 1 January 1997 the levels were:

1 Chief Nursing Consultant

1 Nursing Consultant

1 Personal Secretary

1 Administrative Assistant

The NHES was reduced in size and scope in 1996 as part of a range of economy measures agreed by the Employment Service Board. In reaching the decision to reduce the Service the Board took full account of legal advice regarding ES compliance with the Nurses Agencies Acts 1957 (1951 Scotland) and of the views of its Chief Nursing Consultant. The ES currently demonstrates the duty of care under the Act by submitting only those appropriately qualified nurses required to fill healthcare employer vacancies.

Reductions in the number of nursing consultant posts were achieved through voluntary severance and early retirement effecting a saving of £123,607. The budget identified for the purchase of contingency cover by way of a 'call off' contract to provide emergency cover for sickness absence is £12,000. This cover is available via an outside agency and was achieved through the competitive tendering process.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Further Education

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent representations she has received from the Further Education Funding Council concerning the state of college finances; and if she will make a statement. [13697]

Mr. Paice: The Department is in regular contact with the funding council on a range of matters.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for each FE college in England the number of *(a)* teaching and *(b)* other posts lost through redundancy for each year since incorporation. [13698]

Mr. Paice: This information is not collected centrally.

Cash Limits

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she plans changes to cash limits and running cost limits on votes within her responsibility for 1996–97. [14254]

Mr. Robin Squire: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class IX, vote 1—Department for Education and Employment: programmes and central services—and class IX vote 3, Employment Service, will be amended as follows:

Class	*Vote*	*Existing cash limit* £	*Change* £	*New cash limit* £
IX	1	8,745,142,000	–58,515,000	8,686,627,000
IX	3	1,288,977,000	–20,303,000	1,268,674,000

The cash limit for class IX, vote 1, will be decreased by £58,515,000 from £8,745,142,000 to £8,686,627,000. This is the result of a transfer of £56,000,000 from section A, I and J to the non-cash-limited demand-led element of funding for further education, section B; £8,100,000 in expenditure from section A is to be transferred to the non-voted DfEE/LACAP cash limit.

Transfers to other Departments and votes include £17,000 to the Department of the Environment as a contribution to the Manchester bomb appeal, £60,000 to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for salary-related costs of British teachers working in overseas countries, £2,300,00 to the Department of Social Security in respect of bridging allowances, £190,000 to the Employment Service in relation to post-merger administrative changes, £165,000 and £66,000 of running costs and capital provision respectively to the Office for National Statistics in respect of machinery of Government changes and premises costs.

These transfers have been partially offset by the take-up of £7,000,000 running costs end-year flexibility entitlement, as announced by the Chief Secretary to the House of Commons on 12 July 1996, *Official Report*, columns *326–31*, an increase of £1,000,000 in publicity expenditure funded through a transfer from the Employment Service and increases of £143,000 on specialist schools expenditure and £240,000 on the private finance initiative expenditure offset by corresponding decreases in the DfEE/LACAP cash limit.

As a result of the changes, the DfEE/LACAP cash limit will be increased by £7,717,000 from £46,523,000 to £54,240,000.

The cash limit for class IX, vote 3—Employment Service—will be decreased by £20,303,000 from £1,288,977,000 to £1,268,674,000. The running costs limit for vote 3 will be decreased by £2,993,000 from £910,151,000 to £907,158,000 as a result of a net transfer of £31,423,000 to the Department of Social Security to cover staff and services transferred to the Benefits Agency as part of the implementation of the jobseeker's allowance, a transfer to the Cabinet Office of £750,000 for advance funding of annual compensation payments for early departures, a transfer of £10,000 to the Inland Revenue to cover the transfer of responsibility for accommodation at Bognor Regis, the take-up of £29,000,000 under the running costs end-year flexibility scheme and a transfer of £190,000 from the Department for Education and Employment to cover work now undertaken by the Employment Service.

The ES's other current provision will be reduced by £21,000,000 from £111,571,000 to £90,571,000 as a result of a transfer to the Department for Education and Employment, to help cover an increase int he demand-led element of further education expenditure and publicity expenditure.

The ES's capital provision will be increased by £3,690,000 from £86,200,00 to £89,890,000 as a result of the take-up of £3,000,000 of the capital end year flexibility entitlement, as announced by the Chief Secretary to the House of Commons on 12 July 1996, *Official Report*, cols. *326–31*, and £690,000 from the Department of Social Security for the refurbishment of the Doncaster local office following the reassignment of the lease to the Employment Service.

The running costs provision for class IX, vote 1, will be increased by £6,645,000 from £367,263,000 to £373,908,000. The running costs provision for class IX, vote 3, will be decreased by £2,993,000 from £910,151,000 to £907,158,000. The gross running costs limit for the Department for Education and Employment is increased by £3,652,000 from £1,277,414,000 to £1,281,066,000.

HEALTH

Toothpaste

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of levels of consumption of toothpaste in the north-west relative to the south of England. [12471]

Mr. Malone: We have made no such assessment.

Water Fluoridation

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to issue guidance to water companies regarding fluoridation of public water supplies; if he will list those *(a)* individuals and *(b)* organisations consulted on this guidance indicating the date of consultation; and if he will place in the Library copies of all responses. [12631]

Mr. Malone: We have no plans to issue guidance to water companies about the fluoridation of public water supplies.

Dental Hygiene

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the number of children not cleaning their teeth *(a)* in Bolton and *(b)* nationally. [12472]

Mr. Malone: We have no plans to make such an assessment.

Dental Services

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 28 January, *Official Report*, column *162*, what was the income of the highest earning NHS dentist in 1995–96 carrying out primary non-orthodontic work. [13903]

Mr. Malone: The largest gross fee payment in 1995–96 to a national health service dentist who had no other dentist working for him and who carried out primarily non-orthodontic work was £363,000.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 28 January, *Official Report*, column *162*, how many (i) adult patients and (ii) children were registered with the highest paid NHS dentist in 1995–96. [13856]

Mr. Malone: The dentist with the highest level of gross fee earnings in 1995–96 who had no other dentists working for him had no registrations and was engaged mainly in orthodontic treatment.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 28 January, *Official Report*, column *162*, how many practices the highest earning NHS dentist has; and in which counties they are located. [13855]

Mr. Malone: To give this information would be in breach of the open government code of practice, which exempts information which could facilitate an unwarranted invasion of privacy.

Hospital Consultants

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* casualty and *(b)* accident and emergency consultants there were in each of the last five years. [13246]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is:

Accident and emergency consultants in England

	Number
1991	220
1992	230
1993	250
1994	260
1995	290

Whole-time equivalents, rounded to the nearest 10; latest available figures; figures were as at 30 September in the relevant year.
Source:
Medical and Dental Workforce Census 1991–1995.
There is no specialty called "casualty".

Fulwood Hospital, Sheffield

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the sale and development of the site of the Fulwood hospital, Sheffield. [13305]

Mr. Horam: Fulwood hospital is surplus to the requirements of the national health service and has been placed on the market for sale. A number of offers have now been received, which will be evaluated before selecting the preferred purchaser. Proceeds from such sales are reinvested in health care projects.

Cash Limits

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes will be made to the cash limits of his Department in 1996–97. [14207]

Mr. Dorrell: Subject to the approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XI, vote 1—hospital, community health, family health and related services, England—will be reduced by £16,641,000, from £27,807,821,000 to £27,791,180,000. This reduction allows for a transfer of £124,896,000 following a reappraisal of drugs budget requirements and a transfer of £8,000 to Department of Health and Social Services Northern Ireland for the National Poisons Information Service. The reduction is partially offset by increases of £81,121,000 in respect of the take up of entitlement under the end-year flexibility scheme; £25,000,000 for a claim on the reserve to support priority services, and by a transfer of £2,142,000 from class XVIII, vote 4—Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner and health service commissioners—as an offset for previously funded activity not now required.

The cash limit for class XI, vote 2—Department of Health, administration, miscellaneous health and personal social services, England—will be reduced by £169,000, from £1,208,599,000 to £1,208,430,000. This reduction allows for transfers of £494,000 to class XII, vote 3—Department of Social Security: administration—made up of £366,000 (£329,000 running costs) for accommodation charges, £68,000 running costs for telecommunications and £60,000 for services provided by staff at Richmond house and a transfer of £117,000 to DHSS, Northern Ireland to obtain advice and information about medical devices. The reduction is partially offset by a transfer of £442,000 from class XII, vote 3—Department of Social Security, administration and miscellaneous services—made up of £352,000 running costs for the production of milk tokens, £70,000 running costs for the provision of petty cash services at Richmond house and £20,000 towards the administrative costs of Age Concern.

The Department's gross running cost limit will be reduced by £5,099,000 from £280,057,000 to £274,958,000. This reflects a reduction of £5,124,000 mainly to meet shortfalls on receipts, partially offset by the transfers listed.

All increases will either be offset by savings, increased receipts or transfers to or from other votes or charged to the reserve and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Volatile Substance Abuse

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State Health what assessment he has made of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs in its report on volatile substance abuse. [14208]

Mr. Burns: The Government welcome this thoughtful and thorough report and its recommendations. A copy of the Government's response has been placed in the Library.

The Government share the advisory council's view that although volatile substance abuse has characteristics in common with other types of drug misuse, it has particular problems of its own which merit specific attention.

While the number of deaths associated with VSA has fallen from 151 in 1990 to 57 in 1994, the Government are committed to continuing the pressure to reduce and ultimately eliminate such deaths. Since the advisory council's report was presented to Ministers, a wide range of action which broadly reflects the ACMD's recommendations has been taken, including:

the Department of Health has agreed a contract with St. George's hospital medical school to produce an annual report on the number of VSA-associated deaths;

the Department funded the Health Education authority 1995 national drugs campaign survey which brought to light new information on the prevalence of VSA. The HEA has extended the 1996 survey to include items about prevalence and behaviour patterns associated with VSA;

the Department has funded the National Children's Bureau solvent misuse project to become a national resource for the collection and dissemination of information on VSA, including details of education and training materials;

the National Children's bureau has surveyed drug action teams to establish the extent of their involvement in VSA work at local level;

the Department for Education and Employment has issued guidance to schools on VSA. The Department of health and the British Manufacturers Association have jointly funded the Advisory Council on Alcohol and Drug Education—TACADE—to produce a resource pack to facilitate VSA education in primary schools;

the Department also funded an HEA advertising campaign in autumn 1996, targeted at parents to raise awareness of the dangers of VSA;

a VSA Industry Forum has been established to examine the advisory council's recommendations specific to industry. The Department of Trade and Industry has sponsored research on behalf of the forum into the effectiveness of product labelling. The forum is considering the introduction of voluntary product labelling;

manufacturers and retailers of cigarette lighter gas refills have voluntarily introduced 25 ml refill cans and emphasis has shifted from larger cans.

Emergency and Intensive Care Services

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list those regions of the NHS for which he has requested reports on emergency care and intensive care; and if he will place copies in the Library; [13884]

(2) when he intends to publish the report to Alan Langlands on intensive care provision in the North West region of the NHS. [13883]

Mr. Horam: All regional offices of the National Health Services Executive were asked to report to the chief executive of the NHS on intensive care in their regions. We regard these reports as internal discussion and advice and do not intend to publish them.

Elective Admission Waiting List

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the size of the resident-leased waiting list for elective admission at the second quarter of 1995–96 for *(a)* ordinary admission, *(b)* day care admission and *(c)* all admissions; and how many patients have been awaiting admission for (i) 0 to five months, (ii) six to 11 months, (iii) 12 to 17 months and (iv) more than 18 months, for each specialty and for each health authority separately. [13701]

Mr. Horam: This information is contained in "Hospital Waiting List Statistics: England (Resident Based)—at 30 September 1995", copies of which will be placed in the Library.

St. Thomas's Hospital

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the proposal to develop St. Thomas's hospital under the private finance initiative was included in the calculation of the Departmental total in table 5.5 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report"; what was the value of that proposal; and if he will make a statement on its current status. [13807]

Mr. Horam: The figure in table 5.5 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" does not represent a control total—it represents an estimate of the anticipated spend on private finance schemes. In deciding the level of the estimate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health took account of all private finance initiative schemes being prepared within the national health service including the St. Thomas's scheme. Approval has just been given for the trust to draw up a revised outline business case in the light of changed purchaser requirements.

Life Expectancy

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the life expectancy in each region for *(a)* men and *(b)* women in each year since 1992. [13704]

Mr. Burns: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 23 January 1997, *Official Report*, columns *703–4*. The reply referred to figures for 1992, which is the most recent year for which regional analyses are available.

NHS Employees

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many employees there were in the NHS in England by *(a)* NHS trust, *(b)* health authority and *(c)* general practice surgeries in the last year for which figures are available. [8491]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 12 December 1996]:* Information on the number of staff employed by each national health service trust and health authority, and the number of general medical services practice staff by each family health service authority, will be placed in the Library. Information on the number of staff employed by individual general practice surgeries is not available centrally.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Organophosphates

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of illnesses connected with organophosphate toxicity have been reported to his Department in the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [13872]

Mrs. Browning: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my reply to him of 10 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *107*. Numbers of incidents of human suspected adverse reactions to all veterinary medicines are contained in the annual reports of the appraisal panel for human suspected adverse reactions, all of which have been published and are available in the Library of the House. Since 1 January 1992 there have been 516 reports of human suspected adverse reactions to organophosphate veterinary medicines, of which 416 related to sheep dips.

Newcastle Disease

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment his Department has made of the reasons behind the recent outbreaks of Newcastle disease in *(a)* Ross on Wye and *(b)* Sussex; and if he will make a statement. [13607]

Mrs. Browning: The State Veterinary Service is actively investigating the current outbreaks of Newcastle disease, but no source of infection has yet been identified.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out his policy on compensation for farmers whose poultry are slaughtered for *(a)* contracting and *(b)* coming into contact with birds affected with Newcastle disease; and if he will make a statement. [13611]

Mrs. Browning: The Animal Health Act 1981 makes provision for the slaughter of diseased or suspected poultry or poultry exposed to the infection of disease. The Act requires the Minister to pay compensation for poultry, other than diseased poultry, at the value of the bird immediately before it was slaughtered.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how long a vaccine against Newcastle disease has been available; for what periods it has been withdrawn; and if he will make a statement. [13610]

Mrs. Browning: Newcastle disease vaccines have been available in the UK for more than 30 years. Both live and inactivated vaccines are currently available. However, on the advice of the independent scientific Veterinary Products Committee, which advises the Government on all matters relating to the authorisation of veterinary medicines, live La Sota and Clone 30 vaccines were suspended in 1981. This was because of concerns that high virulence strains of these vaccines could interfere with the diagnosis of disease and could spread to non-vaccinated flocks. In 1993 the VPC reviewed the suspension in the light of Commission decision 93/152/EEC on the criteria for vaccines in the EU. Vaccines containing low-virulence strains of live Clone 30 were re-authorised on the basis of the VPC advice and are therefore also currently available.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of *(a)* chickens and *(b)* turkeys on farms in England are currently vaccinated against Newcastle disease; and if he will make a statement. [13600]

Mrs. Browning: There is no statutory requirement for routine vaccination against Newcastle disease and the information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of the vaccine against Newcastle disease on *(a)* farmed poultry and *(b)* other captive birds; and if he will make a statement. [13604]

Mrs. Browning: All veterinary medicines marketed in the UK must satisfy statutory criteria of safety, quality and efficacy. The licensing authority is advised on this by the independent scientific Veterinary Products Committee. Newcastle disease vaccines currently marketed in the UK are authorised for use in fowls, whether farmed or otherwise kept. Veterinary surgeons have discretion to use such vaccines on other captive birds under their care in accordance with the provisions of the Medicines (Restrictions on the Administration of Veterinary Medicinal Products) Regulations 1994. Veterinary surgeons may wish to consult the manufacturer of the product on the dose to be administered and whether there is any information on the safety and efficacy of the product in captive birds other than fowls.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recommendations his Department makes to farmers with regard to the vaccination of poultry against Newcastle disease; and if he will make a statement. [13609]

Mrs. Browning: Poultry farmers are advised to vaccinate their flocks against Newcastle disease. This advice has been confirmed in the recent press releases concerning the current outbreaks of the disease.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if any of the birds involved in the *(a)* Ross on Wye and *(b)* sussex outbreak of Newcastle disease had been given the vaccine prior to contamination; and if he will make a statement. [13605]

Mrs. Browning: Of the five cases identified up to 29 January, in only one involving turkeys had the birds been vaccinated. It is not yet known whether or not the vaccination took place before contamination with Newcastle disease, but in any event the vaccine would not have had sufficient time to develop protection in the birds.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment his Department has made of the risks to farmed ostriches from Newcastle disease; and if he will make a statement. [13620]

Mrs. Browning: Ostriches are susceptible to Newcastle disease, as are other birds. The risk to ostriches will depend on the virulence of the strain of the disease concerned.

Ostriches

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recommendations his Department issues to people farming ostriches; and if he will make a statement. [13622]

Mrs. Browning: The welfare of farmed ostriches is protected by legislation. This is supplemented by guidelines issued by the Farm Animal Welfare Council. We are, in addition, working with colleagues in the Council of Europe on a recommendation to the welfare of farmed ratites—ostrich, emu and rhea—which we hope will be adopted later this year.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the number of ostrich farms in operation in each of the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [13621]

Mrs. Browning: None. Information on ostrich farms is not collected centrally.

Quarantine Premises

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of quarantine premises state veterinary staff will inspect before compiling the information required for his Department's voluntary code of practice; and if he will make a statement. [13540]

Mrs. Browning: All quarantine premises that have undertaken to comply with the voluntary code of practice for the welfare of dogs and cats in quarantine premises will be inspected by the State Veterinary Service to ensure compliance.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects information to be published regarding the quarantine kennels which comply with the welfare standards set out by his Department's document voluntary code of practice on welfare standards in quarantine premises; and if he will make a statement. [13541]

Mrs. Browning: Information on the quarantine premises that comply with the voluntary code of practice for the welfare of dogs and cats in quarantine premises will be included in the literature sent out to prospective importers of pet dogs and cats after all the premises that have undertaken to comply with the code have been inspected by the State Veterinary Service.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* sheep, *(b)* calves and *(c)* pigs were rejected as unfit to travel prior to export from the United Kingdom in each month of 1996. [13542]

Mrs. Browning: The numbers of animals rejected as unfit to travel from Great Britain were as follows:

	Ovine	*Bovine*	*Porcine*
January	471	103	128
February	204	251	60
March	131	28	69
April	0	0	80
May	1	0	71
June	14	4	27
July	379	7	62
August	574	0	27
September	608	0	42
October	410	0	130
November	547	1	20
December	390	2	55

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food who takes legal responsibility for unaccompanied consignments of livestock that are ferried from Dover port from the time a driver leaves his consignment of livestock at Dover port to the time he rejoins his vehicle at the continental port of arrival. [13545]

Mrs. Browning: None of the consignments referred to are unaccompanied.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) in cases where consignments of livestock cannot be accompanied by their driver during the sea crossing from Dover to continental ports, what steps he takes to ensure that the person in charge of the animals during the journey is declared in accordance with articles 7 or 8 of the Welfare of Animals During Transport Order 1994; [13546]

(2) when unaccompanied vehicles containing livestock are permitted to leave the port of Dover on the MV Cap Afrique, what steps he takes to ensure that the animals' journey is not delayed because of the absence of drivers at the port of arrival. [13547]

Mrs. Browning: The operators of the Cap Afrique employ a competent stockman who takes responsibility for animals which are not accompanied by their drivers. The cross-channel travel arrangements for the drivers who cannot be taken on the Cap Afrique are such that they should arrive in time to meet the vessel at the port of destination.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food where on the MV Cap Afrique provision has been made for isolation of ill or injured animals during the voyage. [13548]

Mrs. Browning: The Department is not of the view that point 18 of schedule 3 to the Welfare of Animals during Transport Order 1994 concerning provision of facilities for isolation of ill or injured animals during the voyage applies when animals are being carried on a roll-on/roll-off ferry.

Hedley Lomas (Ireland) Ltd.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if Hedley Lomas (Ireland) Ltd. or its livestock export consultant has now provided particulars of its claim against his Department for damages. [13549]

Mrs. Browning: No.

Sheep (Collection Centres)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has taken to amend the United Kingdom regulations which do not accurately reflect the provisions in Community legislation including

Council directive 91/68/EEC referred to in his answer of 12 June 1996, *Official Report*, column *207;* and if he will make a statement. [13550]

Mrs. Browning: The Animals and Animal Products (Import and Export) Regulations 1995, as amended, will shortly be replaced by the Animals and Animal Products (Import and Export) Regulations 1997 which will clarify that holdings operating as collection centres have to be approved only if they are handling cattle or pigs intended for intra-Community trade.

Rice

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what arrangements the European Community had for the import of rice from its overseas community territories; in what quantities and from which territories; what changed arrangements have now been made for each of these territories and for what reasons; and what treaty instruments and administrative arrangements of the Council or Commission have been made to implement these changes, and for what period of time. [13906]

Mr. Baldry: Article 101 of Council decision 91/482/EEC, on the association of the overseas countries and territories with the European Economic Community, provides for products originating in or processed in an OCT to be imported into the Community free of customs duties and charges having equivalent effect. No quantitiatve limits for rice are imposed by the decision. Imports have been rising over the last five years. In the marketing year 1 September 1995 to 31 August 1996 they were just under 240,000 tonnes—source: EU Commission—principally from the Netherlands Antilles but also from others including Montserrat and the Turks and Caicos Islands. Article 109 and annex IV of the decision provide for the Commission to take emergency safeguard action to limit imports when these are causing serious disturbance to the EU market. As a temporary measure, the Commission has taken such action to limit imports to 42,650 tonnes of rice in the first four months of 1997. Of this, 4,594 tonnes has been reserved for Montserrat and 1,328 tonnes for the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Deer

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made in the establishment of deer management groups in the counties of Devon and Somerset. [13539]

Mr. Boswell: There are currently five deer management groups in Devon and Somerset. A further two groups are currently being established.

Cash Limits

Mr. Couchman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what changes are proposed to the cash limits for class III, vote 2 Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for 1996–97. [14204]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class III, vote 2—Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—will be reduced by £3,789,000 from £916,375,000 to £912,586,000.

Provision of £2,160,000 is being transferred from the Ministry of Defence for the storm tide warning service. Reductions are being made in the cash limit to take account of a transfer to the Office of Science and Technology for staff transfers and redundancies at Horticultural Research International of £1,800,000, a transfer to MAFF's non-voted cash limit for supplementary credit approvals of £1,150,000 and the reimbursement of funds to the Exchequer in respect of aid to the tanning industry of £3,000,000. Provision has been included for additional payments and matching receipts of £20,000,000 in respect of EU beef support measures. Provision for payments to the rendering industry of £118,000,000 has been reclassified within the vote.

The MAFF/LACAP cash limit for supplementary credit approvals will be increased by £2,011,000 from £14,422,000 to £16,433,000. The increase comprises two elements; £861,000 relates to the Ministry's entitlement to end-year flexibility, which takes account of slippage in the construction of a number of coast protection schemes, such as those at Hythe and Eastbourne. The balance is to be matched by the reduction of £1,150,000 in MAFF's voted cash limit class III, vote 2.

The increase will be charged to the reserve and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Farm Incomes

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on farm incomes. [14213]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Provisional figures show that total income from farming fell by 8 per cent. in real terms in 1996. However, incomes remain higher in real terms than in 1994 and the preceding 10 years, and in the four years up to 1995 they rose by more than 75 per cent. in real terms. Detailed estimates of the income, output and productivity of United Kingdom agriculture in 1996 were published this morning and have been placed in the Library of the House.

WALES

Social Lettings

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Sectetary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of social lettings which are available for the year 1996–97; and if he will make a statement. [12977]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: There were 21,088 social lettings, excluding transfers and exchanges in 1995–96. I am not aware of any specific grounds to expect the 1996–97 figure to be greatly different.

Council House Sales

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what was the total amount of council house sales receipts returned to councils in 1995–96; and if he will make a statement; [12979]

(2) what was the total amount of council house sales receipts held by each district and borough council in the years 1994–95 and 1995–96. [12980]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Local authorities are required to set aside 75 per cent. of receipts from the sale of council houses against their credit liabilities, in accordance with section 59 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. Authorities are able to use the remaining 25 per cent.—the usable part—to set aside against their credit liabilities or for new capital spending, in accordance with section 60 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

The table gives the receipts received by local authorities from the sale of council houses in 1994–95 and 1995–96; the usable part of these receipts for 1995–96; and the accumulated receipts, set aside and usable, at 31 March 1995 and 31 March 1996. The set aside receipts are the total for the housing revenue account. It is not possible from local authority returns to disaggregate set-aside receipts from the sale of council houses from other set-aside receipts held in the housing revenue account.

Receipts from the sale of council housing

		Accumulated receipts at 31 March 1995:		In year receipts 1995–96:		Accumulated receipts at 31 March 1996:	
	In year receipts 1994–95	Set aside receipts[1,2]	Usable receipts[3]	Total[4]	Usable part[3,4]	Set aside receipts[1,2]	Usable receipts[3,4]
Alyn and Deeside	1,009	5,526	521	859	215	6,155	0
Colwyn	406	2,991	569	428	107	3,316	59
Delyn	376	0	0	460	115	0	0
Glyndwr[5]	831	3,313	456	—	—	3,473	—
Rhuddlan[5]	505	3,579	397	—	—	3,708	—
Wrexham Maelor	2,598	0	992	2,210	553	0	500
Carmarthen	865	4,572	776	929	232	0	300
Ceredigion	943	6,871	1,170	1,149	287	7,733	857
Dinefwr	702	3,131	608	379	95	3,420	700
Llanelli	1,878	4,066	0	1,331	333	5,068	0
Preseli Pembrokeshire	2,049	2,239	2,597	1,149	287	3,125	1,724
South Pembrokeshire	545	285	1,209	373	93	196	490
Blaenau Gwent	1,772	5,014	2,199	1,364	341	6,036	2,341
Islwyn	2,016	9,998	390	1,840	460	11,378	244
Monmouth	2,465	0	3,585	2,061	515	0	3,393
Newport	3,067	7,575	7,642	2,341	585	9,331	7,564
Torfaen	4,858	13,575	2,660	3,160	790	15,945	950
Aberconwy	710	603	247	502	126	2,451	253
Arfon	1,092	5,223	0	765	191	8,425	0
Dwyfor	344	1,269	303	192	48	1,411	2
Meirionnydd	346	823	0	301	75	1,025	53
Ynys Mon	745	3,665	246	879	220	4,324	0
Cynon Valley	535	4,446	0	549	137	4,857	0
Merthyr Tydfil	719	4,629	345	902	226	5,192	312
Ogwr	2,710	7,267	633	1,692	423	0	625
Rhondda	347	1,361	0	303	76	1,537	0
Rhymney Valley	1,855	6,410	0	1,524	381	6,537	0
Taff Ely	1,975	14,584	532	1,700	425	15,859	107
Brecknock	750	4,350	1,188	620	155	7,934	550
Montgomeryshire	718	9,579	689	633	158	10,074	450
Radnorshire	512	3,309	399	530	133	3,350	226
Cardiff	5,060	3,795	7,053	3,605	901	6,499	133
Vale of Glamorgan	2,148	24,237	6,702	1,537	384	25,386	5,411
Port Talbot	1,695	8,230	0	953	238	8,973	0
Lliw Valley	938	7,036	0	808	202	7,642	0
Neath	1,202	5,730	0	897	224	6,403	0
Swansea	2,357	9,226	242	1,856	464	10,618	706
Wales	53,643	198,507	44,350	[5]40,781	[5]10,195	217,381	[5]27,950

Notes:

[1] Under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, authorities are required to set aside a proportion of capital receipts as provision to meet credit liabilities ("the reserved part"). The amounts shown are such receipts which, at the date shown, were yet to be used to meet those liabilities. European Union grants are included.

[2] All set aside housing revenue account receipts, including housing receipts other than from the sale of council houses.

[3] The usable part of in-year receipts after deduction of "the reserved part".

[4] Provisional.

[5] Cash backed accumulated receipts returns have not yet been received for 1995–96 for Glyndwr or Rhuddlan and are therefore not included in the totals.

Source:

Local authority cash backed accumulated receipts and capital outturn returns.

European Summit

Mr. Donald Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what role Swansea will play int he 1998 European summit. [13148]

Mr. Hague: My right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister announced on 28 January, *Official Report*, column *160*, that the June 1998 European Council will be held in Cardiff. This provides a unique opportunity for not only Cardiff but also the rest of Wales. I will be considering how its benefits can be spread as widely as possible.

Poll Tax Arrears

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many poll tax arrears cases currently involve the use of bailiffs; and if he will make a statement; [13557]

(2) how many poll tax arrears cases there are for each of the former district council areas. [13558]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Electricity Supplies

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps his Department has taken to improve the electricity distribution system in Wales following the recent occurrences of supply cut-off during cold weather. [13316]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This is a matter for the regional electricity companies and the Director General of Electricity Supply.

Beaches

Mr Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many beaches qualifying for a European blue flag there were in Wales in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993, *(c)* 1994 and *(d)* 1995; and if he will make a statement. [13864]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) on 24 January 1996, *Official Report*, columns *301–2*.

Cash Limits

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what changes he is proposing to make to the cash limits for his Department and the office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in Wales for the current year. [14256]

Mr. Hague: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the cash limit on class XIV, vote 2 will be reduced by £9,533,000 from £704,178,000 to £694,645,000; the cash limit on class XIV, vote 3 will be increased by £15,000,000 from £524,870,000 to £539,870,000; the cash limit on class XIV, vote 4 will be increased by £139,000 from £1,910,125,000 to £1,910,264,000 and the cash limit on class XIV, vote 6 will be reduced by £625,000 from £9,789,000 to £9,164,000.

The Department's running cost limit will be increased by £70,000 from £75,178,000 to £75,248,000 to cover the costs associated with the sale of the Housing for Wales Loan Book.

The cash limit reduction on vote 2 results from a technical transfer of resources from the cash limited budget of the Further Education Funding Council into the demand-led Further Education Funding Council budget, to cover the costs associated with an increase in student numbers. In addition, there has been a virement of £290,000 from the central government grants to local authorities, in respect of the provision of vocational qualifications at West Cardiff Collegium.

The cash limit increase on vote 3 allows for additional spending on the central government roads programme. This additional expenditure is being covered mainly from underspends in previous years on the provision for the European regional development fund.

The cash limit increase on vote 4 results from transfers of £129,000 from class XVIII, vote 4 in respect of underspends by the Health Commissioner's officer and £10,000 from class VII, vote 1 in respect of the Department's share of seized drugs assets. A further increase of £5,000,000 as a result of end-year flexibility take-up for the all-Wales capital programme, has been offset by a transfer of £5,000,000 from the cash limited general practitioner fundholders' drugs provision to the non-cash limited pharmaceutical provision.

The cash limit decrease on vote 6 results from lower than expected expenditure on inspections of nursery places.

None of the above changes will add to the planned total of public expenditure.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Bodies (External Audit)

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will outline the progress that has been made on the commitment, contained in the Nolan Committee's first report, "Standards in Public Life", to review the external audit arrangements of certain public bodies. [14257]

Sir John Wheeler: Following consultation with the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland, it is proposed that the local government and health audit functions should be attached to the Northern Ireland Audit Office. The change will put the external audit arrangements for these sectors on an independent basis similar to practice in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Cash Limits

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the cash and running costs limits for the Northern Ireland Office/Northern Ireland departmental services, the Independent Living Fund, certain national agricultural schemes and discretionary rent allowance payments for 1996–97. [14258]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, it is proposed that the cash limit for class XV, vote 1—the Northern Ireland Office—will be increased by £46,216,000 from £862,858,000 to £909,074,000. This reflects the take-up of end-year flexibility on capital and departmental running costs, additional expenditure on compensation and police costs, the additional expenditure required to meet the cost of elections held in Northern Ireland on 30 May 1996 for the purpose of providing delegates to the forum for the promotion of dialogue and understanding within Northern Ireland, the expenditure to cover the cost of setting up and servicing the forum, the associated political talks and related purposes as well as allowances and expenses of delegates attending the forum and the political talks, and other minor technical changes.

The cash limit which covers most Northern Ireland departmental services will be increased by £35,209,000 from £4,151,983,000 to £4,187,192,000. This increase reflects the take-up of end year flexibility on capital, departmental running costs and health, the transfer of £47,198,000 to the Northern Ireland Office cash limit on class XV, vote 1 and other technical changes.

The cash limit for the independent living fund—Northern Ireland Department of Health and Social Services, vote 6—has been reduced by £337,000 reflecting lower than expected demands on this fund.

The cash limit covering national expenditure capital grant schemes and certain assistance for production, marketing and processing and the fishing industry will increase by £646,000 from £19,957,000 to £20,603,000 as a result of the take up of entitlement to end-year flexibility on capital.

The cash limit for discretionary rent allowance—Northern Ireland Department of Health and Social Services vote 6—has been reduced by £71,000 reflecting lower than expected demands on this fund.

The combined gross running cost limit for the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments will be increased by £33,902,000 from £787,695,000 to £821,597,000. This reflects the take-up in 1996–97 of £32,000,000 of the end-year flexibility entitlement announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 12 July 1996, *Official Report*, columns *330–31*, a net transfer of £1,885,000 from the Department of Social Security in respect of agency services and minor transfer totalling 17,000. Of the revised gross running cost provision, £174,354,000 if for the Northern Ireland Office and £647,243,000 is for Northern Ireland Departments.

The increase will be offset by transfers or charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what arrangements have been made in Northern Ireland for the payment in 1996–97 of the additional hill livestock compensatory allowance allocation for the 1997 scheme agreed in the 1996 public expenditure survey. [14259]

Mr. Ancram: Additional HLCA expenditure in 1996–97 totalling £11.2 million will be met by a repayable advance from the Northern Ireland contingencies fund. Parliamentary approval of this expenditure will be sought in the 1997–98 main estimates when the full additional funding for HLCAs of £12.4 million will be included.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

EU Funds (Applications)

Mr. MacShane: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful applications have been made by United Kingdom organisations in the last four years to obtain EU subsidies for study and research centres; and what funds have already been allocated to the United Kingdom for these purposes. [12340]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The EU framework programme provides funding for collaborative research projects. UK researchers participate vigorously in the EU's framework programmes. Commission statistics show that 2,337 UK research teams participated in projects funded under the third framework (1990–1994); more than in any other member state. Full information on research projects funded in individual member states is held only by the European Commission, and is not distributed to member states. Accordingly, information on the numbers of successful and unsuccessful applications from the UK, as well as the precise funds allocated, is not available.

Cash Limits

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what changes will be made to cash and running cost limits within his responsibility for 1996–97. [14201]

Mr. Lang: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the following changes will be made.

The cash limit for class IV, vote 1—programmes and administration—will be decreased by £22,105,000 from £1,315,585,000 to £1,293,480,000. This decrease results from the following reductions in expenditure.

(i) £11,992,000 on regional selective assistance;

(ii) £5,300,000 on business enterprise services;

(iii) £3,000,000 on international trade;

(iv) £1,583,000 on the small firm loan guarantee scheme; and

(v) £230,000 on innovation and technology support.

Within this total, the gross running costs limit for the Department of Trade and Industry is being increased by £7,406,000 from £381,819,000 to £389,225,000. This change comprises:

(i) £8,212,000 resulting from the transfer of all industrial tribunal provision to running costs;

(ii) £2,436,000 increase in grant in aid to the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service provision to cover relocation and refurbishment costs;

(iii) £16,000 increase resulting form the movement of further central services to a net control regime;

offset by

(iv) –£3,258,000 following the transfer of existing provision to assist in the funding of the disaster recovery costs associated with the Radiocommunications Agency's headquarters facility.

The cash limit for class IV, vote 2 will be increased by £6,735,000 from £1,312,563,000 to £1,319,298,000. This increase results from:

(i) £4,605,000 relating to the take-up of capital end year flexibility under the end-year flexibility scheme announced by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 12 July 1996, *Official Report*, columns *326–31*;

(ii) £1,800,000 to enable the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council to meet the costs of certain redundancies at Horticulture Research International;

(iii) £230,000 in respect of redundancy costs at the British Geological Survey; and

(iv) £100,000 to meet the costs of the UK's subscription to the International Oceanographic Commission.

The last three increases are offset by similar reductions in class III, vote 2, class IV, vote 1 and class II, vote 5 respectively and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

The cash limit for class IV, vote II—Office of Telecommunications—will be increased by £150,000 from £10,212,000 to £10,362,000 and the running cost limit will be increased by £150,000 from £9,736,000 to £9,886,000. The increase is required to meet professional advisory costs resulting from the proposed merger of British Telecom and MCI Communications. The increase will be charged to the reserve and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

The cash limit for class IV, vote 12—Office of Gas Supply—will be increased by £500,000 from £9,743,000 to £10,243,000 and the running costs limit will be increased by £500,000 from £10,452,000 to £10,952,000. The requirement for an increase results from an increase in running costs associated with the referral to the Monopolies and Mergers commission on price controls. The increase will be charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Research Councils

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were the success rates of *(a)* applications for funding and *(b)* alpha-graded applications for funding to each research council in each year since 1979. [12053]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 21 January 1997]:* There has been some increase in the number of grant applications, fuelled by the increase in numbers of researchers in the system, both as a result of the change of status of the "new" universities and increasing numbers of contract researchers drawn into the "old" universities by the growth in research funding in the university system.

This information is not available for some of the earlier years. The success rates by number of grant applications for later years are as follows:

	1983	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Agriculture and Food Research Council [1,2]														
Success rate (percentage) of all applications				26	36	40	33	27	33	30	32			
Success rate (percentage) of total alphas				47	73	84	78	55	60	49	53			
Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council [1,2]														
Success rate (percentage) of all applications												30	24	
Success rate (percentage) of total alphas [3]												47	49	
Science and Engineering Research Council [4]														
Success rate (percentage) of all applications	58	51	54	53	44	50	47	35	36	40	38	37		
Success rate (percentage) of total alphas	58	51	54	55	61	60	60	60	65	66	64	66		
Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council														
Success rate (percentage) of all applications													44	42
Success rate (percentage) of total alphas [3]													n/a	n/a
Economic and Social Research Council														
Success rate (percentage) of all applications					34	30	29	34	27	27	24	20	27.5	
Success rate (percentage) of total alphas [5]					n/a	78	54	60	44	46	40	32	43	
Medical Research Council [1]														
Success rate (percentage) of all applications											32	29	32	
Success rate (percentage) of total alphas											78	41	69	
Natural Environment Research Council [1,6]														
Success rate (percentage) of all applications						37	40	39	40	35	27	23	23	
Success rate (percentage) of total alphas						87	71	63	57	57	42	31	28	

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council [1] [5]														
Success rate percentage of all applications												50	60	
Success rate percentage of total alphas												65	72	

[1] Figures for AFRC, BBSRC, NERC and PPARC are for financial years, rather than calendar years.
[2] In 1994 the BBSRC took over the former responsibilities of the Agriculture and Food Research Council. AFRC figures from 1986–87 to 1993–94 cannot be directly compared with BBSRC figures from 1994–95 as BBSRC responsibilities, principally for biological sciences, run wider than did AFRC's.
[3] From 1 January 1995 BBSRC replaced the former alpha/beta system with a numerical grading system. The last two percentages given are BBSRC's best estimate of figures on a basis comparable with the previous system.
[4] The responsibilities of the Science and Engineering Research Council transferred to other research councils—principally EPSRC and PPARC—in 1994.
[5] EPSRC does not grade proposals on the basis of alpha, beta etc.
[6] ESRC's research grants scheme only started in 1987. Alpha grades were not used until 1988.
[7] NERC figures are for non-thematic grants, equivalent to responsive grants for other councils.
[8] The figures for 1995–96 are not comparable with previous years as the staff element for experimental grant applications made under the particle physics programme was not considered in that year. PPARC supports the particle physics community through four-year rolling grants which are reviewed every two years. In 1995–96 PPARC decided to defer the review by one year because of the uncertainty over the likely future level of the UK subscription to CERN. This meant that particle physics awards were limited to two years support for non-staff costs only. These figures reflect this position.

SPUR and SMART

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the estimated expenditure on *(a)* the support for products under research scheme and *(b)* the small firms merit award for research and technology scheme for (i) 1997–98 and (ii) 1998–99. [12783]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* On 15 October 1996, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade announced a significant rationalisation of the current range of programmes for promoting research and development, including plans for a new scheme in England combining the current SMART, SPUR, SPUR-plus and innovation element of regional enterprise grants. A copy of the announcement, DTI press notice p/96/756, is available in the Library of the House. A further announcement with details of the new scheme, including funding levels for 1997–98 and 1998–99, will be made in due course. Different arrangements will apply in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Work is also being done to enable these schemes to reflect foresight objectives.

Exotic Animal Imports

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) how many non-CITES listed venomous snakes have been imported into the United Kingdom in each of the last five years; and if he will list them by species; [12625]

(2) what is the total number of non-CITES-listed venomous snakes which have been imported by *(a)* zoos, *(b)* individuals and *(c)* dealers in each of the last five years. [12626]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 29 January 1997]:* The information requested is not available from the United Kingdom overseas trade statistics because the system under which trade is recorded does not separately identify imports of non-CITES venomous snakes from imports of other live animals, and also does not identify the destination of imports.

Exports (Iraq)

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the impact of the easing of restrictions on firms negotiating directly with the Iraqi Government to supply essential civilian goods. [13311]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) on 13 January 1997, *Official Report*, column *139*.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what guidelines his Department issues to engineering companies in respect of export orders for Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [13310]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* My Department issues a detailed guidance note on the sanctions imposed on Iraq in accordance with various resolutions of the United Nations Security Council. The guidance is aimed at all sectors of industry and sets out the scope of the controls on the freedom of companies to communicate with Iraq about the supply of goods and, in addition, makes clear that a licence is required before any such supplies may take place.

Ammonium Nitrate

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what *(a)* labelling arrangements and *(b)* other measures exist as part of the anti-dumping action in relation to the importation of ammonium nitrate; and if he will make a statement. [13534]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* Imports of ammonium nitrate fertiliser from Russia and Lithuania are currently subject to EU anti-dumping measures. An anti-dumping duty of ECU 102.9 per tonne applies in the case of imports from Russia, while Lithuania has undertaken to restrict her exports to the UK to 100,000 tonnes per annum. Labelling provisions for ammonium nitrate and other fertilisers are contained in the Fertilisers Regulations 1991, as amended. There are no special labelling requirements associated with the anti-dumping measures.

Armoured Vehicles (Indonesia)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answers of 9 December, *Official Report*, columns *29–30*, relating to armoured vehicles exports, what assessment his Department made of the conformity of the sales with international conventions relating *(a)* the sale of arms to the prevailing human rights in destination countries and *(b)* the transfer of equipment to its possible end use to suppress human rights. [10737]

Mr. Hanley: I have been asked to reply.

Our policy is not to license for export any UK defence equipment which we judge likely to be used for internal repression. Such human rights considerations were taken fully into account before the decision was taken to allow the export of this equipment in accordance with international criteria.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answers of 9 December, *Official Report*, columns *29–30*, relating to the issue of export licences to Indonesia what account his Department took of international criteria for military exports relating to the behaviour of the buyer country with regard to international law; and what view his Department took of Indonesia's observance of international laws in respect of East Timor. [10736]

Mr. Hanley: I have been asked to reply.

We do not recognise Indonesian sovereignty over East Timor. We fully support the efforts of the UN Secretary General to find a just and comprehensive settlement to the question of East Timor, and we continue to raise with the Indonesian Government our concerns about the situation in East Timor.

Along with several of our EU partners, we do not consider that Indonesia's annexation of East Timor precludes the sale of defence equipment to Indonesia. Indonesia plays a leading role in regional and international forums and is a major contributor to peacekeeping forces.

Under article 51 of the United Nations charter, every sovereign state has a legitimate right to self-defence. We continue to consider licence applications for the export of defence equipment on a case by case basis. We do not licence for export any equipment which we judge likely to be used for internal repression in Indonesia or East Timor. We remain committed to the criteria agreed by the UN, the EU and the then Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, which are intended to guide national decision-making.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answers of 9 December, *Official Report*, columns *29–30*, relating to exports of armoured vehicles to Indonesia, what account his Department took of the use by the Indonesian army in April 1996 of previously exported armoured vehicles to counter student demonstrations; and what assurances his Department has received from the Indonesian authorities regarding the future use of the vehicles. [10757]

Mr. Hanley: I have been asked to reply.

We have investigated the reports of the April 1996 incident in South Sulawesi and have discussed it with the Indonesian authorities. The Indonesians have themselves acknowledged that the way in which this equipment was used was inappropriate, and a number of soldiers have been tried and sentenced for excessive use of force. These considerations were taken fully into account before the decision was taken to allow the export of armoured vehicles for the Indonesian military.

We have received assurances from the Indonesian authorities that British-supplied military equipment will not be used against civilians in Indonesia or East Timor.

TREASURY

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the impact on the public sector borrowing requirement *(a)* in the current year and *(b)* in subsequent years, of a letter of comfort provided to financial institutions by the Secretary of State for Health underwriting outstanding liabilities of a private finance initiative hospital project in the event of the demise of the hospital trust undertaking it. [11253]

Mr. Waldegrave: No letter of comfort has been issued in support of private finance initiative hospital projects. A letter of explanation has been provided which gives details of the Secretary of State's responsibilities in respect of trusts that run into financial difficulties. If a trust is dissolved, the NHS (Residual Liabilities) Act 1996 provides for the transfer of the trust's residual liabilities to another health body or to the Secretary of State for Health.

The public sector borrowing requirement measures the public sector's net cash transactions with the rest of the economy. As such, contingent liabilities have no effect on the PSBR.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy with regard to the level of funding of the public sector borrowing requirement. [12014]

Mr. Waldegrave: The Government's annual financing objective is to sell sufficient gilts of any maturity, Treasury bills and National Savings products to finance the central Government borrowing requirement, plus maturing gilts and any net increase in the foreign exchange reserves. The Treasury's published gilts remit to the Bank of England for 1996–97 states that the bank should aim to sell gilts at a broadly even pace through the year. Within-year fluctuations in the pattern of central Government expenditure and revenue will be met by other financing means, including changes to the weekly Treasury bill tender.

Mr. Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the Government's policy in respect of the use of Treasury bills to finance the public sector borrowing requirement; and what assessment he has made of the impact of this policy on inflation. [12029]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer January 1997]:* As stated in the Treasury's debt management report for 1996–97, there is no intention that net Treasury bill issuance should contribute to the financing of the central Government borrowing requirement in 1996–97. However, the monthly pattern of issuance will fluctuate

in the light of the needs of money market management. This policy will have minimal impact on annual monetary growth.

Pools Betting Levy and National Lottery

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much tax revenue has been raised by *(a)* the pools betting levy and *(b)* the national lottery in each year since 1994–95. [13206]

Mr. Oppenheim: The information requested is given in the table.

	1994–95 £ million	*1995–96 £ million*
Pool betting duty[1]	341.6	190.8
Lottery duty[2]	103.9	611.9

Notes:

[1] The following rates of duty were applicable to pool betting during those financial years.

[2] The first draw of the national lottery took place on 19 November 1994.

Rate Percentage	*Date of introduction*
37.5	17 August 1991
32.5	6 May 1995
27.5	3 December 1995

The rate was further reduced to 26.5 per cent. on 5 May 1996.

Dorneywood

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the running costs of Dorneywood in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [13616]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Dorneywood is financed and administered by the Dorneywood Trust, a private trust for which I am not responsible.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many days he spent in residence at Dorneywood in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [13617]

Mr. Clarke: The amount of time that I spend at Dorneywood depends on the constraints of my diary, but since I became Chancellor in 1993 I have resided there on numerous occasions.

Privatised Companies

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of ownership of each of the privatised utilities and companies the Government retain. [13905]

Mr. Jack: The Government have sold the vast majority of its residual holdings in the privatised utilities and other companies. Other than the relatively small numbers of shares required to be held to meet future bonus share entitlements of retail investors in previous privatisations, the Government retain disposable shareholdings in only two companies: BT—0.18 per cent. of share capital; and the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company—13.89 per cent. of share capital.

Privatisation Proceeds

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will calculate the revenues raised from the privatisation of each of the privatised utilities and companies expressed in 1996–97 prices. [13904]

Mr. Jack: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) on 8 July 1996, *Official Report*, column *36*. That answer included a cumulative total for privatisation proceeds to the end of 1995–96, in 1996–97 prices, of £83.86 billion. Estimated proceeds this financial year are £4.5 billion, taking the cumulative total, in 1996–97 prices to £88.36 billion.

Cash Limits

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes are proposed to the cash limit and net running costs limit for the Government Actuary's Department for 1996–97. [14199]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The net running costs limit for the Government Actuary's Department within class XVI, vote 13, will be decreased by £184,000 from £389,000 to £205,000 and the cash limit will be reduced by £201,000 from £6,396,000 to £6,195,000. The decreases arise from the imposition of penalties following the breaches of the net running costs limit and cash limit in the previous year, 1995–96. The Government Actuary's Department has reported that its systems and procedures have been reviewed to prevent a recurrence of the breach.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes are proposed in the cash limit and running cost limit for 1996–97 for Customs and Excise. [14214]

Mr. Oppenheim: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XVI, vote 3, will be increased by £23,050,000 from £827,572,000 to £850,622,000 and the running cost limit for Customs and Excise by £23,057,000 from £720,093,000 to £743,150,000.

The increase in the running cost limit arises from the take up of £23,000,000 of the end-year flexibility entitlement, £30,000 running costs provision transferred from the Department of the Environment to meet the costs of the Security Facilities Executive's advisory service, £29,000 running costs provision transferred from the Home Office as the Department's share of the seized assets fund, and an additional £7,000 related to the recovery of input VAT on other business activities. The supplementary estimate also serves to provide an additional £9,000 from running costs for a contribution to the central drugs co-ordination unit, and £7,000 appropriations-in-aid provision related to the recovery of input VAT on other business activities. The increase will be charged to the reserve and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes are proposed to the cash limit and running costs limit for the Office for National Statistics for 1996–97. [14215]

Mrs. Knight: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XVI, vote 12—Office for National Statistics—will be

increased by £231,000 from £112,600,000 to £112,831,000 and the running costs limit will be increased by £165,000 from £106,939,000 to £107,104,000.

This reflects an increase in running costs provision of £165,000 and in capital provision of £66,000. These sums cover work formerly carried out by the Employment Department which has been transferred to the Office for National Statistics. The increases will be offset by transfers and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes are proposed to the cash limit and running costs limit for 1996–97 for the Inland Revenue. [14216]

Mr. Jack: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XVI, vote 4 will be increased by £40,027,000 from £1,607,569,000 to £1,647,596,000 and the running costs limit will be increased by £39,020,000 from £1,654,535,000 to £1,693,555,000.

The vote is eligible for a cash limit increase of £39,000,000 running costs and £507,000 capital in respect of end year flexibility entitlement as announced by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 12 July 1996, *Official Report*, columns *326–31*.

In addition there are transfers of £10,000 running costs from the Office of Public Service, class XVII, vote 1, for advice work on repayment terms by the Security Facilities Executive Agency; £10,000 running costs from Employment Services, class IX, vote 3; and £507,000 capital from the Department of Social Security, class XII, vote 3 as a contribution towards refurbishing St. Peter's house, Doncaster, previously occupied by the Benefits Agency.

All the increases other than those relating to the interdepartmental transfers will be charged to the reserve and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Insurance Premium Tax

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) on what basis his Department calculated that introducing a higher rate of insurance premium tax would yield £235 million in its first year of operation; and if he will make a statement; [11465]

(2) what forecast yields have been calculated for 1997 to 2002 for the increased revenue of insurance premium tax in respect of insurance sold with television hire; on what basis those calculations have been made; and if he will make a statement; [11466]

(3) what forecast yields have been calculated for 1997 to 2002 for the increased revenue in respect of insurance premium tax at a rate of 17.5 per cent.; and if he will make a statement. [11467]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 22 January 1997]:* The estimated tax revenue yield of £235 million in 1998–99 is the yield from charging the higher rate of insurance premium tax on travel insurance, mechanical breakdown insurance and insurance sold with TV and car hire. The estimate uses data from a number of sources including the Association of British Insurers and is consistent with the Budget costings methodology explained in annex A to chapter 6 of the 1997–98 "Financial Statement and Budget Report". It therefore incorporates assumptions about changes in behaviour in response to the increased rate of insurance premium tax; but excludes any affect of the tax change on the overall level of income and spending.

The 1997–98 "Financial Statement and Budget Report" estimated the revenue yield from the introduction of a higher rate of insurance premium tax to be £160 million, £235 million and £260 million in 1997–98, 1998–99 and 1999–2000 respectively. Approximately £20 million, £25 million and £30 million of this is attributable to the higher rate insurance premium tax on insurance sold with television hire.

Public Sector Debt

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the size of the net public sector debt as at the end of March 1997; and what were the equivalent figures at *(a)* end March 1991 and *(b)* end March 1979. [12791]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* The Budget forecast was that net public sector debt would stand at £350 billion at end-March 1997. Equivalent outturn figures for end-March 1991 and end-March 1979 were £153 billion and £91 billion respectively. However, such comparisons are not particularly meaningful since they take no account of the impact of inflation or the size of the economy. As a per cent. of money gross domestic product, net pubic sector debt in end March 1997 is expected to be 45½ per cent. compared with 49 per cent. in 1979.

Interest Rates

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the annual cumulative savings to the Exchequer which would result from lower debt interest costs if United Kingdom interest rates were *(a)* 0.5 per cent., *(b)* 0.75 per cent., *(c)* 1 per cent. and *(d)* 1.5 per cent. lower across the yield curve for (1) 1997–98, (2) 1998–99, (3) 1999–2000, (4) 2000–01 and (5) 2001–02. [12784]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* Estimated reductions in central Government net debt interest payments resulting from lower interest rates are presented in the table.

£ billion

	Savings made from stated reduction in interst rates			
	0.5 per cent.	*0.75 per cent.*	*1.0 per cent.*	*1.5 per cent.*
1997–98	0.3	0.5	0.6	0.9
1998–99	0.5	0.7	0.9	1.4
1999–00	0.6	0.9	1.2	1.7
2000–01	0.7	1.0	1.3	2.0
2001–02	0.7	1.0	1.3	2.0

These estimates show the total reduction in debt interest payments for a given year which might be expected from a reduction in interest rates of the magnitude shown. They assume the fall in interest rates is sustained throughout the forecast period.

Such estimates are dependent on the assumed path of Government borrowing. These figures are calculated using the Budget 1996 borrowing forecast.

Company Cars

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the exchequer what plans he has to review taxation relating to company car usage. [13336]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* I have nothing further to add to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), on 16 January 1997, *Official Report*, column *449*.

Value Added Tax (Domestic Fuel)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue has been raised from VAT on the fossil fuel levy on domestic bills in each of the last three years. [13484]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* The revenue from VAT on the fossil fuel levy on domestic bills in each of the last three years is estimated to be as follows:

1993–94: £0 million

1994–95: £40 million

1995–96: £50 million.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Chevening

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what have been the running costs of Chevening in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [13614]

Mr. Rifkind: The running costs of Chevening house are the responsibility of the Chevening estate and are not borne by Government. The management of Chevening house is under the Chevening Trust, a public trust established by Parliament with certain tax exemptions. When Chevening house is use with my permission for meetings and conferences, the costs are assessed on a commercial basis and charges levied accordingly.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many days he has spent in residence at Chevening in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [13615]

Mr. Rifkind: I resided at Chevening for the following numbers of days:

1996: 18

1995: 20

1994: 20

1993: 20.

Information for 1992 is not available.

No. 1 Carlton Gardens

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what have been the running costs of No. 1 Carlton gardens for each of the last five years; what accommodation is available on those premises; and if he will make a statement. [13619]

Mr. Rifkind: No. 1 Carlton gardens, a grade 1 listed building, has been the official London residence of successive Foreign Secretaries since 1945 when it was acquired on lease from the Crown Estates for Mr. Ernest Bevin.

The accommodation comprises state rooms, used solely for official functions, on the ground and first floors and an apartment for the Foreign Secretary on the second and third floors.

Information on maintenance expenditure for 1991–92 and 1992–93 is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

	£
1991–92	[1]136,077
1992–93	[1, 2]137,150
1993–94	[2]136,729
1994–95	283,635
1995–96	342,741

Expenditure is given in cash terms.

[1] Rent and utilities only.

[2] In addition, about £3.5 million was spent on the total refurbishment of the state rooms and major supporting services. This was the first major refurbishment since the house suffered bomb damage in the second world war.

Cash Limits

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further changes he proposes to make in his Department's diplomatic wing cash limits and running costs limits for 1996–97. [14200]

Mr. Hanley: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate the cash limit for class II, vote 4—the British Council—will be increased by £4,237,000 from £98,147,000 to £102,384,000. The increase is required to take in a transfer of £5,500,000 from the Overseas Development Administration. This increase is partly offset by a negative overseas price.

In addition, the cash limit for class II, vote 1—overseas representation—will be reduced by £4,474,000 from £671,359,000 to £666,885,000. This reduction takes account of the negative overseas price movement claim of £5,224,000 partially offset by a transfer in of £750,000 from the Overseas Development Administration as a contribution towards the Bosnia peace implementation conference. The gross running costs limit on class II, vote 1, will be reduced by £1,720,000 from £520,693,000 to £518,973,000.

The increase will be charged to the reserve, or offset by savings and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefit Entitlement Awareness

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will make a statement on the role of benefit offices in making *(a)* pensioners and *(b)* others entitled to benefit aware of their entitlements; [12547]

(2) what initiatives he is taking to ensure that pensioners in Wales are made aware of their benefit entitlements; and if he will make a statement. [12545]

Mr. Heald: This is an operational matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Barry Jones, dated 30 January 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking if he will make a statement on the role of benefit offices in making pensioners and others entitled to benefit aware of their entitlements and; what initiatives he is taking to ensure that pensioners in Wales are made aware of their benefit entitlements.

The Benefits Agency (BA) is committed to giving all customers equal access to the benefit system. The BA expects to provide general advice about benefit entitlement, clear and accurate information about all claims which have been made and details of benefits in payment. Staff in BA offices have access to computer and clerical records, enabling provision of a personalised advice and information service.

Home visits can be arranged for customers who have difficulty attending their local office where the matter cannot be cleared by correspondence or over the telephone.

Pensions Direct Helpline was specifically set up to offer a comprehensive service to retirement and widow pensioners who receive payment of benefit direct into their bank and building society accounts. Pensions Direct will also give general advice and information on benefits to all pensioners and will send out claim packs for Income Support where appropriate.

The Benefit Enquiry Line provides free help and advice for sick and disabled people and their care. Specialist braille and textphone services are also offered and there are benefit specific advice services which offer specialist advice for certain customer groups, for example the Family Credit Helpline. In addition, benefit literature and leaflets covering all social security benefits are widely available in BA local offices, post offices and numerous other outlets. Information is also available in booklets and leaflets which are produced in other languages, audio and video tape and in braille.

The BA conducted a national campaign—"Pension and Benefits for Older People" from 13 January to 26 January 1997. This was aimed at information older people and their carers of the benefit help and services that may be available to them. Regional information staff promoted the campaign through appearances in the local media and at community initiatives. This campaign was actively promoted within Wales.

Additionally a media pack was issued to all national radio and TV outlets, and all regional as well as local newspapers. A copy of the specially produced leaflet giving further information is enclosed.

Further copies can be obtained from:-

Pensions and Benefits for Older People

PO Box 28

Leatherhead

Surrey

KT22 7NA

The Benefits Agency in Wales participates in specific events which are aimed to raise awareness of benefit entitlement. Information officers have regularly given talks to pensioner groups on benefit entitlement and have also actively liaised with pensioner organisations. In September 1996, the Agency participated in a "Pensioner Week" by providing information in a live broadcast on S4C TV.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of outstanding cases for the Child Support Agency in each year since its inception; what has been the highest number of cases outstanding; and what information he collates on the distribution of cases throughout different areas of the United Kingdom. [12862]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Harry Barnes, dated 30 January 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about cases on hand in the Child Support Agency.

It is not possible to give a complete answer to your question. A breakdown of child maintenance applications on hand in the Child Support Agency Centres (which cover specific geographical areas) is available only for the year ending 31 March 1996 and for the current year to 31 December 1996. An overall total is available for the year ending 1994–95. An estimate is given for 1993–94; this represents the highest number of such cases on hand since the Agency began. As in the previous two years, the Agency is currently on track to reduce the total number of maintenance applications on hand by the end of the year i.e. by 31 March 1997.

The information available is provided in the attached table. The figures represent those applications which have not been fully cleared, either by assessment or for other reasons, and are therefore counted as work on hand. The base data is drawn from scans of the Child Support Computer System which have been enhanced as the Agency's business has evolved. The number of cases on hand at any time must be taken in context with the increasing number of cases that the Agency has dealt with. This has risen form 858,000 at the end of 1993–94 to over 1.8 million at 31 December 1996.

I hope this is helpful.

Maintenance assessments on hand since CSA inception

Child Support Agency centre	*1993–94 (as at 31 March 1994)*	*1994–95 (as at 31 March 1995)*	*1995–96 (as at 31 March 1996)*	*1996–97 (as at 31 December 1996)*
Dudley	n/a	n/a	62,908	72,203
Hastings	n/a	n/a	52,113	58,796
Falkirk	n/a	n/a	81,314	89,417
Plymouth	n/a	n/a	60,261	66,234
Birkenhead	n/a	n/a	69,077	65,865
Belfast	n/a	n/a	83,986	89,269
Total	[1]550,000	425,561	409,659	441,784

[1] Estimate.

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in what circumstances the Child Support Agency varies maintenance awards or arrears to reflect overpayments made by an absent parent when these arise due to the parent with care *(a)* under-declaring her or his income and *(b)* in some other way defrauding the benefits system; and what assessment he has made of whether existing arrangements with regard to fraudulent claims might be improved. [13021]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Malcolm Wicks, dated 30 January 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about maintenance overpaid to the Child Support Agency.

A maintenance assessment will be reviewed and any arrears adjusted where the Agency is notified, or becomes aware, that there has been a change in circumstances or that the original circumstances were not accurately represented by either party involved.

Where a reviewed assessment results in the absent parent having overpaid maintenance, this can be dealt with in one of three ways. It can be used to reduce any arrears, reduce future maintenance payments or in certain exceptional circumstances a lump sum repayment may be made to the absent parent. The appropriate action would depend on the circumstances of the case.

As part of the Closer Working Programme with the Benefits Agency, the Child Support Agency has a number of initiatives in place to help improve the security of benefit payments. In particular a Benefits Agency fraud liaison officer is stationed in each mainland Child Support Agency Centre both to improve fraud awareness and to monitor fraud referrals. Work under this programme continues to explore the interaction between the Agencies, one of the main objectives being to further tighten security on benefits payments.

I hope this is helpful.

War Pensions Agency

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people were employed in the War Pensions Agency in *(a)* 1985, *(b)* 1990 and *(c)* 1995 and *(d)* in the current year; and at what cost at constant prices. [13450]

Mr. Heald: These are matters for Mr. Kevin Caldwell, chief executive of the War Pensions Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from K. C. Caldwell to Mr. Winston Churchill, dated 30 January, 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the numbers of people employed in the War Pensions Agency in 1985, 1990, 1995 and also in the current year.

Comparable staffing and paybill figures for this Agency for the years 1985 and 1990 are not available. The War Pensions Agency began operating in April 1994. Before that staff numbers were included in the Benefits Agency complement and before 1991 in the Department of Social Security figures.

The average number of staff employed by this Agency in 1995/1996 was 1648 and for 1996/97 it is 1346. This reduction in staff numbers is due to the decreasing intake of work and the investment in modern technology, notably the War Pensions Computer System introduced in late 1995.

The Agency paybill for 1994/1995 was £26,447,348 and for 1996/97 it is £21,967,048 (at constant 1996/97 prices).

I hope you find my reply helpful.

Income Support

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 21 January, *Official Report*, column *566*, how many of the income support for mortgage interest payments were made in error; how many of these were underpayments; and how many underpayments exceeded *(a)* £5,000, *(b)* £2,500, *(c)* £1,000, *(d)* £500 and *(e)* £250. [13295]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of income support is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. John Denham, dated 30 January 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking pursuant to his Answer of 21st January, Official Report, column 566, how many of the Income Support for mortgage interest payments made in error, how many of these were underpayments and how many underpayments exceeded (a) £5,000, (b) £2,500, (c) £1,000, (d) £500 and (e) £250.

Of the 308,590 cases in error, 54,635 were underpayments. We do not collect centrally a breakdown of these underpayments and the information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will introduce amendments to the jobseeker's allowance regulations to protect the position of share fishermen; and if he will make a statement. [13428]

Mr. Roger Evans: The jobseeker's allowance regulations already contain a number of special provisions for share fishermen. They are specifically designed to ensure that share fishermen claiming contribution-based jobseeker's allowance are in a broadly similar financial position to that which they enjoyed under unemployment benefit.

We are closely monitoring the effects of the introduction of jobseeker's allowance on share fishermen. This monitoring has not identified any difficulties which would require the regulations to be amended.

Mortgage Interest Payments

Sir Peter Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects the standard interest rate upon which help with interest payments for mortgages are made to those on income support will be increased. [13833]

Mr. Roger Evans: The standard rate of interest used to calculate payments of income support mortgage interest—currently 6.89 per cent.—is based on the weighted average rate provided by the top building societies. It is calculated and published monthly by the Office for National Statistics. Any movement in the rate of ±0.25 per cent. will trigger a change in the standard interest rate. We expect recent rises in interest rates to be reflected in the weighted average rate shortly but cannot predict exactly when this will trigger an increase in the standard interest rate.

Cash Limits

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on changes in the *(a)* cash limits and *(b)* running costs limit of his Department for 1996–97. [14128]

Mr. Burt: The cash limit for class XII, vote 2—housing benefit subsidies, council tax benefit subsidies and administration, payments into the national insurance fund and the social fund and other grants—will be increased by £394,000 from £437,479,000 to £437,873,000. The cash limit of class XII, vote 3—Department of Social Security, administration—will be increased by £62,373,000 from £2,263,983,000 to £2,326,356,000.

The revision for vote 2 takes account of funding for the London organised fraud investigation team of £1,000,000, a pilot project to investigate organised housing benefit fraud, an increase in the grant in aid to Motability of £346,000 towards its administrative expenses, offset by a corresponding decrease in Department of Social Security, Administration, class XII, vote 3, and a reduction of £952,000 in challenge funding, offset by a corresponding increase in Department of Social Security, Administration, class XII, vote 3.

Vote 3 revisions take account of increased requirements arising from the re-instatement of withheld administration provision following comparable additional benefit savings of £19,000,000 running costs, an increase of £4,000,000 running costs under the end-year flexibility scheme as announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 12 July 1996, *Official Report*, columns *326-31* for the security and control package, the reinstatement of a £5,000,000 running costs shortfall resulting from the untying of the repayment service with the Department for Education and Employment for the administration of the unemployment benefit service and £2,000,000 running costs for the parent plus project. Other changes result from a net increase of £31,423,000 towards the administrative cost of the jobseeker's allowance, offset by a corresponding reduction in Department for Education and Employment, Employment Service class IX, vote 3, an increase of £600,000 running costs offset by a corresponding reduction on the Lord Chancellor's and Law Officers' Departments, Lord Chancellor's Department, class VIII vote 1, a reduction of £45,000 running costs offset by a corresponding increase on Department of Health administration and miscellaneous health services and personal social services, England class XI, vote, a reduction of £8,000 running costs, offset by a corresponding increase on Department of Health and Social Services Northern Ireland, vote 3, an increase of £30,000 running costs for repayment to the Security Facilities Executive, a reduction of £40,000 running costs for fallow period compensation payments, a net increase of £606,000 running costs from a transfer of provision from Department of Social Security, housing benefit subsidies, council tax benefit subsidies and administration, payments into the national insurance fund and the social fund and other grants, class XII, vote 2, and an increase in running cost cover of £960,000 for services provided by and to the Department of Health on a repayment basis. Further running cost changes arise from a transfer of £20,486,000 to a net section of the vote, a re-allocation of £8,429,000 from capital expenditure and a shortfall of £11,008,000 is offset by a corresponding reduction in running costs.

Cash limit changes arise from a transfer of £37,000 from Department of Health, administration and miscellaneous health services and personal social services, England, class XI, vote 2, a transfer of £500,000 to Inland Revenue administration class XVI, vote 4, and a transfer of £690,000 to Department for Education and Employment, employment services, class IX, vote 3.

As a result of these changes, the running cost limit of the Department of Social Security will be increased by £40,461,000 from £3,161,911,000 to £3,202,372,000.

The increases will be charged to the reserve and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

DEFENCE

Cash Limits

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on changes to the class 1 cash limits and defence operating costs limit for 1996–97. [14205]

Mr. Portillo: A spring supplementary estimate is to be presented to the House to take up additional provision of £244 million which, subject to parliamentary approval, the Government have agreed will be provided from the reserve in 1996–97 to meet the additional costs of the military operation in the former Yugoslavia, as I announced on 25 November 1996, *Official Report*, columns *28–29*.

The additional funding to be drawn on to class 1, vote 1 will, in accordance with supply procedure, be funded through a further partial appropriation of receipts from the sale of the married quarters estate in England and Wales. Parliamentary supply procedures dictate that any increase in provision on a vote must, in the first instance, be funded by an additional appropriations in aid that are available to the vote.

This appropriation is in addition to the receipts appropriated in aid to fund the entitlement to end year flexibility on class 1, vote 1 in the winter supplementary estimates, which my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces announced to the House on 1 November 1996, *Official Report*, columns *269–70*.

The balance of the married quarters sale receipt, some £641 million, will be surrendered to the consolidated fund as extra receipts.

The class 1 cash limits will change as follows:

£000s

Class 1 vote	*Current cash limit*	*Change*	*Revised cash limit*
1	10,994,897	–99	10,994,798
2	4,687,170	42,112	4,729,282
3	6,049,870	26,056	6,075,926

The reduction in the cash limit for class 1, vote 1 reflects the net effect of the transfer of responsibilities to another Government Department.

The impact of these changes on the Ministry of Defence operating costs limit is as follows:

Class 1 vote	*Current cash limit*	*Change*	*Revised cash limit*
1	10,989,352	–99	10,989,253
2	4,687,170	42,112	4,729,282
3	806,347	—	806,347

Royal Yacht

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many nights the royal family spent on the royal yacht in 1995–96 and when; and where the yacht was at the time. [13402]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is as follows:

Date	Location	Number of nights
1995		
19–21 March	Simons Town and Capetown	2
24–25 March	Durban	1
31 May to 2 June	Falmouth, Pembroke Dock and Avonmouth	2
12–13 June	Portsmouth	1
28 July to 2 August	Cowes	5
4–13 August	Western Isles	10
18–19 August	London	2
Total		23
1996		
15 March	Palm Beach	1
24–27 June	Douglas, Belfast Portrush and Londonderry	3
5–8 July	Marchwood Falmouth and Portsmouth	3
11–12 July	Amsterdam	1
2–17 August	Cowes Western Isles	15
Total		23

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for how many days the royal yacht has been used for inward investment seminars since 1989. [13400]

Mr. Soames: HMY Britannia has been used around the world to promote British exports and attract inward investment to the United Kingdom on 63 days since 1989. The figure does not include the transit times to and from the UK. On some days, however, more than one event was held.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what defects have been found in the *(a)* hull, *(b)* main and auxiliary machinery, *(c)* superstructure and *(d)* major items of marine equipment of the royal yacht Britannia requiring replacement or major repairs in order to maintain its sea going condition; [13586]

(2) what personnel and maintenance costs are required by the royal yacht Britannia which would not be incurred by its planned replacement. [13587]

Mr. Soames: Britannia is now a very elderly ship, built with 1940s technology, including steam-powered engines. She takes a great deal of manpower to maintain, with a ship's complement larger than that of the latest generation of Royal Navy frigates, and would have needed a refit this year costing £17 million in order to remain seaworthy for a further five years. Necessary work, much of it age related, would have included reappraisal and repair of around 80 frame connections between the frame, deck and shell; survey and replacement where required of lined surfaces; replacement of a significant portion of the main electrical cabling; and replacement of radar and communications equipment. Her running costs would not reduce from their average of about £10 million per annum.

The new yacht will incorporate the latest technology and her design will reflect the fact that she will not be required to sail long distances with the Queen abroad. The precise size of her crew has yet to be determined, but it will be substantially smaller than that required by Britannia. We expect average annual running costs to be not much more than half of those of Britannia.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many days in each year since 1967 Her Majesty the Queen has been on board Her Majesty's yacht Britannia. [13699]

Mr. Soames: Since 1967, Her Majesty the Queen has spent the following number of days on board HMY Britannia:

Year	Days
1967	12
1968	21
1969	27
1970	62
1971	26
1972	53
1973	8
1974	41
1975	13
1976	44
1977	84
1978	16
1979	36
1980	14
1981	26
1982	23
1983	35
1984	21
1985	38
1986	36
1987	[1]0
1988	30
1989	28
1990	15
1991	16
1992	22
1993	20
1994	21
1995	20
1996	11

[1] Major refit year.

These figures do not reflect the often considerable transit times to and from the UK. Britannia is, of course, also used by other members of the royal family, and used to promote British exports and attract inward investment to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent on *(a)* refitting, *(b)* refurbishing and *(c)* maintaining the royal yacht since 1967. [13694]

Mr. Soames: The information is not available in the breakdown requested. However, total expenditure on repair and refit is:

Year	£ thousand[1]
1967–68	258
1968–69	63
1969–70	481
1970–71	152
1971–72	172
1972–73	1,213
1973–74	758
1974–75	430
1975–76	1,286
1976–77	390
1977–78	1,299
1978–79	164
1979–80	4,568
1980–81	988

Year	£ thousand[1]
1981–82	1,315
1982–83	199
1983–84	5,506
1984–85	1,161
1985–86	1,660
1986–87	2,402
1987–88	17,052
1988–89	3,811
1989–90	1,204
1990–91	2,593
1991–92	7,053
1992–93	2,292
1993–94	1,593
1994–95	4,189
1995–96	1,277
1996–97[2]	2,227

[1] Figures are outturn unless otherwise stated.

[2] Estimate.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements he proposes to make in respect of provision of transport by sea for Her Majesty the Queen after Her Majesty's yacht Britannia is decommissioned and before the proposed replacement yacht is brought into service. [13700]

Mr. Soames: The royal yacht is a national asset, which projects the image of Britain, provides a platform for state and official occasions, assists in promoting British economic interests and provides a suitable royal residence overseas. It is not a primary means of royal transport. Should Her Majesty have a requirement for sea travel before the new yacht enters service, this will be addressed at the appropriate time.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many days HMY Britannia was at sea in 1996; what functions were carried out; what was the total cost to his Department of the royal yacht in 1995–96; and what estimate he has made of the costs up to the date of decommissioning. [12391]

Mr. Soames *[pursuant to his reply, 23 January 1997, Official Report, column 688–89]:* I regret that the figure given for the running costs of HMY Britannia in the year 1995–96 was incorrect. The correct figure is £8,423,000.

Royal Flight

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates in 1996 when aircraft of the Queen's flight were used by members of the royal family for private journeys indicating in each case the member of the royal family concerned, the starting point and destination and the amount re-imbursed to public funds in 1996. [13891]

Mr. Soames: The information is as follows:

Date of journey	Passenger	Route	Cost reimbursed £
1 January 1996	Prince of Wales	Mildenhall to Zurich	1,232
16 March 1996	Duke of Edinburgh	Nassau to Rock Sound (Caribbean)	890
3 May 1996	Duke of Edinburgh	Hereford to Stanmer Park	1,793.33
1 September 1996	HM the Queen	Aberdeen to Teesside	1,186.67
3 September 1996	HM the Queen	Teesside to Aberdeen	1,483.33
8 December 1996	HM the Queen	Blackpool to Northolt	1,216.67
13 December 1996	Duke of Edinburgh	Aberdeen to Lydd[1]	1,064.38
31 December 1996	Prince of Wales	Stansted to Zurich	Bill not yet submitted

[1] Only the London to Lydd distance represented private use.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which persons other than members of the royal family are entitled to make official use of the royal flight. [13671]

Mr. Soames: No. 32 (The Royal) Squadron is established to fulfil communications, VIP and royal flying tasks. In addition to the royal family, squadron aircraft are used by Government Ministers, senior officers and officials of the MOD in fulfilment of their official duties, as well as meeting operational, exercise and flying training requirements. Visiting foreign dignitaries may also be flown, when appropriate. Such additional use contributes to overall cost-effectiveness.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many flights have been made in each of the last five years by members of the royal family for *(a)* official use and *(b)* personal use. [13673]

Mr. Soames: The information is available in the format requested only for financial years 1995–96 and 1996–97 and is set out in the table. Prior to April 1995 only total figures are available.

Year	Official	Private	Total
1991–92	—	—	1,088
1992–93	—	—	1,066
1993–94	—	—	966
1994–95	—	—	870
1995–96	871	9	880
1996–97[1]	589	7	596

[1] To 31 December 1996.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the rules on the use of the royal flight aircraft for the personal use of members of the royal family. [13674]

Mr. Soames: No. 32 (The Royal) Squadron may be used for private purposes only by HM the Queen, the Duke of Edinburgh, HM Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother and HRH the Prince of Wales: such use is at the personal discretion of HM the Queen. In accordance with the wishes of Her Majesty the Queen, since 1 April 1995 the costs of private flights in aircraft of No. 32 (The Royal) Squadron by members of the royal family have been reimbursed to the MOD.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those members of the royal family entitled to use the royal flight. [13675]

Mr. Soames: No. 32 (The Royal) Squadron may be used by any member of the royal family on official business, subject to HM the Queen's permission. In addition to HM the Queen, the Duke of Edinburgh, HM Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother and HRH the Prince of Wales may use the Squadron for private travel at their own expense, subject to HM the Queen's permission.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service and civilian staff are employed *(a)* full time and *(b)* part time by the royal flight by numbers and rank; and at what annual cost to public funds. [13676]

Mr. Soames: No. 32 (The Royal) Squadron consists of the personnel set out in the table. Costs of these personnel amount to some £3.7 million per year. The squadron is supported by service, civilian and contractor personnel at RAF Northolt.

Wing commander: 1
Squadron leader: 4
Lieutenant commander (Royal Navy): 3
Flight lieutenant: 38
Master aircrew: 1
Flight sergeant: 1
Chief technician: 2
Sergeant: 12
Corporal: 17
Senior aircraftsman: 18
Typist: 1
Retired officer 3: 1.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the cost to public funds of journeys made by royal passengers using the royal flight in each of the past three years if they had been undertaken by commercial services. [13677]

Mr. Soames: It would not be possible to determine a relevant estimate of this nature without disproportionate effort. The majority of royal tasks undertaken by No. 32 (The Royal) Squadron could not readily be provided by commercial services and would have required special charter arrangements.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the aggregated cost per passenger mile of a royal flight aircraft. [13678]

Mr. Soames: An average cost per passenger mile flown could not be provided without disproportionate effort.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many aircraft make up the royal flight, listed by aircraft type, seating capacity and date of introduction to the flight. [13680]

Mr. Soames: The information is as follows:

Aircraft number and type	*Seating*	*Remarks*
3 x BAe 146	18	bought between 1986 and 1991
8 x BAe 125[1]	7	bought between 1983 and 1984
2 x Wessex	5–7	1969
2 x leased Twin Squirrels	5	1996

[1] Seven plus one in-use reserve.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the annual cost of the royal flight broken down by *(a)* aircraft depreciation, *(b)* running and maintenance costs, *(c)* airport charges and *(d)* personnel costs. [13681]

Mr. Soames: The information is not immediately available in the form requested. I will write to the hon. Member.

Duke of York (Helicopter Flight)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people were on board the naval helicopter on the training sortie on 13 November 1996 involving the Duke of York; and what were their operational roles. [13695]

Mr. Soames: There were three people on board the naval helicopter on the training sortie on 13 November 1996 including HRH the Duke of York. The operational roles of the other two were pilot and observer.

Guardsmen Fisher and Wright

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received in respect of the cases of Scots Guardsmen Fisher and Wright. [13907]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave on 29 January1997, *Official Report*, columns *209–10*.

Castlemartin Camp

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number and location of properties that have received compensation from his Department for damage allegedly caused by firing operations at Castlemartin camp, Pembrokeshire, in each of the last 15 years. [13800]

Mr. Soames: The information required pre-1987 is not readily available and I will write to the hon. Member. From 1987, my Department paid compensation to property owners in the Castlemartin area as follows:

Year	*Number*	*Location*
1987	1	Castlemartin
1988	2	Warren and Rhoscouther
1989	0	—
1990	0	—
1991	1	Maidenvells
1992	1	Rhoscouther
1993	0	—
1994	3	Hundletom, Castlemartin and Stackpole
1995	1	Stackpole
1996	0	—

Hawk Aircraft

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Hawk aircraft the RAF owns; and how many have been procured since 1992. [13275]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The RAF currently has 125 Hawk aircraft. Other Hawks are operated by the Royal Navy and Procurement Executive, giving a combined fleet of 145. No Hawks have been procured since 1992.

Mull of Kintyre (Air Crash)

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will establish a judicial inquiry into the crash of Flight Zulu Delta 576 on the Mull of Kintyre. [13799]

Mr. Soames: An extremely thorough investigation into this tragic accident has already been carried out by RAF experts and civilian specialists from the air accidents investigation branch, with assistance from the manufacturers of the aircraft and its systems. All possible causes were exhaustively examined, including that of some malfunction in the aircraft's systems. The investigation concluded that the accident was caused by the two pilots, who wrongly continued to fly their aircraft towards the high ground of the Mull of Kintyre below a safe altitude in unsuitable weather. No new evidence has emerged subsequently which would cause us to doubt the accuracy of this conclusion. My right hon. Friend does not believe that there would be any purpose in setting up a judicial inquiry.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 3 February 1997

SCOTLAND

Hospital Waiting Times

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many in-patient, day care episodes involved a wait of longer than one year in each NHS hospital trust and health board in 1996; and what proportion of the total number of discharges these episodes represent. [11951]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is set out in the table. From April this year, the Government guarantee that no patient will wait longer than 12 months for in-patient and day case treatment.

Discharges after admission from the waiting list and numbers and percentage who waited over one year in the year ending 31 December 1996

Health Board/NHS Trust	Discharges		
	Total	Number Waiting >1 Year	
		Total	Per cent.
Argyll and Bute NHS Trust	1,423	3	0.2
Inverclyde Royal NHS Trust	8,480	100	1.2
Lomond Healthcare NHS Trust	4,491	—	—
Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS Trust	267	—	—
Royal Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust	15,077	133	0.9
Argyll and Clyde Health Board Total	29,738	236	0.8
Ayrshire and Arran Community Healthcare NHS Trust	7	—	—
North Ayrshire and Arran NHS Trust	15,728	5	0.0
South Ayrshire Hospitals NHS Trust	1,422	15	1.1
Ayrshire and Arran Health Board Total	17,157	20	0.1
Borders General Hospital NHS Trust	9,261	11	0.1
Borders Health Board Total	9,261	11	0.1
Dumfries and Galloway Acute and Maternity Hospitals NHS Trust	8,721	50	0.6
Dumfries and Galloway Community Health NHS Trust	17	—	—
Dumfries and Galloway Health Board Total	8,738	50	0.6
Fife Healthcare NHS Trust	4,431	5	0.1
Kirkcaldy Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	11,921	56	0.5
Queen Margaret Hospital NHS Trust	7,117	42	0.6
Fife Health Board Total	23,469	103	0.4
Falkirk and District Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	8,052	104	1.3
Stirling Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	11,093	46	0.4
Forth Valley Health Board Total	19,145	150	0.8
Aberdeen Royal Hospitals NHS Trust	33,366	378	1.1
Grampian Healthcare NHS Trust	4,009	1	0.0
Moray Health Services NHS Trust	3,418	21	0.6
Grampian Health Board Total	40,793	400	1.0
Glasgow Dental Hospital and School NHS Trust	661	1	0.2
Glasgow Royal Infirmary University NHS Trust	30,023	580	1.0
Southern General Hospital NHS Trust	15,042	173	1.2
Stobhill NHS Trust	14,551	193	1.3
The Victoria Infirmary NHS Trust	11,960	493	4.1
The Yorkhill NHS Trust	7,636	19	0.3
West Glasgow Hospitals University NHS Trust	27,662	217	0.8
Greater Glasgow Health Board Total	107,535	1,676	1.6
Caithness and Sutherland NHS Trust	1,819	—	—
Highland Communities NHS Trust	1,342	1	0.1
Raigmore Hospital NHS Trust	14,107	237	1.7
Highland Health Board Total	17,268	238	1.4
Hairmyres and Stonehouse Hospitals NHS Trust	14,722	91	0.6
Lanarkshire Healthcare NHS Trust	101	—	—
Law Hospital NHS Trust	10,577	49	0.5
Monklands and Bellshill Hospitals NHS Trust	9,640	55	0.6
Lanarkshire Health Board Total	35,040	195	0.6
East and Midlothian NHS Trust	5,365	10	0.2
Edinburgh Healthcare NHS Trust	58	—	—
Edinburgh Sick Children's NHS Trust	4,715	2	0.0
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh NHS Trust	32,569	120	0.4
West Lothian NHS Trust	13,741	40	0.3
Western General Hospitals NHS Trust	15,880	9	0.1
Lothian Health Board Total	72,328	181	0.3
Orkney Health Board Total	691	5	0.7
Shetland Health Board Total	1,037	2	0.2
Angus NHS Trust	4,306	5	0.1
Dundee Healthcare NHS Trust	242	—	—
Dundee Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	26,123	331	1.3
Perth and Kinross Healthcare NHS Trust	8,483	33	0.4
Tayside Health Board Total	39,154	369	0.9
Western Isles Health Board Total	1,017	—	—
Scotland—Total	422,371	3,636	0.9

Business Rates

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the revenue raised from business rates in 1996–97 for *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Scottish local authorities. [13667]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* The most recently available estimates of the revenue to be raised from business rates in 1996–97 are the mid-year estimates that councils submitted in November 1996. The total estimated non-domestic rate income for Scotland in 1996–97 is £1.34 billion. The relevant figure for each local authority is set out in the table.

1996–97 Estimated NDRI

	£
City of Aberdeen	86,557,317
Aberdeenshire	46,027,947
Angus	17,849,992
Argyll and Bute	24,994,405
Clackmannanshire	10,315,691
Dumfries and Galloway	28,717,819
City of Dundee	39,671,237
East Ayrshire	18,482,249
East Dunbartonshire	14,466,300
East Lothian	24,013,929
East Renfrewshire	9,620,396
City of Edinburgh	171,584,824
Falkirk	44,231,365
Fife	110,198,191
City of Glasgow	200,692,337
Highland	50,294,365
Inverclyde	14,219,363
Midlothian	12,173,141
Moray	18,119,856
North Ayrshire	34,125,511
North Lanarkshire	76,483,901
Orkney	6,153,472
Perth and Kinross	30,800,908
Renfrewshire	41,251,093
Scottish Borders	16,425,654
Shetland	16,505,489
South Ayrshire	25,992,108
South Lanarkshire	65,389,460
Stirling	23,464,362
West Dunbartonshire	21,656,620
West Lothian	35,078,584
Western Isles	4,396,491
Scotland	1,339,954,377

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the proportion of business rates in Scotland raised from *(a)* local government, *(b)* central Government, *(c)* public corporations, *(d)* private sector and *(e)* other. [13668]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* Information is not available in the form requested. The table shows the latest available information on the rateable values of non-domestic subjects analysed by type of subject. This analysis does not separately identify central Government, local government, public corporations and private sector subjects. Shares of rateable value do not give precise estimate of shares paid, as reliefs and exemptions may differ from different categories of subject.

Table 1: Total rateable value by type of subject, Scotland, April 1996

Type of Subject	*Rateable value £ million*	*Percentage of total rateable value*
Commercial		
Shops (including restaurants)	753.0	19.9
Offices	627.0	16.6
Hotels, boarding houses etc.	97.1	2.6
Other Commercial subjects	560.5	14.8
Industrial and freight transport		
Mineral extraction	21.7	0.6
Oil and petrochemicals	80.6	2.1
Other industrial and freight transport	531.9	14.1

Table 1: Total rateable value by type of subject, Scotland, April 1996

Type of Subject	*Rateable value £ million*	*Percentage of total rateable value*
Formula valued subjects		
Water	33.2	0.9
Gas	53.3	1.4
Electricity	167.7	4.4
Rail	15.6	0.4
Miscellaneous[1]	833.5	22.1
Total all subjects	3,775.3	100.0

Notes:

[1] Includes public buildings such as schools, hospitals, libraries also docks and harbours and independent generators of electricity.

Source:

Annual RVASS return from assessors.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the proportion of business rates raised by each industrial sector, broken down by the standard industrial classification 1992 categories. [13669]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* Information on rates paid by the manufacturing sector is available from the Scottish production database, and is shown in table 1 for 1994, the latest year for which information is available. The best available information for other economic sectors comes from work carried out in the compilation of 1993 Scottish input-output tables. The calculations are based on the level of rates paid by industries across the UK as a whole. Table 2 provides a percentage split between seven broad economic sectors in 1993.

Table 1 - Rates paid by Scottish Manufacturing sector, 1994

Manufacturing Division (SIC92)	*Rates (£ million)*
15–16[1]	26.7
17	5.0
18	3.0
19	0.7
20	2.8
21	9.1
22	5.3
23–26[1]	11.7
24	10.0
25	5.4
27	4.2
28	6.6
29	8.0
30	4.4
31	2.6
32	4.0
33	2.7
34	1.0
35	7.6
36—7[1]	3.6
Manufacturing Total	124.4

Note:

[1] These SIC groups are aggregated to avoid company specific information.

Source:

Scottish Production Database 1994.

Table 2: Estimated share of rates paid by Scottish industry, by Sector, 1993

Sector	Percentage of total rates paid
Agriculture, forestry and fishing (SIC 1–5)	0.3
Mining, energy and water supply (SIC 10–14 and 40, 41)	11.1
Manufacturing (SIC 15–37)	14.7
Construction (SIC 45)	1.2
Distribution (SIC 50–55)	42.0
Transport and communication (SIC 60–64)	7.6
Services (SIC 65–99)	23.0
Total	100.0

Source:
Scottish input–output analyses—1993.

EU Finances

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the criteria for calculating the United Kingdom's contribution to European Union finances; and if he will estimate the Scottish contribution to the European Union based on these criteria. [13798]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* The arrangements for financing the EC budget are set out in the Community's "Own Resources Division" Council decision 94/729/EC, Euratom, adopted by the Community in 1994. A copy of the ORD is held by the Library. The most significant effect of the ORD is to increase the Community's own resources ceiling from 1.2 per cent of Community GNP in 1994 to 1.27 per cent. in 1999. Because the data used to determine own resources contributions are collated for the UK as a whole, it would only be possible to estimate a disaggregated contribution for Scotland at disproportionate cost.

Algrade Trust

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a further statement on the progress of the investigation by the Scottish charities office into allegations about the Algrade trust raised in an Adjournment debate by the hon. Member for East Lothian on 16 January 1996. [13705]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The investigation under the supervision of charities legislation uncovered evidence of maladministration, but not dishonesty, on the part of the former trustees. This took the form of inefficiencies in management brought about by their advancing years and a reluctance to adapt to changing ideas for and approaches to the care of those with learning difficulties. The former trustees resigned following the intervention of the charities office and were replaced by trustees experienced in management and in the care of those with learning difficulties.

Lyme Disease

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the incidence of Lyme disease in the highlands of Scotland and in each of the other health board areas in each of the last three years; and what steps are being taken to prevent its spread. [13911]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Lyme disease has been a notifiable disease in Scotland since January 1990. The number of statutory notifications, by health board area, for 1994, 1995 and 1996 is as follows:

Notifications of Lyme Disease by Health Board Area[4] 1994 to 1996[1]

Year	Argyll and Clyde	Ayrshire and Arran	Fife	Grampian	Greater Glasgow	Highland	Lothian	Tayside
1994[2]	2	—	1	—	1	2	2	1
1995[2]	—	1	—	1	1	2	—	—
1996[3]	—	—	—	—	2	1	—	—

Source:
[1] NHS Information and Statistics Division.
[2] Confirmed notifications
[3] Provisional notifications subject to amendment where a revised diagnosis is subsequently received
[4] There were no statutory notifications from 7 Health Boards.

Lyme disease is transmitted from animals to man by the bite of the adult female tick. It is not a common condition in Scotland, but the notification requirements introduced in 1990 enable monitoring of its incidence to be maintained.

The Forestry Commission and Scottish Natural Heritage have issued guidance to their field staff on precautions that should be taken to avoid tick bites.

ENVIRONMENT

Asbestos

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans his Department has to impose a ban on the import and use of asbestos products in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [13561]

Mr. Clappison: The United Kingdom takes the view that prohibitions on the marketing and use of asbestos should be based on agreements within the European Union. The Asbestos (Prohibitions) Regulations 1992 and the Asbestos (Prohibitions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1993 implement directive 91/659/EEC and prohibit the importation and use of many forms of asbestos. Efforts will continue within the United Kingdom to find suitable alternatives to the remaining uses of asbestos, and to encourage the use of substitute products, but a total ban will not be instituted without EU agreement.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what current research his Department has commissioned on the safe removal of asbestos from buildings in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [13560]

Sir Paul Beresford: None, but the Health and Safety Executive has commissioned such research in the past. HSE keeps under review the available techniques for asbestos removal and issues guidance as appropriate.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the most recent review was undertaken of the asbestos licensing scheme in the United Kingdom; how many companies have been grated such licences; what are the criteria for granting such a licence; and if he will make a statement. [13562]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Health and Safety Commission last reviewed the Asbestos (Licensing) Regulations 1983 in 1988.

The Health and Safety Executive does not distinguish in its records between licences granted to companies and those granted to individuals or partnerships. On 28 January 1997, a total of 730 licences were in force.

Applicants for licences are required to demonstrate during a formal interview a good theoretical and practical knowledge of the requirements of the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 1987, the Asbestos (Licensing) Regulations 1983, the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 and the approved code of practice for work with asbestos insulation, asbestos coating and asbestos insulating board published by the Health and Safety Commission.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the policy of his Department on the labelling of asbestos installed in buildings; and if he will make a statement. [13559]

Mr. Clappison: The Asbestos Products (Safety) Regulations 1985, as amended, require that any products containing asbestos are labelled in accordance with the schedule to the regulations. The label serves as a warning that asbestos is present and gives details of precautions to be taken in handling the product.

The Department of the Environment's guidance on asbestos, "Asbestos Materials in Buildings", recommends that the presence of an asbestos material should be noted on plans or other records, and that building owners should make known the existence of asbestos to workers or others who may be affected.

Reserved Capital Receipts

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the gross value of reserved capital receipts held by local authorities; how much of the total relates to housing benefit receipts; and to what extent receipts are supported by cash. [13397]

Sir Paul Beresford: Figures for the value of reserved capital receipts held by local authorities, and the amount relating to housing receipts, are not available. These form part of the provision for credit liabilities, which is reported the Department, but which also includes amounts set aside from revenue.

The provision for credit liabilities may be held as cash or investments, or may be used temporarily to finance expenditure as a substituted for new borrowing. Information on the extent to which the provision for credit liabilities is supported by cash is not available.

Departmental Publicity

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide *(a)* his Department's budgeted expenditure on (i) advertising, (ii) publicity and (iii) public information campaigns for the period January to March 1997 and *(b)* the actual expenditure on (1) advertising, (2) publicity and (3) public information campaigns in the period January to March in each of the past five years. [13460]

Sir Paul Beresford: Total expenditure by my Department on paid publicity initiatives in each of the periods requested is in the table. Paid publicity campaigns usually involve a variety of multimedia elements and disaggregating expenditure into the categories requested is not possible except at disproportionate cost. The figures exclude expenditure by Departmental agencies and on central recruitment advertising.

	£000
Budgeted expenditure for January to March 1997	4,400
Actual expenditure for January to March 1992	1,597
1993	9,999
1994	3,410
1995	4,107
1996	2,950

Local Authority Assets

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information his Department collates on the gross capital value of assets shown on the balance sheets of local authorities in England and Wales. [13396]

Sir Paul Beresford: The total value of fixed assets, at 31 March 1996, for local authorities in England, was about £130 billion. A list of figures for each local authority has been placed in the Library of the House.

Information relating to local authorities in Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Lord Lieutenants

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if Hertfordshire and Rutland will be *(a)* counties for the purposes of the Local Government Act 1972 and *(b)* eligible for Lord Lieutenants under the terms of the Lieutenances Bill [*Lords*]. [14061]

Sir Paul Beresford: Rutland and Hertfordshire will both be counties for the purposes of the Local Government Act 1972, following local government reorganisation in April 1997 and April 1998 respectively. They will have their own lieutenancies.

Sellafield

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will reopen the inquiry into plans for an underground laboratory at Sellafield to examine the need for additional data in respect of the underground rock. [14139]

Sir Paul Beresford: We are considering the matter.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Risley Prison

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to publish the report by HM chief inspector of prisons into the female wing of HMP Risley. [13494]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* Responsibility for the publication of the report into the female wing at Her Majesty's prison, Risley lies with the chief inspector of prisons. I understand that the chief inspector plans to publish this report on 21 February.

Geoffrey Thomas

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the investigation into the circumstances surrounding the physical restraint of Geoffrey Thomas in a hospice in Cardiff will be completed. [13532]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Phil Wheatley to Mr. Ron Davies, dated 3 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your Question about the completion of his investigation into the circumstances surrounding the physical restraint of Geoffrey Thomas in a Cardiff hospice.

The inquiry has been completed and the Director General has received the final report. The report raises a number of issues which require careful but urgent consideration. An announcement will be made in due course.

Whitemoor Prison (Escape)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he had read a transcript of the trial of the men accused of the 1994 escape from HMP Whitemoor before his announcement that he was considering legislation that would allow the prosecution to appeal against judges' rulings stopping trials. [13419]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* No transcript was available at the time of my announcement on Friday 24 January, but I had been fully briefed on the outcome of the proceedings and the reason given for his decision by the trial judge.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will *(a)* alter the conditions under which those accused in connection with the Whitemoor prison escape are held and *(b)* hold an independent inquiry into how far the conditions under which the accused are held are responsible for the health of the accused. [13417]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from S. G. Norris to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 3 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about conditions under which those accused in connection with the Whitemoor prison escape are held.

The prisoners who escaped from Whitemoor prison in September 1994 have all been categorised as Exceptional Risk Category A prisoners and their security category and escape risk classification are subject to annual reviews. Exceptional Risk Category A prisoners must be held in accommodation with an appropriate level of physical security. The units used are known as Special Secure Units (SSUs).

In June 1996, Sir Donald Acheson of the Department of Public Health and Safety at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, was asked by the Prison Service to examine what effect, if any, the current SSU regime may have on prisoners' health. As a result of his report, a system of reviewing the health of individual prisoners every three months was introduced. There are no plans to hold a further inquiry into this particular issue.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will request a report from the Director General of the Prison Service on the evidence of *(a)* Mr. Brodie Clarke and *(b)* Mr. Richard Vart at the trial of the men accused of the 1994 escape from Whitemoor prison; and if he will make a statement; [13418]

(2) if he will order a fresh inquiry into the 9 September 1994 escape from HMP Whitemoor in the light of claims by senior counsel that prison officers assisted in organising the escape. [13412]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answers 30 January 1997]:* The circumstances surrounding the escape from Her Majesty's prison, Whitemoor on 9 September 1994 were thoroughly investigated by Sir John Woodcock. While his inquiry found evidence of many loopholes in the adopted practices and procedures, it found no evidence that prison officers assisted in organising the escape. The report of the inquiry was published on 19 December 1994 and is available in the Library. Cambridgeshire constabulary has also carried out a thorough and detailed investigation of the escape. No charges have been brought against any member of Prison Service staff as a result of that investigation. If any person has any additional information concerning the escape, this should be made available to the police as soon as possible.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps have been taken to locate the missing Prison Service category A books logging the movements of the six men accused of the 1994 escape from HMP Whitemoor; and if he will make a statement. [13420]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Phil Wheatley to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 3 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about missing Prison Service Category A books logging the movements of the six men accused of the 1994 escape from HMP Whitemoor.

The six category A Exceptional Risk prisoners who escaped from Whitemoor Prison in 1994 did not have category A books during their period at Whitemoor in the Special Secure Unit.

Secure Units

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what are the criteria under which prisoners in England and Wales are selected for detention on special secure units; [13415]

(2) what guidance he has issued on the maximum time prisoners in England and Wales may be held in special secure units; [13414]

(3) what explanation is supplied to prisoners in England and Wales for their detention in special secure units. [13416]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from S. G. Norris to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 3 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Questions asking what are the criteria for allocating prisoners to special secure units, what guidance is issued in respect of the maximum time prisoners may be held in such units and what explanation is supplied to prisoners in England and Wales for their detention in special secure units.

Special secure units hold prisoners who have been classified Category A with an exceptional escape risk classification. Prisoners are categorised as exceptional risk because they have a history and background which suggests that they have the motivation and the resources to make a concerted escape attempt and they are usually criminals who pose a particularly grave danger to the public.

There are no time limits relating to the period of detention in special secure units. Once a prisoner is no longer classified as exceptional risk he will be moved out of the unit.

Remand prisoners who Prison Service Headquarters have decided meet the criteria for such a classification are provisionally categorised pending conviction and sentence. At this stage, reasons for the decision are not automatically provided but it is the practice of the Prison Service to do so if requested.

Following conviction and sentence, all such prisoners have their cases reviewed by the Category A Committee in accordance with procedures introduced following the judgement in the case of Regina v. the Secretary of State for the Home Department ex-parte Duggan. Under these arrangements, prisoners are provided with the gist of those matters of fact and opinion relevant to the determination of their security category and given the opportunity to make representations. These arrangements also require that a prisoner be given the reasons for any decision which results in him remaining a Category A prisoner and, if appropriate, being classified as a high or exceptional escape risk.

The security category and escape risk classification are thereafter reviewed annually in accordance with the same procedures.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of asylum seekers who absconded in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [14016]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is not available.

Prisoner Danny McNamee (Inquiries)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what explanation he has requested from the Director General of the Prison Service for the injuries to prisoner Danny McNamee shown in police photographs taken on 13 September 1994; and if he will make a statement. [13422]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Dr. Mike Longfield to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 3 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent question about what explanation has been requested for the injuries to Mr. McNamee shown in police photographs taken on 13 September 1994.

The allegation of assault upon Mr. McNamee was referred to the Cambridgeshire Constabulary on 14 September. I understand that, on 8 June 1995, Mr. McNamee's solicitors were advised by the police the CPS would not be proceeding with any prosecution on the grounds there was insufficient evidence in order for there to be a realistic proposal of a conviction.

Departmental Publications

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the *(a)* White Papers, *(b)* Green Papers, *(c)* consultation papers, *(d)* draft regulations and *(e)* circulars, for which his Department has been responsible issued in 1996 which his Department assesses could give rise, (i) directly and (ii) indirectly, to significant environmental effects. [12701]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* The work of the Home Office has no significant environmental impact.

Roisin McAliskey

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what medical facilities are currently available to Roisin McAliskey at HMP Holloway; and to which hospital she will be taken for her confinement. [13294]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 29 January 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 3 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the medical facilities available to Roisin McAliskey at Holloway, and the hospital to which she will be taken for her confinement.

Nursing staff are available at Holloway 24 hours a day. Ms McAliskey is seen daily by a qualified midwife and a qualified nurse. A doctor is available 13 hours a day and is 'on call' for the remainder. She has also been seen, on a number of occasions by a gynaecologist.

I am afraid that, for security reasons, I cannot say where Ms McAliskey will be taken for her confinement.

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what restrictions have been placed on the receipt of printed material by Roisin McAliskey in Holloway prison; and if he will make a statement. [13252]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from S. G. Norris to Mr. Harry Barnes, dated 3 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the restrictions on the receipt of printed material by Roisin McAliskey in Holloway prison.

In common with all high security prisoners, Ms McAliskey must receive all her newspapers, periodicals and magazines direct from publishers, newsagents or booksellers either at the order of relatives or friends or by payment from her private cash or prison pay. She may receive books direct from relatives or friends.

Immigration (Detention and Deportation)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people detained under Immigration Act powers in the United Kingdom were held in detention at the end of (i) October, (ii) November and (iii) December; in which establishments were they held; what were their *(a)* nationalities and *(b)* gender; and how many were deported and from which establishments. [12323]

Mr. Kirkhope: The available information on persons in detention is given in the tables. The numbers of persons who had been detained at any time and subsequently removed from the United Kingdom under the deportation process were 47 in October and 69 in November 1996. These figures are provisional and include persons departing voluntarily after deportation action had been initiated, but exclude persons removed as illegal entrants or under port refusal procedures. A corresponding figure for December 1996 is not yet available. An analysis of the deportation data, showing where the person had been detained, could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Table 1: Persons recorded as being in detention[1] solely under Immigration Act powers, by establishment

Establishment	1996 31 October	30 November	31 December
Prison Service establishments in England and Wales[2]			
Belmarsh	8	11	8
Birmingham	23	20	18
Bristol	7	5	3
Brixton	15	11	10
Canterbury	5	5	4
Doncaster	4	3	4
Exeter	4	3	—
Feltham	2	2	4
Haslar	135	131	129
High Down	30	28	23
Holloway	19	23	25
Leeds	7	9	7
Manchester	5	6	4
Pentonville	9	7	5
Rochester	190	186	183
Wandsworth	17	12	7
Wormwood Scrubs	25	13	15
Others	21	18	20
	526	493	469
Immigration Service detention centres			
Campsfield House	195	189	194
Dover Harbour Board	6	10	9
Gatwick Meadvale	45	45	44
Harmondsworth	87	89	90
Harwick	—	1	1
Heathrow Queen's Building	13	14	15
Manchester Airport	13	13	4
Tinsley House	136	139	132
	495	500	489
Total	1,021	993	958

[1] Excluding persons in police cells and Scottish prisons; data on such persons are incomplete.
[2] Data are provisional.

Table 2: Persons recorded as being in detention[1] solely under Immigration Act powers, by nationality and gender

Nationality	1996 31 October	30 November	31 December
European Economic Area			
Austria	—	—	—
Belgium	—	—	—
Denmark	—	—	—
Finland	—	—	—
France	4	1	1
Germany	2	2	1
Greece	3	3	3
Iceland	—	—	—
Ireland	—	1	—
Italy	1	1	1
Luxembourg	—	—	—
Netherlands	3	2	2
Norway	—	—	—
Portugal	1	2	1
Spain	—	—	—
Sweden	—	—	—
Other Europe			
Bulgaria	1	4	4
Cyprus	21	13	27
Former Czechoslovakia	6	5	2
Hungary	1	1	1
Malta	—	—	—
Poland	8	6	6
Romania	19	20	17
Russia	6	6	7
Other former USSR	13	13	14
Switzerland	—	—	—
Turkey	43	41	39
Former Yugoslavia	18	14	18
Other Europe	3	1	1
Americas			
Argentina	1	1	1
Barbados	3	2	2
Brazil	—	1	—
Canada	1	1	1
Chile	—	1	1
Colombia	15	10	24
Guyana	1	—	—
Jamaica	45	40	43
Mexico	—	—	—
Peru	3	2	2
Trinidad and Tobago	1	—	—
USA	2	1	2
Venezuela	1	—	1
Other Americas	6	9	7
Africa			
Algeria	86	95	96
Angola	19	14	18
Egypt	2	2	1
Ethiopia	12	9	8
Ghana	61	56	51
Kenya	6	8	6
Libya	2	3	3
Mauritius	—	—	—
Morocco	8	10	8
Nigeria	129	125	133
Sierra Leone	9	10	9
Somalia	7	8	3

Table 2: Persons recorded as being in detention[1] solely under Immigration Act powers, by nationality and gender

Nationality	1996 31 October	30 November	31 December
South Africa	10	5	10
Sudan	6	4	7
Tanzania	5	5	7
Tunisia	3	3	3
Uganda	3	4	4
Zaire	45	42	40
Zambia	5	2	2
Zimbabwe	4	2	6
Other Africa	54	52	42
Indian sub-continent			
Bangladesh	17	12	11
India	113	122	100
Pakistan	59	55	49
Middle East			
Iran	13	13	9
Iraq	2	2	7
Israel	16	16	12
Jordan	—	—	1
Kuwait	—	—	—
Lebanon	3	4	4
Saudi Arabia	—	—	—
Syria	—	—	—
Yemen	—	1	1
Other Middle East	—	1	1
Remainder of Asia			
China	40	35	39
Hong Kong[2]	2	1	1
Indonesia	—	—	—
Japan	—	—	—
Malaysia	—	—	—
Philippines	—	—	—
Singapore	—	—	—
South Korea	—	—	—
Sri Lanka	40	47	29
Taiwan	—	—	—
Thailand	—	—	—
Other Asia	2	3	3
Oceania			
Australia	1	1	1
New Zealand	—	—	—
Other Oceania	—	—	—
British Overseas citizens	—	—	—
Stateless[3] and nationality doubtful	12	22	11
All nationalities	1,028	998	965
Of whom			
—males	934	900	871
—females	94	98	94

[1] Excluding persons in police cells and Scottish prisons; data on such persons are incomplete.
[2] Including Hong Kong stateless persons.
[3] Excluding Palestine and Hong Kong stateless persons.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how his Department has used the UK indicators for sustainable development in *(a)* the production of the Department's annual report, *(b)* monitoring progress towards meeting the objectives set out in the UK sustainable development strategy and *(c)* assessing the environmental implications of policy options; and what plans it has to extend their use in future within the Department. [12272]

Mr. Howard: As the 1994 publication, the Department of the Environment's "Sustainable Development—The United Kingdom Strategy" showed, the Home Office has no direct role in the achievement of the Government's sustainable development objectives. Nevertheless, my Department keeps itself fully informed of progress on, and alert to any opportunity to contribute to, these objectives. In particular, we pay close attention to the United Kingdom indicators for sustainable development.

UK Citizenship (Hong Kong)

Sir Patrick Cormack: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedures he has established to process the applications for United Kingdom citizenship which he has received from members of the Hong Kong ethnic minority community; and if he will set out the special provisions proposed by Her Majesty's Government for this group. [13323]

Mr. Kirkhope: Some members of the ethnic minority community in Hong Kong have applied successfully for citizenship under the British nationality selection scheme. The Government also made provision in the Hong Kong (British Nationality) Order 1986 to prevent any British dependent territories citizen from becoming stateless, and have guaranteed that any solely British members of the ethnic minority community who come under pressure to leave Hong Kong after the handover will be able to come to the United Kingdom for settlement.

Data Protection

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what progress has been made in respect of data protection measures to implement European directives; what further steps are being taken by Ministers; how long it has taken to implement European directives in this field *(a)* on average and *(b)* relative to other policy areas; and how progress in this area has compared with the speed with which other directives have been implemented by the Government; [13576]

(2) what European Community directives on data protection have been made; and what is the date by which measures must be implemented by the Government. [13575]

Mr. Sackville: Directive 95/46/EC is the only European Community directive on personal data protection to have been adopted. We have carried out a consultation exercise and will bring forward proposals in time to meet the implementation date of 24 October 1998. The work needed to implement directives varies, and there is no sound basis for comparing progress.

Young Offenders

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Welsh young offenders have been placed in detention institutions for each of the last five years for which figures are available, by *(a)* age of offender and *(b)* category of offence; and if he will make a statement. [12836]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from S. G. Norris to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 3 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the number of Welsh young offenders placed in detention institutions in the last five years, by *(a)* age of offender and *(b)* category of offence.

The information on where prisoners originate from is not available. However, statistics relating to persons who were first committed to custody under sentence by a court in Wales, is given in the attached table.

Prison receptions under sentence into custody from courts in Wales[1]

Offence/Age	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*[2]
Aged 15					
Violence against the person	2	5	8	12	8
Sexual offences	—	—	—	1	1
Burglary	4	18	10	17	13
Robbery	—	2	4	2	6
Theft and handling	4	10	16	25	16
Fraud and forgery	—	—	—	—	—
Drugs offences	—	—	—	—	—
Other offences	—	—	12	6	13
Not recorded	—	—	2	1	—
Aged 16					
Violence against the person	6	14	12	13	16
Sexual offences	—	1	—	—	2
Burglary	8	25	29	26	36
Robbery	1	4	5	11	9
Theft and handling	9	28	31	36	16
Fraud and forgery	—	—	—	—	—
Drugs offences	—	—	—	3	1
Other offences	5	7	17	9	14
Not recorded	—	—	3	5	1
Aged 17					
Violence against the person	8	16	19	15	32
Sexual offences	1	1	—	1	3
Burglary	26	40	41	50	32
Robbery	6	10	10	10	9
Theft and handling	19	52	54	63	38
Fraud and forgery	—	1	1	—	—
Drugs offences	—	—	2	1	4
Other offences	9	20	24	31	39
Not recorded	2	1	3	5	1
Aged 18					
Violence against the person	10	27	27	27	43
Sexual offences	2	4	2	3	1
Burglary	35	60	49	74	54
Robbery	2	13	9	15	15
Theft and handling	18	49	73	67	75
Fraud and forgery	—	—	1	—	3
Drugs offences	1	3	1	5	7
Other offences	25	45	52	61	55
Not recorded	1	—	—	—	1
Aged 19					
Violence against the person	18	37	35	36	48
Sexual offences	4	4	1	1	6
Burglary	41	60	56	70	43
Robbery	4	15	7	13	17
Theft and handling	21	54	59	66	73
Fraud and forgery	—	1	2	2	1
Drugs offences	2	8	8	11	20
Other offences	25	57	79	65	69
Not recorded	1	2	1	2	1
Aged 20					
Violence against the person	12	31	33	36	44
Sexual offences	1	1	1	—	4
Burglary	31	78	65	49	58
Robbery	11	14	6	7	11

Prison receptions under sentence into custody from courts in Wales[1]

Offence/Age	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*[2]
Aged 15					
Theft and handling	21	41	64	70	51
Fraud and forgery	—	—	2	4	3
Drugs offences	5	6	5	13	15
Other offences	12	41	58	57	57
Not recorded	2	1	2	1	2

[1] Excludes those committed to custody for non-payment of a fine and non-criminal prisoners.
[2] Provisional figures.

Dangerous Dogs Act 1991

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to respond to the recommendations contained in the first report of the Home Affairs Select Committee on the operation of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, HC 146, Session 1996–97. [13770]

Mr. Sackville: My right hon. and learned Friend hopes to respond to the Home Affairs Select Committee report on the operation of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 during February.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Child Care

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what proposals are being considered by the Administration Committee for a staffed creche or nursery for the use of hon. Members. [13500]

Mr. Michael J. Martin: None.

Security Passes (Contractors)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee how many Palace of Westminster security passes are *(a)* available and *(b)* currently in use for contractors; and if he will make a statement. [13063]

Mr. Michael J. Martin: Photographic identity passes are made available for issue to contractors as and when the need arises; currently 2,176 passes for contractors are in use.

New Parliamentary Building

Mr. Dixon: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee when construction of the new parliamentary building will commence; and if he will make a statement. [11925]

Sir Raymond Powell: I am pleased to report that good progress is being made with the design and procurement of the new building. Contracts for over 70 per cent. of the work by value have been awarded. For example, prefabrication of the roof is proceeding apace in Lancashire, of the stone columns in Derbyshire and the contractors are well advanced with the detailed design and ordering of the mechanical and electrical services.

It had been planned that work would start on site today, 3 February 1997. Unfortunately London Underground Ltd. and its contractor have not made as much progress

as they planned with the construction of the new Westminster station and are not able to hand back the site. My Committee has taken evidence in public and in private from the chief executive of LUL and from the project director on a number of occasions and, while we appreciate the magnitude of their task, they have been left in no doubt of the considerable disappointment that they have not been able to return the site on the due date. In due course the House will be pursuing the remedies available under the terms of the agreement with LUL.

At this stage I cannot advise the right hon. Member when work will start on site. There have been progressive slippages in the forecast date for the first stage handover and all the indications are that the current forecast of 29 July 1997 may not be achieved. My Committee continues to press London Underground and will keep the matter under continuous scrutiny.

Until there is a date from London Underground in which we can have confidence, it is not possible to give a firm date for the completion of the building. The aim, however, is that occupation should start during the summer recess 2000.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Global Environment Facility

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his Department's policy will be in respect of funding for the global environment facility at the meeting of the ad hoc working group of the Commission on Sustainable Development on 24 February. [13820]

Dr. Liam Fox: The Government remain strongly committed to the global environment facility and will be encouraging support for a satisfactory replenishment of it during the forthcoming negotiations.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's policy on the global environment facility replenishment negotiations in Paris in March. [13809]

Dr. Fox: The global environment facility replenishment negotiations will begin in Paris on 12 March with a meeting to outline the process and timetable. The UK intends to take a positive role in the negotiations.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Sustainable Development

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how her Department has used the UK indicators for sustainable development in *(a)* the production of the Department's annual report, *(b)* monitoring progress towards meeting the objectives set out in the UK sustainable development strategy and *(c)* assessing the environmental implications of policy options; and what plans it has to extend their use in future within the Department. [12276]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department is primarily concerned with raising standards of educational achievement and skill and with promoting an efficient and flexible labour market. The environmental impact of our work is therefore relatively slight. None the less, we use the indicators for sustainable development to inform policy options and will continue to do so.

Hawksworth Hall School

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what factors underlay her decision that the behaviour of teachers at Hawksworth Hall school had not fallen below the standards of propriety expected of the teaching profession; and if she will make a statement; [13511]

(2) what consideration she gave to whether there was fraud or deception by teachers at Hawksworth Hall school under the terms of the teachers misconduct circular 11/95; and she will make a statement. [13512]

Mrs. Gillan: The Department gave careful consideration to all the evidence available to it about events at Hawksworth Hall school, including the report of the independent inquiry commissioned by Scope. That evidence did not warrant action by the Secretary of State against any teachers at the school on grounds of misconduct.

College Funding

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate of the likely size of the claim for the funding of the demand-led element of colleges by the Further Education Funding Council was made by her Department prior to the submission of the claim. [13565]

Mr. Paice: Expenditure on the demand-led element programme depends on the termly claims made by individual colleges to the Further Education Funding Council for England. The funding council then advisers the Department of its net funding requirement in February, April and July each year. The next claim from the funding council is therefore expected shortly. On the basis of advice from the funding council, the Department estimated that it would need to provide an additional £82 million to meet the likely size of the February claim.

GCSE Grades

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for each local education authority in rank order the percentage change in the number of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grade C or above from 1995 to 1996. [13387]

Mrs. Gillan: The percentage change in the number of 15-year-old pupils in maintained schools gaining five or more GCSEs at grade C or above from 1995 to 1996 by local education authority in England is as follows:

Percentage change in the number of 15-year-olds in maintained schools gaining five or more GCSEs Grade C or above from 1995 to 1996 analysed by local education authority in England

	Percentage change 1995–1996
Isles of Scilly	72.7
Kensington and Chelsea	44.7
Islington	37.6
Newham	25.2
Westminster	21.8
Knowsley	19.8
Isle of Wight	19.5
Manchester	19.1
Newcastle upon Tyne	17.3
Redbridge	16.9
Southwark	16.9
Rochdale	16.3
Tower Hamlets	16.1
Doncaster	15.3
Richmond upon Thames	15.0
Coventry	14.3
Wandsworth	13.7
Dudley	13.4
Northamptonshire	12.8
Hillingdon	12.4
Stockport	11.6
Hammersmith and Fulham	11.4
Trafford	11.1
Brent	11.1
Bexley	11.0
Bedfordshire	11.0
Lambeth	10.5
Sutton	10.3
Somerset	10.3
Staffordshire	10.1
Tameside	10.1
Cambridgeshire	10.1
Birmingham	9.9
Bury	9.6
Hounslow	9.5
Calderdale	8.9
Salford	8.9
Camden	8.8
Oldham	8.7
Bromley	8.7
Dorset	8.6
Enfield	8.3
Derbyshire	8.3
Cumbria	8.3
Wirral	8.3
Hereford and Worcester	8.2
St. Helens	7.7
Nottinghamshire	7.5
Hackney	7.3
Waltham Forest	7.3
Kent	7.0
Leeds	7.0
Lewisham	6.9
Rotherham	6.7
Kingston upon Thames	6.6
North Tyneside	6.4
Bradford	6.4
Cheshire	6.0
Bolton	5.9
Oxfordshire	5.8
Gloucestershire	5.7
Liverpool	5.6
Ealing	5.5
Hampshire	5.4
Wigan	5.4
Barnet	5.3
Hertfordshire	5.3
Lancashire	5.3
Sheffield	5.2
Warwickshire	5.2

Percentage change in the number of 15-year-olds in maintained schools gaining five or more GCSEs Grade C or above from 1995 to 1996 analysed by local education authority in England

	Percentage change 1995–1996
Suffolk	5.2
Croydon	5.1
Walsall	5.1
East Sussex	5.1
Havering	5.0
Haringey	5.0
Leicestershire	5.0
Solihull	4.9
Kirklees	4.9
Durham	4.7
Merton	4.5
Buckinghamshire	4.4
Barking and Dagenham	4.3
Devon	4.2
South Tyneside	4.1
Cornwall	4.1
Surrey	3.3
Essex	3.2
Harrow	3.1
Northumberland	3.0
Sefton	3.0
Shropshire	3.0
Wakefield	2.7
Wiltshire	2.0
West Sussex	2.0
Lincolnshire	1.9
Sunderland	1.8
Sandwell	1.8
Berkshire	1.7
Gateshead	1.1
Norfolk	0.9
Barnsley	–1.2
Wolverhampton	–3.0
Greenwich	–4.1

Education Wastage Rates

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what are the most recent estimated United Kingdom education wastage rates for full-time students studying for first degrees. [13563]

Mr. Forth: The wastage rates for full-time and sandwich students for first degrees in the UK in 1994–95, the latest year for which figures are available, is estimated to be in the range of 17 to 18 per cent.

School Performance (Southend)

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the performance of schools in Southend-on-Sea on A-level, GCSE, and the test for seven-year-olds on reading and spelling relative to the national average. [13510]

Mrs. Gillan: The performance of maintained schools in Southend-on-Sea on A-level and GCSE in 1996 are as follows. School-by-school key stage 1 national curriculum assessment results for seven-year-olds are not published centrally.

1996 Results

	GCSE Results Percentage of 15-year-olds pupils achieving			*GCE A/AS Results Average GCE A/AS point score of 16-18 year olds entered for*		
	5 A–C*	*5 A*–G*	*1 A*–G*	*less than 2 GCE A/AS*	*2 or more*	*Score per entry*
Belfairs community college	29	79	90	3.1	9.0	3.6
Cecil Jones high school	19	76	86	1.5	11.0	3.6
Eastwood county high School and VI form centre	20	80	90	4	6.0	1.4
Kingsdown school	0	50	88			
Lancaster school	—	—	—			
Priory school	0	0	30			
Shoeburyness county high school	19	81	89	2.0	8.1	3.3
Southend high school for boys	98	100	100	2.9	18.6	5.8
Southend high school for girls	96	98	98	2.7	20.4	5.5
St. Bernard's high school	53	93	95	6.0	10.5	3.9
St. Nicholas school	0	0	22			
St. Thomas More high school for boys	35	92	97			
The Prittlewell school	27	90	95			
The St. Christopher school	—	—	—			
The Thorpe Bay school	15	72	88			
Thorpe Hall school	63	83	83			
Westcliff high school for boys	96	99	99		26.8	6.7
Westcliff high school for girls	94	96	96		20.7	7.0
Total (Southend schools)	44.5	84.6	91.2	2.7	19.3	5.8
National (all schools)	44.5	86.0	92.1	3.2	18.3	5.5
LEA averages (LEA-maintained, grant-maintained schools and CTCs)	43.1	88.9	93.6	2.4	17.5	5.4

Technology Colleges

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many schools *(a)* applied for specialist technology college status and *(b)* were successful; and if he will indicate the parliamentary constituencies in which the schools were located. [13793]

Mrs. Gillan: In the most recent competition for technology college designation—October 1996—102 schools submitted applications, of which 29 were successful.

Successful applications came from schools located in the following constituencies:

Aylesbury
Bath
Beaconsfield
Birmingham Northfield
Birmingham Sparkbrook
Blackburn
Bridlington
Carshalton and Wallington
Congleton
Cornwall North
Coventry North West
Coventry South East
Dartford
Derbyshire West
Durham North
Eddisbury
Gloucestershire West
Hackney South and Shoreditch
Hornsey and Wood Green
Huddersfield
Liverpool Mossley Hill
Liverpool Walton
Milton Keynes South West
Northampton South
Pendle
Ryedale
Salisbury
Upminster
Westbury

Unsuccessful applications came from schools located in the following constituencies:

Aldershot
Banbury
Bethnal Green and Stepney
Birmingham Selly Oak
Birmingham Sparkbrook
Blaby
Blackburn
Bolton South East
Bradford South
Bradford West
Bromsgrove
Burton
Calder Valley
Cambridgeshire South West
Castle Point (2 applications)
Cheadle
Chelmsford (2 applications)
Cheltenham
Chester, City of (2 applications)
Chichester
Cirencester and Tewkesbury
Derbyshire South
Eastbourne

Finchley
Gloucester
Great Yarmouth (2 applications)
Greenwich
Hampstead and Highgate
Harborough
Harlow
Harwich
Hayes and Harlington
Hazel Grove (2 applications)
Hemsworth
Hertsmere
Keighley
Kingston upon Thames
Kingswood
Knowsley South
Lewes
Liverpool Broadgreen
Newbury
Newcastle upon Tyne Central
Newham North East
Northavon
Northampton North
Nottingham North
Penrith and The Border
Pontefract and Castleford
Putney
Rutland and Melton
South Hams
South Ribble
Stevenage
Stoke on Trent North
Suffolk Coastal
Sunderland South
Tatton
Thanet North
Torbay
Wallsend
Walsall North
Wantage
Warrington North
Wealden
Winchester
Windsor and Maidenhead
Woking

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children are eligible to receive a voucher for the summer term 1997; and how many voucher application forms have been sent out in respect of each of the local authorities piloting the nursery voucher scheme. [13203]

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* An estimated 640,000 children are eligible for a voucher in the summer term 1997, of whom approximately 14,595 live in phase 1 local education authority areas. Of these, 5,580 and 3,961 applied for a voucher in the autumn term 1996 and the spring term 1997 respectively, and will be eligible for a voucher for the summer term 1997. The following tables provide a breakdown of these figures for each phases 1 LEA area.

Voucher Applications

	Autumn 1996	*Spring 1997*
Norfolk	3,754	2,605
Kensington and Chelsea	375	234
Wandsworth	992	803
Westminster	495	319
Phase 1 LEAs	5,580	3,961

Voucher Eligibility

	Summer 1997
Norfolk	8,706
Kensington and Chelsea	1,150
Wandsworth	3,162
Westminster	1,577
Phase 1 LEA	14,595

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the level of reserves held by each TEC; and what is the total held by TECs. [14010]

Mr. Paice: A list of training and enterprise councils and their accumulated reserves, as shown in their audited annual statutory accounts, at the end of the financial year 1995–96 is shown in the following table.

Accumulated reserves

TECs (by region)	*1995–96* £
North East	
County Durham	6,413,585
Northumberland	6,511,028
Teeside	7,234,000
Tyneside	4,407,600
Sunderland City	4,725,925
	29,291,538
Merseyside	
CEWTEC	3,424,783
Merseyside	4,455,012
St. Helens	832,294
	8,712,089
North West	
Bolton/Bury	3,867,289
Manchester	5,155,404
METRO	971,827
Oldham	1,240,279
Rochdale	1,932,813
South and East Cheshire	3,808,389
Stockport and High Peak	2,715,158
Cumbria	3,121,591
ELTEC	3,259,567
LAWTEC	5,626,129
NORMID	2,996,717
	34,695,163
Yorkshire and Humberside	
Barnsley/Doncaster	5,948,000
Bradford	2,311,416
Calderdale and Kirklees	1,986,121

Accumulated reserves	
TECs (by region)	*1995–96* £
Humberside	6,229,229
Leeds	4,228,110
North Yorks	5,535,000
Rotherham	4,419,256
Sheffield	5,717,000
Wakefield	4,107,933
	40,482,065
Eastern	
Bedfordshire	1,347,628
CAMBS	1,286,849
Essex	7,066,397
Greater Peterborough	1,408,067
Hertfordshire	3,770,000
Norfolk and Waverney	4,260,000
Suffolk	2,290,854
	21,429,795
East Midlands	
Greater Nottingham	2,394,000
Leicester	6,472,807
Lincolnshire	2,295,863
Northamptonshire	1,991,332
North Derbyshire	1,238,306
North Nottinghamshire	3,111,550
South Derbyshire	3,961,000
	21,464,858
West Midlands	
Birmingham	3,987,000
Central England	1,798,394
Coventry/Warwick	2,835,271
Dudley	940,007
HAWTEC	1,164,866
Sandwell	1,691,913
Shropshire	2,273,100
Staffordshire	5,629,000
Walsall	1,254,626
Wolverhampton	1,700,000
	23,274,177
South West	
WESTEC	4,316,000
Devon/Cornwall	3,465,000
Dorset	2,626,165
Gloucester	3,619,487
Somerset	2,003,935
Wiltshire	1,551,212
	17,581,799
London	
AZTEC	4,397,861
CENTEC	2,701,498
CILNTEC	2,405,603
LETEC	8,530,616
North London	7,066,973
North West London	2,581,550
SOLOTEC	6,249,000
West London	2,608,221
	36,541,322
South East	
Hampshire	3,758,587
Isle of Wight	921,777
Kent	6,189,635
Milton Keynes/North Buckinghamshire	1,151,259
Heart of England	2,340,596
Surrey	2,043,823
Sussex	4,595,000
Thames Valley Ent.	5,332,077
	26,332,754
Grand total	259,805,560

Further Education

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what directions she has given to the Further Education Funding Council in respect of the increase in the number of further education colleges with operating deficits. [14064]

Mr. Paice: Colleges are independent, autonomous bodies and are responsible for managing their own financial affairs. However, under its financial memorandum with the Department, the Further Education Funding Council is required to keep the financial health of colleges under regular review.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will instruct the Further Education Funding Council to review the decision of Nelson and Colne college to make 37 full-time equivalent posts redundant. [14063]

Mr. Paice: No. It is for colleges in the further education sector such as Nelson and Colne to manage their resources, including staff, as they see fit in the light of changing needs and circumstances.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what arrangements are in place for ensuring that the Further Education Funding Council and her Department are informed of the number of students enrolled at further education colleges. [14065]

Mr. Paice: Further education colleges are required to supply information on student numbers to the Further Education Funding Council twice in each academic year. These figures are forwarded to the Department after processing, and shortly before their publication.

Teachers (Early Retirement)

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what has been the cost to public funds of the teachers' early retirement scheme for each of the last five years. [14062]

Mrs Gillan: This question requires calculations by the Government Actuary, which could not be carried out in the time available. I will reply as soon as possible.

Training (North Yorkshire)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *338*, what is the number of people aged under 25 years living in north Yorkshire, and in any sub-division of North Yorkshire for which figures are available, attending a Government-funded training scheme *(a)* currently and *(b)* at the same date in each of the previous five years. [14268]

Mr. Paice: The information requested is available for North Yorkshire training and enterprise council, and is given in the following table.

Date	*Number of in-training*
October 1996	4,000
October 1995	3,100
October 1994	3,000
October 1993	3,000
October 1992	3,000
October 1991	3,400

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Ministerial Statements

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what assessment he has made of the application of the principles of Pepper *v.* Hart to ministerial comments *(a)* in the *Official Report*, *(b)* in ministerial correspondence and *(c)* outside the House; and if he will make a statement. [13599]

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* The decision in Pepper *v.* Hart enables courts in certain circumstances, if legislation is ambiguous or obscure, to take account of statements made in Parliament by Ministers or other promoters of a Bill in construing that legislation. It does not have application to statements made in correspondence or otherwise outside Parliament.

Textural clarity and precision, and the avoidance of ambiguity, are of course high priorities in the drafting of legislation. None the less, administrative procedures are in place for avoiding or correcting any errors or ambiguities arising out of ministerial statements during the passage of legislation. In particular, speeches and speaking notes will generally be reviewed by departmental legal advisers for possible influence on interpretation; the *Hansard* record of Ministers' contributions to debates on legislation will similarly be reviewed to consider whether there is any inaccuracy; and, where it seems sensible to do so, Ministers may more frequently offer to reflect and take further advice on points of interpretation that are raised in debate.

If it does prove necessary to correct a ministerial statement, the aim will be to do this as promptly as possible at an appropriate point during the further consideration of the Bill.

Senior Business Panel

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when the panel of senior business figures he appointed last year will be submitting its report; and if he will make a statement. [14230]

The Deputy Prime Minister: The panel, chaired by Sir Bryan Nicholson, has reported to me and I am today placing copies of its report in the Libraries of the House. I am very grateful to the panel members for the time and energy they have freely devoted to this task. The Government believe strongly in the value of interchange in improving individuals's skills and in fostering co-operation and understanding between the public and private sectors. It whole-heartedly endorses the panel's conclusion that interchange between these sectors serves the national interest as well as the interests of individuals and their employers.

The panel has made a wide-ranging set of recommendations designed to bring about an increase in the size of the current interchange programme and improvements in its focus. The Government accept all the panel's recommendations and Departments and agencies are now beginning work on an action plan for implementation. Any new and reinvigorated programme of interchange will, of course, also benefit a wide range of private sector organisations and once a preliminary action plan is drawn up I will be inviting key figures and organisations in the private sector to consider how best they can co-operate.

HEALTH

Intensive Care

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many intensive care beds are currently available in the Northern and Yorkshire region. [12921]

Mr. Horam: The information is not available centrally in the form requested. The average daily number of available beds in intensive care wards, other than for children or elderly patients, in national health service hospitals in the Northern and Yorkshire region in 1995–96 was 402.

Departmental Publicity

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* his Department's budgeted expenditure on (i) advertising, (ii) publicity and (iii) public information campaigns for the period January to March 1997 and *(b)* the actual expenditure on (1) advertising, (2) publicity and (3) public information campaigns in the period January to March in each of the past five years. [13464]

Mr. Horam: Budgeted expenditure on paid publicity for the period January to March 1997 is £8.96 million, of which £1.83 million is estimated to be spent on advertising.

Actual expenditure for the periods January to March in earlier years was:

£ million

	Total paid publicity	*Advertising*
1995–96	8.77	1.70
1994–95	8.55	2.37

In the years before April 1994, our budgetary record systems do not allow us to break down expenditure into specific quarters, only whole years.

Health Authority Funding

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the average amount allocated to health authorities in each of the past three years; what was

the percentage increase each year; and if he will provide equivalent figures for the South East Essex health authority. [13508]

Mr. Horam: Before 1996–97, allocations to health authorities were made by the regional health authorities. Comparable figures before this year are therefore not available centrally. The information requested for 1996–97 and 1997–98 is shown in the table.

	1996–97	*1997–98*
National average allocation (£000)	208,860	218,164
National average percentage cash increase	3.86	3.93
Allocation to South Essex Health Authority (£000)	273,134	288,089
Percentage cash increase	7.06	4.76

NHS Patients (Private Hospitals)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS hospitals in *(a)* West Yorkshire and *(b)* Leeds are currently paying private sector hospitals to treat NHS patients; if he will list the hospitals; and what are the costs involved. [13810]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 7 March 1996 at column *320*.

Intensive Care Units

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds there are in intensive care units in Leeds infirmary, St. James' hospital, Leeds and Pinderfields hospital, Wakefield. [13817]

Mr. Horam: Information on the daily number of available beds by ward classification is collected annually from each trust. The latest published information shows that in 1995–96 the average daily number of available beds in wards classified as adult intensive care was as follows:

	Number
United Leeds Teaching Hospitals National Health Service Trust	29
St. James' University Hospital National Health Service Trust	11
Pinderfields Hospital National Health Service Trust	26

1. Figures on numbers of beds by Trust are published annually in 'Bed Availability for England' copies of which are available in the Library.
2. The figures above exclude neonatal intensive care cots and paediatric intensive care beds.

Medical Staff (West Yorkshire)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors and nurses have been employed in NHS hospitals in *(a)* West Yorkshire and *(b)* Leeds since 1990; and how many vacancies for doctors and nurses in West Yorkshire and Leeds remain unfilled at present. [13815]

Mr. Malone: Individual hospital units cannot be separately identified in the Department of Health's hospital and community health services work force censuses, but staff can be sub-divided between those working in hospitals and those working in the community on the basis of their area of work. The table gives information available centrally for West Yorkshire health authority area—formerly Huddersfield, Dewsbury and Calderdale district health authorities—and Leeds health authority area—formerly Western Leeds, Eastern Leeds and Leeds district health authorities.

NHS Hospital and Community health Services hospital doctors and nursing and midwifery staff in hospital areas of work (excluding agency staff and learners[1]); West Yorkshire Health Authority (HA) and Leeds HA at September 1990 to 1995

Whole-time equivalents

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
West Yorkshire HA						
Hospital doctors	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	420
Nursing and midwifery staff	3,030	2,750	2,780	2,820	2,810	n/a
Leeds HA						
Hospital doctors	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	960
Nursing and midwifery staff	5,140	5,470	5,290	5,250	5,210	n/a
Excluded from figures above *Learners*[1]						
West Yorkshire HA	820	720	540	*	—	n/a
Leeds HA	870	300	180	60	30	n/a

Notes:

[1] Learners are nurses on traditional nurse training courses and are directly employed by the NHS HCHS. Project 2000 training was introduced in 1989 and has gradually replaced traditional pre-registration nurse training. Project 2000 students are funded by bursaries. They are supernumerary, not employees, and thus excluded from the count of NHS HCHS nursing staff. Figures for Project 2000 students are not available by health authority.

n/a = Not available. It is not possible to provide figures for hospital doctors below regional level before 1995 or to provide numbers of nursing and midwifery staff in hospital areas of work after 1994.

* denotes five or less.

All figures are rounded to the nearest ten whole-time equivalents.

Source:

Department of Health annual medical and dental and non-medical workforce censuses.

Information about the number of vacancies for doctors and nurses currently unfilled in West Yorkshire HA and Leeds HA areas is not available centrally.

Figures on vacancies for HCHS nurses and midwives are collected by the Office of Manpower and Economics and published in the annual reports of the Review Body for Nursing Staff, Midwives, Health Visitors and Professions Allied to Medicine, copies of which are available in the Library.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his oral statement of 21 January, *Official Report*, column 765, if he will list the 32 private finance initiative schemes which have been finished. [14103]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) on 29 January 1997 at columns *269–72*.

Dental Services

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists are employed in dental

practices by general dental practitioners who contract with the health service in the latest year for which figures are available. [14066]

Mr. Malone: The table sets out the number of dental assistants and vocational trainees employed by general dental practitioners at 30 September 1996.

General Dental Service: Number of dentists employed by a principal dentist on Health Authority Dental lists on 30 September 1996 (England)

	Number of dentists
Assistants[1]	560
Vocational trainees[2]	496
Total	1,056

[1] Assistants are fully qualified dentists who do not have their own health authority contract number but work on that of a principal.
[2] Vocational trainees are newly qualified dental graduates who must complete a year's vocational training in a selected practice before commencing unsupervised dental practice as a principal in the general dental service.

TREASURY

Census (Languages)

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to collect information on the level and location of spoken indigenous languages in the next census; and if he will make a statement. [10551]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 23 January 1997]:* A major census test will be conducted in selected areas of England and Scotland in June this year. Test questionnaires to be used in Scotland will include a question asking if the respondent can speak, read, write or understand Gaelic but this question will not be asked in England. Following consultation and research, the Government have concluded that a question on Scots could not be justified for inclusion in the next census and therefore will not be included in the June test. For the 2001 census, we expect to ask questions about Welsh in Wales and Gaelic in Scotland. There are no plans to extend questions on Scottish Gaelic, and the Welsh language outside the respective countries. The Government will publish their proposals for questions to be included in the census in a White Paper in mid-1998. The White Paper will invite comment.

EU Education Expenditure

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the percentage of GDP spent on education in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* other EU countries. [13253]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. John Marshall, dated 3 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the percentage of GDP spent on education in the United Kingdom and other EU countries.

The information requested for the latest year for which data are available for all EU countries is shown in the table. The latest figure for the United Kingdom is 5 per cent for 1995. The figures are published in table DD of *Education Statistics for the United Kingdom 1996*, which in turn is derived from information provided by each country to OECD for its latest edition of *Education at a glance*. Copies of both publications are available in the House of Commons Library.

Public education expenditure as a percentage of GDP, 1993

	Per cent.
Austria	5.3
Belgium	5.6
Denmark	6.7
Finland	7.3
France	5.6
Germany	4.6
Greece	3.4
Ireland	5.3
Italy	5.0
Luxembourg	n/a
Netherlands	4.9
Portugal	5.3
Spain	4.5
Sweden	6.7
United Kingdom	5.0

Source:
Education at a Glance. OECD December 1996.

Lone Parents

Ms Corston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the number of lone parents who are out of work *(a)* in Great Britain and *(b)* in other European countries. [11392]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 28 January 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Ms Jean Corston, dated 3 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the number of lone parents who are out of work in Great Britain and other European countries.

According to the Labour Force Survey (LFS) there was in Great Britain in summer 1996 a total of 136,000 unemployed lone parents with dependent children (15 year olds and under and 16–18 year olds in non-advanced further education). The LFS uses the International Labour Organisation (ILO) definition of unemployment. This covers people without a job who were available to start work in the two weeks following their LFS interview and who had either looked for work in the four weeks prior to interview or were waiting to start a job they had already obtained. The ILO unemployment rate for lone parents was 15.7 per cent. This rate is defined as all those ILO unemployed as a percentage of all those either ILO unemployed or in employment.

European comparisons are published in the annual Eurostat publication *Labour Force Survey Results* which is available in the House of Commons Library. The lower half of Table 115 gives unemployment rates for various household types including '1 adult and children'. A copy of this table is attached. The EUR15 figure is a weighted average of the national figures, weighted by the size of the relevant economically active population in each country.

The rates published in the table are not directly comparable with the rate quoted above for a variety of reasons. The Eurostat figures do not cover all lone parents with dependent children. For example they exclude lone parents whose youngest dependent child is aged 15 to 18 and those lone parents who are not the only adult in the household. These exclusions are likely to increase the unemployment rate. The Eurostat figures are also less up to date and refer to the United Kingdom rather than Great Britain as specified in your question. Estimates of the number of unemployed lone parents are not available from the Eurostat publication.

*Activity rates and unemployment rates by household type (children under 15)**

Percentage

Labour force survey 1995	*I*	*L*	*NL*	*A*	*P*	*FIN*	*S*	*UK*
Activity rates								
1 person households	28.5	36.4	47.6	43.2	31.6	48.0	—	42.4
1 male adult aged 15 to 64 years	78.2	82.0	76.8	80.7	72.1	74.6	—	8.17
1 female adult aged 15 to 64 years	47.5	59.4	66.1	66.8	53.1	69.8	—	68.6
1 male adult aged 65+ years	4.3	—	4.5	—	19.4	—	—	5.8
1 female adult aged 65+ years	1.2	—	0.9	(1.3)	9.4	—	—	2.2
Several adults and no children	43.0	43.3	56.6	54.0	52.3	57.0	—	60.3
2 adults, both aged 15 to 64 years	56.4	59.7	71.1	67.2	64.3	71.2	—	78.1
2 adults, 1 or both aged 65+ years	10.5	6.5	7.0	11.8	22.2	10.3	—	13.0
3 or more adults and no children	48.6	48.2	63.7	62.1	57.6	64.0	—	70.7
1 adult and children	78.1	76.9	51.5	88.6	79.6	73.7	—	46.8
1 male adult and 1 or more children	90.6	—	74.4	(98.8)	(73.6)	95.0	—	66.3
1 female adult and 1 or more children	75.4	75.2	49.7	88.1	80.1	71.7	—	45.1
2 adults and children	73.6	70.5	76.1	82.8	84.6	81.6	—	79.8
2 adults and 1 child	75.9	73.1	77.8	85.2	84.7	81.0	—	81.1
2 adults and 2 children	72.1	69.2	77.5	81.8	85.8	83.9	—	81.8
2 adults and 3 children	67.6	68.3	71.9	79.6	80.9	79.5	—	75.8
2 adults and four or more children	65.5	(60.4)	63.8	72.5	69.3	69.3	—	61.3
3 or more adults and children	50.5	55.0	61.9	65.7	63.0	68.1	—	67.0
Total private households	47.4	50.8	59.2	59.4	58.1	61.1	—	61.5
Unemployment rates								
1 person household	7.9	2.4	12.9	4.5	5.2	23.2	—	14.4
1 male adult aged 15 to 64 years	7.2	0.8	14.0	4.1	9.7	28.0	—	18.5
1 female adult aged 15 to 64 years	9.4	5.0	11.7	5.1	4.5	17.9	—	8.9
1 male adult aged 65+ years	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.7	0.0	0.0	—	5.4
1 female adult aged 65+ years	6.1	0.0	0.0	3.5	0.0	0.0	—	4.5
Several adults and no children	13.3	2.8	5.6	4.2	7.2	15.7	—	7.2
2 adults, both aged 15 to 64 years	8.6	2.6	5.0	5.0	6.3	13.8	—	6.1
2 adults, 1 or both aged 65 + years	9.2	2.7	5.2	4.5	1.6	13.5	—	7.2
3 or more adults and no children	14.8	2.9	6.5	3.7	8.1	19.1	—	8.3
1 adult and children	11.9	5.4	18.0	8.5	12.5	27.7	—	22.7
1 male adult and 1 or more children	9.3	—	15.5	(0.0)	(9.9)	14.9	—	18.2
1 female adult and 1 or more children	12.5	6.0	18.3	9.0	12.7	29.3	—	23.3
2 adults and children	8.1	2.4	6.5	4.2	6.0	14.1	—	8.2
2 adults and 1 child	7.7	3.2	7.6	4.2	6.6	15.4	—	7.9
2 adults and 2 children	7.9	1.7	5.9	4.7	5.1	12.6	—	6.7
2 adults and 3 children	11.2	1.8	5.9	2.6	5.5	13.7	—	10.8
2 adults and 4 or more children	13.0	3.7	7.0	1.6	9.7	19.3	—	20.2
3 or more adults and children	13.9	4.2	8.9	4.5	7.7	17.3	—	9.4
Total private households	11.8	2.9	7.2	4.3	7.1	16.9	—	8.7

*Activity rates and unemployment rates by household type (children under 15)**

Percentage

Labour force survey 1995	*EUR 15*	*B*	*DK*	*D*	*GR*	*E*	*F*	*IRL*
Activity rates								
1 person households	40.8	34.3	—	46.0	27.7	22.0	42.0	39.9
1 male adult aged 15 to 64 years	79.3	74.0	—	81.4	73.0	74.7	76.5	76.0
1 female adult aged 15 to 64 years	64.8	54.5	—	69.9	45.6	53.5	65.9	62.0
1 male adult aged 65+ years	4.3	(2.6)	—	3.0	6.2	4.1	2.0	15.2
1 female adult aged 65+ years	1.4	(0.6)	—	1.2	1.6	1.1	0.8	
Several adults and no children	50.3	43.3	—	54.2	45.3	42.9	47.8	52.6
2 adults, both aged 15 to 64 years	68.6	57.8	—	70.1	59.9	61.3	66.5	70.8
2 adults, 1 or both aged 65+ years	10.0	6.7	—	8.4	13.8	10.3	6.6	18.0
3 or more adults and no children	55.9	59.4	—	62.9	51.9	48.0	55.1	55.3
1 adult and children	65.8	73.5	—	74.1	72.1	81.3	85.2	46.6
1 male adult and 1 or more children	81.4	85.8	—	87.4	(95.4)	85.9	91.4	
1 female adult and 1 or more children	64.2	71.9	—	72.7	68.2	80.9	84.5	45.5
2 adults and children	78.9	84.1	—	78.5	73.6	74.5	84.7	71.6
2 adults and 1 child	81.1	85.2	—	81.5	74.3	76.9	87.5	75.2

*Activity rates and unemployment rates by household type (children under 15)**

Percentage

Labour force survey 1995	*EUR 15*	*B*	*DK*	*D*	*GR*	*E*	*F*	*IRL*
2 adults and 2 children	79.3	86.4	—	78.3	74.0	73.8	86.8	73.8
2 adults and 3 children	73.0	78.7	—	69.1	69.1	69.2	75.6	68.9
2 adults and 4 or more children	62.8	62.9	—	61.8	68.2	62.4	62.6	60.7
3 or more adults and children	57.0	49.7	—	61.9	52.6	52.0	54.5	49.0
Total private households	54.9	50.5	—	57.7	49.2	48.2	55.4	53.9
Unemployment rates								
1 person household	11.7	15.8	—	10.2	7.5	12.9	12.3	13.7
1 male adult aged 15 to 64 years	13.3	16.1	—	11.5	6.4	14.3	13.5	17.0
1 female adult aged 15 to 64 years	9.9	15.8	—	8.7	9.4	12.5	11.2	11.2
1 male adult aged 65 + years	2.4	0.0	—	2.3	1.5	3.6	0.0	0.4
1 female adult aged 65 + years	3.2	8.5	—	1.6	3.4	0.0	4.2	6.4
Several adults and no children	10.7	8.1	—	7.7	10.6	23.6	11.7	10.3
2 adults, both aged 15 to 64 years	8.4	7.7	—	8.4	6.9	18.4	10.4	9.5
2 adults, 1 or both aged 65 + years	9.0	9.1	—	8.4	4.5	18.7	11.2	8.3
3 or more adults and no children	12.5	8.3	—	7.0	12.7	25.0	13.2	10.9
1 adult and children	19.6	27.5	—	17.0	11.9	28.7	21.1	31.1
1 male adult and 1 or more children	13.1	16.9	—	13.0	8.6	4.2	10.7	—
1 female adult and 1 or more children	20.5	29.2	—	17.5	12.7	30.7	22.4	33.7
2 adults and children	9.1	8.2	—	7.3	5.8	18.6	10.3	11.2
2 adults and 1 child	9.3	9.1	—	7.6	6.8	19.4	10.8	10.1
2 adults and 2 children	8.2	6.6	—	6.8	5.2	17.4	8.9	11.3
2 adults and 3children	10.0	8.8	—	6.9	5.1	18.9	11.2	10.9
2 adults and 4 or more children	17.0	16.3	—	12.9	5.4	28.6	21.5	14.2
3 or more adults and children	13.3	10.3	—	8.0	8.6	25.2	14.5	15.3
Total private households	10.8	9.3	—	8.2	9.1	22.7	11.9	12.0

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the number of lone parents who are out of work in *(a)* Great Britain and *(b)* other European countries. [11394]

Mrs. Knight *[holding answer 28 January 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Alan Milburn, dated 3 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the number of lone parents who are out of work in Great Britain and other European countries.

According to the Labour Force Survey (LFS) there was in Great Britain in summer 1996 a total of 136,000 unemployed lone parents with dependent children (15 year olds and under and the 16-18 year olds in non-advanced further education). The LFS uses the International Labour Organisation (ILO) definition of unemployment. This covers people without a job who were available to start work in the two weeks following their LFS interview and who had either looked for work in the four weeks prior to interview or were waiting to start a job they had already obtained. The ILO unemployment rate for lone parents was 15.7 per cent. This rate is defined as all those ILO unemployed as a percentage of all those either ILO unemployed or in employment.

European comparisons are published in the annual Eurostat publication *Labour Force Survey Results* which is available in the House of Commons Library. The lower half of Table 115 gives unemployment rates for various household types including '1 adult and children'. A copy of this table is attached. The EUR15 figure is a weighted average of the national figures, weighted by the size of the relevant economically active population in each country.

The rates published in the table are not directly comparable with the rate quoted above for a variety of reasons. The Eurostat figures do not cover all lone parents with dependent children. For example they exclude lone parents whose youngest dependent child is aged 15 to 18 and those lone parents who are not the only adult in the household. These exclusions are likely to increase the unemployment rate. The Eurostat figures are also less up to date and refer to the United Kingdom rather than Great Britain as specified in your question. Estimates of the number of unemployed lone parents are not available from the Eurostat publication.

Capital Stock

Mr. Hain: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the capital stock per worker in dollars in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Germany, *(c)* France, *(d)* Japan and *(e)* the European Union in (i) 1979, (ii) 1992 and (iii) the latest year available, showing the percentage change between these years. [13442]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Peter Hain, dated 3 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the capital stock per worker.

Figures for capital stock per worker in dollars are not available, but can be derived from information on gross capital stock at current prices, employment and exchange rates. Figures of gross stock at current prices are not available for Japan or the European Union. Information on gross stock for the United Kingdom, Germany and France are available in the OECD publication *Flows and Stocks of Fixed Capital*. Figures for exchange rates and employment are available in Volume I, Table 8.2 and Volume II, Table 15 of the OECD publication *National Accounts*. Copies of these publications are available in the House of Commons Library.

The latest figures for gross capital stock at current prices for the United Kingdom are not shown in the OECD publication *Flows and Stocks of Fixed Capital*. These figures are given in the table.

Gross capital stock at current prices for the United Kingdom

Year	*Billions of pounds sterling*
1992	2,395.9
1993	2,462.9
1994	2,630.2
1995	2,889.6

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Hain: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the percentage change in real gross domestic product between *(a)* 1979 and the latest available year and *(b)* 1992 and the latest available year for (i) the United Kingdom, (ii) Germany, (iii) France, (iv) Japan and (v) the European Union. [13441]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The change in real gross domestic product between 1979 and 1995, and between 1992 and 1995, can be calculated from figures available in the OECD publication "National Accounts," volume II, which is available in the House of Commons Library.

Unemployment (York)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the number of people aged 25 years or under living in the York parliamentary constituency who *(a)* were registered unemployed and *(b)* had been registered unemployed for six months or more in each month since March 1992. [13582]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Hugh Bayley, dated 3 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on claimant unemployment in your constituency.

A complete count of the total number of claimant unemployed by age and duration is available quarterly, for the months of January, April, July and October. For other months, age and duration data are restricted to those claimants whose records have been computerised (about 99.5 per cent of the total). In each case the data are not seasonally adjusted, nor do they make allowances for discontinuities in the count.

All this information can be accessed from the Nomis database held by the House of Commons Library.

Company Cars

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number and percentage of United Kingdom company cars whose tax claims for business mileages fall within the bands *(a)* 0 to 2,499 miles, *(b)* 2,500 to 17,999 miles and *(c)* 18,000 and miles above. [13338]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* Estimates for 1997–98 are given in the table. "Company cars" are cars made available for the private use of employees and directors. Other cars registered in a company name—that is, short-term hire cars and "pooled cars"—are not included.

Annual business mileage	*Number of recipients (000s)*	*Percentage of company cars*
0–2,499	150	9
2,500–17,999	1,000	59
18,000 and above	550	32
Total	1,700	100

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the revenue effect of raising the lower business mileage break point for company car taxation from 2,500 miles per annum to 5,000 miles per annum; and if he will make a statement. [13340]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* It is estimated that, in 1997–98, raising the lower business mileage break point from 2,500 miles to 5,000 miles per annum would yield about £200 million in income tax and about £60 million in employers' national insurance contributions.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the income tax yield from the taxation of company car scale benefits in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98. [13335]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* It is estimated that the income tax yield from the taxation of private use of company cars will be about £1,500 million in 1996–97 and £1,550 million in 1997–98. There will be a further yield from employers' national insurance contributions of about £450 million in each year.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the revenue which would be raised by eliminating the reductions of income tax liability on company cars triggered by higher mileage thresholds. [13339]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* It is estimated that, in 1997–98, the income tax yield from eliminating mileage discounts on company cars would be about £1,100 million. There would be a further yield of about £325 million from employers' national insurance contributions. This is the direct yield before taking into account changes in behaviour. Employers and employees, faced with substantial national insurance contributions and tax increases—tripled for essential high business

mileage company cars—would move away from company cars to employee car purchase schemes and personal leasing, with allowances paid to employees at tax-free rates for their business mileage. This could considerably erode the Exchequer yield from company cars.

Domestic Rail Fares (Tax Relief)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the annual cost of providing income tax relief at the lower band rate of tax for all United Kingdom domestic rail passenger fares, assuming that such a change had no demand effects; and if he will make a statement. [13341]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* Such a relief would be equivalent to an indirect subsidy to the rail companies, with uncertain effects on rail fares. If the relief were to be given at source, then the full-year cost, based on 1995–96 fare levels and assuming no change in demand, would be about £475 million. This includes the element attributable to non-taxpayers which would score as public expenditure.

Offshore Accounts

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what benefits accrue to *(a)* Her Majesty's Treasury and *(b)* a United Kingdom citizen and resident in respect of bonuses paid into offshore accounts. [13775]

Mr. Jack: An individual, whether or not a UK citizen, who is resident and who carries out the duties of an employment in the UK, is taxable on his earnings from that employment, including bonuses, regardless of whether they are paid in the UK or offshore.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received on the practice of companies paying bonuses into offshore accounts. [13774]

Mr. Jack: None.

Labour Statistics (Ealing)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the change in unemployment figures in the Ealing, North constituency between 1992 and 1997. [12012]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Ealing is sharing fully in the success of the British economy, which is enjoying a combination of low inflation, falling unemployment, low mortgage rates and rising living standards not seen for a generation. Unadjusted claimant unemployment in the Ealing, North constituency has fallen by over 30 per cent. in the past four years, from 5.311 in December 1992 to 3,634 in December 1996, the latest month for which data are available.

DEFENCE

Defence Procurement Contracts

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the impact on north-west industry of the orders for *(a)* the Eurofighter, *(b)* Nimrod and *(c)* Hawk aircraft since 1992. [13269]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Work on the Eurofighter programme has an important and positive impact on industry in the north-west of England. Although detailed employed figures are not readily available specifically for the north-west, approximately 6,000 jobs in the UK are sustained by the Eurofighter development programme. We expect this to increase to some 14,000 in production. At this stage, the quadrinational Eurofighter programme is in the full development phase. We hope to be in a position, in conjunction with our partners, to move to the production investment and production phases of the programme in the very near future. Contractual negotiations are continuing.

The prime contract for Nimrod 2000 was placed with BAe in December 1996. Considerable high-quality engineering work will be undertaken at BAe Warton. A number of other British defence companies will also benefit from involvement in the programme. We expect that about 2,600 UK jobs will be sustained through the contract.

The last Hawk aircraft to be ordered for the Royal Air Force was in 1982. British Aerospace has been very successful in selling Hawk to a number of countries worldwide. These valuable overseas orders have resulted in a considerable amount of work and prosperity in the north-west, primarily at BAe Warton.

Royal Yacht

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if Her Majesty's Government plan to advertise the tender contracts for the proposed new royal yacht in the *Official Journal of the European Communities.* [13399]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The invitation to tender for the construction of the new royal yacht will be advertised in the MOD's "Contracts Bulletin" in the usual way.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library the inventory of the publicly owned contents of the royal yacht. [13777]

Mr. Soames: Full details of the publicly owned items aboard Britannia are not currently available. An inventory to establish those items belonging to the royal household, the Royal Navy and the Ministry of Defence is currently under way, in preparation for Britannia's decommissioning in December this year.

Army Personnel (Northern Ireland)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many part-time Army personnel were stationed in Northern Ireland in 1992; and how many are currently. [13665]

Mr. Soames: There were 2,785 part-time members of the Royal Irish Regiment on 31 December 1992. The figure for December 1996, the last month for which we have complete figures, was 2,027

Trident

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answers of 23 January, *Official Report,* column *686,* if he will list the *(a)* uncommitted and *(b)* unspent parts of the sum allocated to the Trident programme. [13646]

Mr. Arbuthnot: A breakdown of the remaining expenditure on the Trident procurement programme is as follows:

£ million

	Uncommitted	*Unspent commitment*
Submarine	136	260
Strategic weapon system	303	154
Tactical weapon system	0	62
Buildings/works	7	1
Dockyards	256	2
Warhead/miscellaneous-unallocated contingency	161	71
Totals	863	550

Eurofighter

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Eurofighters each of the participating countries proposes to order; and what is the value of each order. [13650]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The UK's commitment will be 232 aircraft to replace the Tornado F3 and Jaguar. Our partners have declared their requirement to be: Germany—180, Italy—121, Spain—87. Contractual negotiations with companies in the four partner nations for the production investment–production and support phases of the programme continue.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the export potential of the Eurofighter; and what potential markets have been identified. [13656]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The prospects for export orders for Eurofighters appear to be excellent; several countries have already expressed interest. For reasons of commercial confidentiality, it would be inappropriate at this stage to identify potential customers and I am therefore withholding this information under exemption 7 of the code of practice on access to government information.

Army Recruitment

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what languages, apart from English, are used in connection with publicity material for recruitment to the armed forces; and if he will make a statement. [13865]

Mr. Soames: Apart from English, recruiting publicity material is printed in Bengali, Gujerati, Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu and Welsh.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current officer recruiting deficit expressed as a percentage. [13498]

Mr. Soames: The armed forces are currently 166 officers short of the financial year 1996–97 recruiting target; this represents a deficit of 10 per cent.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department estimates that the Army will reach its full manning requirement. [13496]

Mr. Soames: The Department is currently considering additional measures to further improve recruitment and retention and restore the Army to full manning over the next few years.

Food Supply Contract

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what circumstances and in what ways the contract for supply of food for the armed forces announced on 28 January can be varied by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Booker Foodservice Group. [14116]

Mr. Soames: The food supply requirement for the armed forces is not static and can change sometimes at short notice, in both volume and location. The contractor will be required to respond effectively to any such changes, including supplies needed for operations and exercises. The contract could therefore be varied by the Department to take account of changes in the contracted requirement. It could also be varied by mutual agreement to reflect economies or efficiencies in operation identified by either party if considered to be in the Department's interest.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what external or consultancy advice was used to evaluate tenders received in the competition for the follow-on contract for the supply of food to the armed forces announced on 28 January. [14120]

Mr. Soames: Four commercial advisers, all senior managers from blue chip companies in the food industry, together with a consultant, were appointed to provide expert advice and independent scrutiny of the evaluation process.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library the tender document for the contract to supply food for the armed forces announced on 28 January. [14115]

Mr. Soames: The tender document contains commercially sensitive information and cannot be made available.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the criteria against which bids for the contract to supply food to the armed forces announced on 28 January were judged. [14119]

Mr. Soames: Tenders were subject to thorough commercial and technical evaluation. The commercial factors assessed included price, buying policy and strategy, efficiency and improvement proposals and contract conditions, as well as company financial status. The technical factors evaluated included the proposals on management, phase-in, quality, commodities, ordering and distribution, and information technology as well as the response to meet overseas requirements and the need of exercises, operations and war. The competitors were briefed on the evaluation criteria at the outset of the competition.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what respects the contract with Booker Foodservice Group for the supply of food to the armed forces reflects the recommendations of the National Audit Office report "Ministry of Defence: Supply of Food to the Armed Forces," HC 66 of Session 1996–97. [14127]

Mr. Soames: The lessons learned from the first contract identified in the National Audit Office report have been taken fully into account.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the value of the contract for supply of food for the armed services announced on 28 January; and on what date the first and subsequent payments will be made. [14117]

Mr. Soames: The estimated value of the contract will be in excess of £400 million over five years. Payments for the cost of food supplied will be paid fortnightly in arrears against verified receipts. Legitimate costs incurred by Booker Foodservice Group before the start of operations in October will be paid against agreed and verifiable milestones. The date of the first payment has not yet been established.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those parties that submitted tenders in respect of the contract for the supply of food for the armed forces announced on 28 January, indicating on what date each tender was received; and when was the closing date for the receipt of tenders. [14121]

Mr. Soames: Tenders were received from Booker Foodservice Group Ltd. and NAAFI. Both tenders were received on the closing date of 25 July 1996.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons the follow-on contract for supply of food to the armed services announced on 28 January will run for five years in place of the current three-year contract. [14118]

Mr. Soames: The current food supply contract was awarded to NAAFI without competition in 1994 because, at that time, the requirement could not be adequately defined and was expected to change significantly as a result of "Options for Change" and the defence cost studies. It was considered that NAAFI, which already provided 50 per cent. of the food, was best placed to meet the task and that three years was the minimum time required to establish a service from which a competition for a follow-on contract could be devised. The new contract will be for a five-year period, which is considered the most appropriate to secure the best value for money.

Naval Helicopters (School Visits)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 28 January, *Official Report*, columns *198–99*, how much notice was given to the head teacher of Cowarth Park school of the visit of the naval helicopter on 13 November; and what is the usual period of notice for such visits to schools. [14093]

Mr. Soames: Cowarth Park school was given four

weeks notice of the intended visit on 13 November. It is our normal practice to give three to four weeks' notice in such cases.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 28 January, *Official Report*, columns *198–99*, how many naval helicopters on training sorties visited schools in each year since 1992. [14094]

Mr. Soames: This information is not recorded centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, by way of illustration, over the last 12 months, helicopters from RNAS Portland undertook some 20 school visits.

Electronic Warfare Capability

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the Army's current requirements for an electronic warfare capability. [14224]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Vixen system was selected to meet the Army's requirement for an automated electronic warfare—EW—system capable of collecting and disseminating accurate signals intelligence from a high-density, dynamic, electronic environment. A decision has been taken to terminate the contract with the prime contractor, Siemens Plessey Systems—SPS—because tests conducted during 1995 and 1996 demonstrated that Vixen has operational shortcomings. Various technical problems have delayed the project by several years and there is little prospect that these could be overcome by SPS without further significant delay and expense. MOD is considering its legal position and, if appropriate, will pursue a claim for compensation. The cost of the Vixen project has been around £50 million. A limited EW capability is already in service in Bosnia and the procurement of additional commercially available equipment is being considered while longer-term requirements are addressed. The decision to cancel Vixen was taken only after careful consideration of the operational, contractual, financial and industrial implications.

PRIME MINISTER

Defence Projects

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister what changes he has made in the rules for reporting decisions to undertake major defence projects since 1991. [14011]

The Prime Minister: It remains the Government's normal practice to announce decisions to undertake major defence projects to Parliament at the earliest convenient time.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Arts (Business Sponsorship)

14. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the Government's initiatives to promote business sponsorship of the arts. [12231]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government's arts pairing scheme, established in 1984 with the intention of bringing new sponsors into the arts, continues to be a success. To date, the scheme has made awards totalling more than £37 million, matching business sponsorship of over £77 million—more than £115 million in new money. Already in 1996–97 the number of awards made is 9 per cent. higher than in the whole of the previous year: over £4.8 million in awards, matching over £10 million in business sponsorship.

National Lottery (Historic Buildings)

15. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the total sum awarded by the national lottery for the restoration or refurbishment of historic buildings. [12232]

Mr. Sproat: The heritage lottery fund has announced 198 grants totalling £127.1 million for the restoration and refurbishment of historic buildings.

English Heritage

16. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on the number of regional offices English Heritage has. [12233]

Mr. Sproat: English Heritage's historic properties department has six regional offices that between them manage over 400 properties throughout England. The offices are located in London, Tonbridge, Bristol, Northampton and Newcastle and at Stonehenge. Each office is led by a regional director, and the regional structure is headed by a director located in English Heritage's London headquarters.

National Lottery

17. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to increase the number of participants in the national lottery. [12234]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I am delighted with the great success of the national lottery. Any plans that the operator might have to increase the number of participants would need to be approved by the Director General of the National Lottery who has a duty under the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 to protect the interests of participants.

21. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the impact of the national lottery on the British film industry. [12238]

Mrs. Bottomley: The national lottery has had a huge impact on the British film industry. Already, more than £66 million has been awarded to some 164 projects. This includes nearly £39 million for 106 film productions, 24 of which went into production last year. This is a tremendous achievement in so short a time which I know is welcomed by the film industry.

24. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of the impact of the national lottery on the voluntary sector in Greater London. [12241]

Mrs. Bottomley: The introduction of the national lottery has given charities and voluntary organisations in all parts of the United Kingdom an unparalleled opportunity to secure new funding for projects and initiatives across a wide range of activities. The National Lottery Charities Board alone has made 838 awards, worth almost £73 million, to charities and voluntary organisations in Greater London, and a large proportion of the 843 awards, worth almost £230 million, made by the other national lottery distributing bodies for arts, sport, heritage and millennium projects in Greater London have gone to charities and voluntary organisations. These figures exclude grants made to London-based national organisations.

Playing Fields

18. **Mr. Pope:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will take steps to halt the sale of playing fields; and if she will make a statement. [12235]

Mr. Sproat: The Government have made it clear that they do not want playing fields which may be needed now or in the future to be redeveloped. The Sports Council has been made a statutory consultee for planning applications affecting playing fields, with strong policies for retaining playing fields, and minimum area and quality standards have been retained for school playing fields where other controls on schools have been removed. We will consider further action if that proves necessary.

Churches and Synagogues

19. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the work that English Heritage has undertaken to preserve the nation's historic churches and synagogues. [12236]

Mr. Sproat: Grants from English Heritage towards the preservation of historic churches and other ecclesiastical buildings are available for grade I and grade II* listed properties, and grade II listed properties in conservation areas. Over the five years from 1991 to 1996, English Heritage has provided £47.2 million in such grants, and aims to have spent a further £1.2 million in 1996–97.

22. **Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what contribution the national lottery has made towards preserving the country's historic churches. [12239]

Mr. Sproat: The national lottery provides a tremendous opportunity for the preservation of historic churches and cathedrals in this country. To date, the heritage lottery fund has made 123 grants totalling £14.3 million to preserve our ecclesiastical heritage.

The heritage lottery fund and English Heritage have also developed a single procedure whereby churches and other places of worship can apply for funding from both sources through a single route: £20 million a year could be available through this joint scheme, which will make it easier for congregations to apply for funding.

Arts Council of England

20. **Mr. Jessel:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how the work of the Arts Council of England has been affected by the provision of funding from the national lottery. [12237]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The national lottery has more than doubled the funds available for distribution by the Arts Council of England, enabling a level of support for the country's arts facilities that has never been seen before. It has enabled the Arts Council to work with, and support, a far wider range of arts projects covering the whole spectrum of arts activity from amateur groups to the commercial sector.

Heritage Sites

23. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to encourage more people to visit important heritage sites. [12240]

Mr. Sproat: My Department, principally through the Historic Royal Palaces agency and English Heritage, is continually striving to develop its historic properties to make them more attractive and accessible to visitors. The Historic Royal Palaces agency has recently completed a programme of major improvements at its properties, and an additional £15 million will be spent on further works over the next two years. English Heritage is undertaking a range of initiatives at its most visited sites, such as new exhibitions, audio tours, and an increasing use of foreign language tours—all designed to encourage both domestic and overseas visitors.

Millennium Exhibition

25. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the outstanding deficiencies in the sums required to guarantee the national millennium exhibition. [12242]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Millennium Commission has agreed an indicative budget on which a grant of £200 million could be made. The commission has a target of £150 million for sponsorship and the balance will be raised from receipts and commercial income. Any project of this size carries risks. An order will be introduced to extend the funding life of the commission for one year should it prove necessary to cover contingencies and inflation.

Radio Station, Doncaster

26. **Mr. Kevin Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what progress has been made in respect of a radio station for Doncaster referred to in her statement of 2 July 1996, *Official Report*, column 873. [12243]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Responsibility for the advertising, award and regulation of independent radio licences rests with the Radio Authority, acting within the terms of the Broadcasting Acts 1990 and 1996. The authority announced on 9 October 1996 that, subject to receiving evidence of interest from prospective applicants, it proposes to advertise a licence designed to cover most or all of the metropolitan borough of Doncaster. This

licence is one of a series it plans to advertise from autumn 1997 onwards. As yet, no final decision has been taken to advertise the licence; nor has a specific time scale been announced.

Football Clubs

27. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations she has received from football clubs outside the premier league on the levels of support available from the Football Trust. [12244]

Mr. Sproat: The Department has received a number of letters in respect of Football Trust funding from clubs outside the premier league. I am meeting the trust shortly to discuss its future funding programme.

Film Industry

28. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what measures her Department is taking to support the British film industry. [12245]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The British film industry is in a buoyant state, with record numbers of films going into production and record cinema attendances in 1996. The Government will continue to provide significant public funds to support the industry. Next year, my Department will provide around £23.5 million to the British Film Institute, the National Film and Television School, British Screen Finance, the European co-production fund and the British Film Commission. Substantial support will also be given to various European programmes.

In addition, the national lottery has already awarded more then £66 million. This includes nearly £39 million for 106 film productions. The Government are also taking forward a number of initiatives recommended by the Advisory Committee on Film Finance.

Sport

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on *(a)* the British Academy of Sport and *(b)* other proposed sporting centres of excellence. [12464]

Mr. Sproat: The closing date for receipt of bids to set up and run the BAS was 31 October 1996 and the Department of National Heritage and the United Kingdom Sports Council received 26 bids. The first stage of the evaluation process was completed in December and 13 of the 26 bids were placed on the first list of bids which are currently the subject of detailed technical evaluation. A decision on the successful bidder will be made in early spring.

Details of the Government's proposals for regional centres of sporting excellence will also be published in early spring.

Provincial Touring Companies

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to increase financial support for provincial touring companies. [12583]

Mr. Sproat: Ministers are keen to ensure that as many people as possible have access to the great artistic traditions of this country. In addition to the grant in aid funding, the Arts Council already invests in touring, the new lottery scheme, "Arts for Everyone", will enable support for new and additional touring activity, allowing audiences to be reached.

Cash Limits

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what changes she proposes to her Department's cash limits and running cost limits for 1996–97. [14321]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Subject to the parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class X, vote 1 will be increased by £2,412,000 from £962,867,000 to £965,279,000 and running costs limit increased by £12,000 from £29,477,000 to £29,489,000. This is to provide additional appropriations in aid for receipts from admission fees for Windsor castle offset by an increase in the grant in aid to the royal household; to provide funds from the public buildings and monuments' capital budget for the refurbishment work by English Heritage on the Albert memorial; to provide additional appropriations in aid for the Historic Royal Palaces agency matched by increases in gross expenditure; to provide for an increase in gross running costs expenditure arising from the transfer of responsibility for voluntary services from the Home Office; to provide for a reduction in the Department's capital expenditure; to provide cover for final payments to local authority capital projects assisted under completed European regional development fund initiatives as a result of a shortfall in receipts from the EU; and to provide for the use of proceeds from the disposal by the Women's Royal Voluntary Service of properties held for the Crown to facilitate the move of its headquarters offices from Brixton to Abington. The increases will be offset by transfers, savings and charges to the reserve, and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Departmental Publicity

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what promotional and public information campaigns his Department is *(a)* currently running and *(b)* planning to run during the next six months; and for each campaign (i) how much it will cost, (1) in total and (2) to his Department, (ii) what agencies or bodies are undertaking the work and (iii) what is its planned duration. [7413]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Such information as is available is as follows:

Headquarters

Publicity campaigns currently running during the 1996–97 financial year are as follows:

Pensions campaign

Providing information to specialists groups, including employers, scheme administrators and trustees, about the implications of the 1995 Pensions Act.

The estimated cost is £1.3 million. Plans for the next six months have not yet been finalised.

The majority of the work is commissioned through the Central Office of Information.

Disability campaign

A public information campaign on the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, aimed at service providers, employers, adviser groups and members of the public (including disabled people).

Activity for the next six months is not yet finalised and will depend partly on the results of research into the success of recent publicity activity and partly on the continuing demand for information materials generated by publicity activity during the past three months.

The total cost for period April 1996 to March 1997 is estimated at £2.5 million. [See background note at (1)]

Anti-fraud

The departmental headquarters is running national and local anti-fraud campaigns in conjunction with the Benefits Agency. This year, we have run two phases of local "Spotlight on Benefit Cheats" campaigns, and national publicity to launch the national benefit fraud hotline.

Activity for the next six months has not yet been finalised but we may run further campaigns between January and March 1997.

Cost to headquarters and Benefits Agency security branch is estimated at £1.75 million.

Working with Benefits

The Department's headquarters is running a national campaign to promote awareness of in-work benefits—that is, family credit and disability working allowance.

This campaign is running in two phases; the first in July–August 1996; the second in January—February 1997.

The estimated cost is estimated at £2.655 million.

Earnings Top-up Pilot

The departmental headquarters will promote earnings top-up on a pilot basis in eight areas.

The campaign began in September 1996 and will run through to the end of the financial year.

The estimated cost is estimated at £1.2 million.

Parent Plus

This is a pilot scheme to help lone parents return to work.

Preparation has already begun on the work which will begin in March 1997. Plans for its continuance are flexible over the general election period.

The estimated cost is £108,000.

Benefits Agency

Pensions

This is a locally delivered information campaign aimed at raising awareness of benefits for pensioners and is planned to start in late January.

The estimated cost to the Benefits Agency is £80,000 and the work is commissioned by the Benefits Agency press and publicity officers to independent companies such as printers and exhibition organisers. The duration of the campaign is estimated to be four weeks.

Disability

This is a planned campaign to raise awareness of a new disability living allowance child claim pack and is set to begin in April 1997.

The cost to the Benefits Agency is estimated to be £50,000. A mail shot will last for approximately two weeks. From then on, the claim pack will be available in local offices and post offices.

Anti-Fraud

This is a local campaign in support of the national campaign run by headquarters and the cost to the agency is estimated at £700,000.

Working with Benefits

A local campaign in support of the national campaign run by headquarters and the estimated cost is £240,000.

Contributions Agency

The agency has a continuing programme of publicity aimed at informing employers and employees of contributions requirements including mailshots, leaflets and exhibitions. In particular, it has an on-going campaign to encourage payment of class 2 contributions by direct debit. The total estimated cost will be £1,904,056.

All publicity is undertaken on a rolling basis and is on-going throughout succeeding financial years.

Child Support Agency

Nothing current or planned.

War Pensions Agency

Nothing current or planned.

Information Technology Services Agency

Nothing current or planned.

Notes:

It is not possible to separate promotional activities from public information campaigns. The figures quoted are for publicity only.

Benefit Information

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list *(a)* the organisations to which benefit information can be lawfully supplied by local authority, *(b)* the permitted lawful uses of benefit information by a local authority and *(c)* the organisations to which benefit information can be lawfully supplied by his Department. [11191]

Mr. Heald: The Department and each local authority must comply with the common law duty of confidentiality. This is backed up by the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1984 and section 123 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992, which will be extended by provisions in the Fraud Bill. Information on an individual's claim to benefit is given to a third party only where there is legislative provision, where a court order has been issued, where disclosure is in the public interest or where the person has given consent. Therefore, although there is specific legislative provision—much of it emanating from outside this Department—which allows local authorities and the Department to disclose benefit information in a variety of circumstances to a range of organisations, information can be supplied to any organisation when a person has given his or her consent.

An authority may lawfully use benefit information for the exercise of its functions relating to housing benefit and council tax benefit and in the exercise of other functions where this is lawful, whether by virtue of statutory authority or otherwise.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how his Department has used the UK indicators for sustainable development in *(a)* the production of the Department's annual report, *(b)* monitoring progress towards meeting the objectives set out in the UK sustainable development strategy and *(c)* assessing the environmental implications of policy options; and what plans it has to extend their use in future within the Department. [12274]

Mr. Burt: The Department of Social Security, in the production of its annual report, concentrates on reporting progress towards the environmental objectives of the Department's environmental strategy. This in turn complements the sustainable development strategy, which includes energy efficiency targets, reductions in carbon emissions and waste minimisation. The Department is ranked low in terms of significant environmental impact and has no plans to assess the environmental implications of policy options or to use the indicators for sustainable development before the Department of the Environment completes its review and publishes a revised set in 1998.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average number of weeks for which cold weather payments have been made in each of the weather areas for each of the past 10 years. [12299]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

Cold weather payment scheme—triggers by weather station and year

Weather station	*1986–87*	*1987–88*	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*[2]	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Aberdeen (Dyce)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	2
Aberporth	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Aughton	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3
Aviemore	—	—	—	—	3	0	3	6	3	6
Bastreet	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	—	—
Bedford	1	0	0	0	2	3	2	1	0	4
Binbrook	1	0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Birmingham (Elmdon)	1	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	0	3
Blackpool	1	0	—	0	2	—	—	—	—	—
Boscombe Down	1	0	0	0	2	2	1	0	0	3
Boulmer	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Bournemouth (Hurn)	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
Braemar	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	5	7
Brawdy	1	0	0	0	0	0	—	—	—	—
Bristol	1	0	0	0	0	—	—	—	—	—
Brize Norton	1	0	0	0	2	2	1	0	0	4
Capel Curig	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	4
Carlisle	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	2
Chivenor	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cilfynydd	1	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	3
Coltishall	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	3
Coningsby	1	0	0	0	0	3	2	—	—	—
Culdrose	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cwmbargoed	—	—	—	—	3	3	—	—	—	—
Dumfries	1	0	0	1	2	2	1	1	0	3
Dunkeswell	—	—	—	—	—	1	0	0	0	3
Easthampstead	1	1	0	1	0	3	1	1	0	4
Edinburgh (Turnhouse)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	2
Eskdalemuir	2	0	1	0	4	3	2	5	1	5
Eskmeals	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Exeter	1	0	0	0	2	—	—	—	—	—
Finningley	1	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	0	—
Fort William	0	0	0	1	3	—	—	—	—	—
Gatwick	1	0	0	1	0	2	1	1	0	3
Glasgow (Abbotsinch)	0	0	0	2	3	0	0	3	0	3
Heathrow	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Herstmonceaux	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Honington	1	0	0	0	2	3	1	1	—	—
Kinloss	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	3	0	3
Kirkwall	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Leeds	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	1
Leeming	1	0	0	0	3	3	2	2	0	2
Lerwick	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2
Leuchars	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	3	0	3
Lyneham	1	1	0	0	3	3	2	1	0	4
Machrihanish	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Manchester (Ringway)	1	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	3
Manston	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
Marham	1	0	0	0	2	2	1	1	0	4
Mount Batten	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	—
Mumbles	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Okehampton	1	0	0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Prestwick	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	—	—	—
Rhoose	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
Shawbury	1	0	0	0	2	3	2	1	0	4
Southampton	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
St. Mawgan	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stanstead	1	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	0	4
Stornoway	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Tiree	—	—	—	—	—	0	0	0	0	0

Cold weather payment scheme—triggers by weather station and year

Weather station	1986–87	1987–88	1988–89	1989–90	1990–91[2]	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96
Trawsfynyd	1	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	[1]—
Tulloch Bridge	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	0	[1]—	[1]—	3	3	3
Tynemouth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Valley	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Waddington	[1]—	[1]—	0	0	0	3	2	1	0	3
Watnall	1	0	0	0	0	2	2	1	0	[1]—
Wattisham	1	0	0	0	[1]—	2	1	0	0	4
Whitby	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Whithorn	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	[1]—
Wick	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2
Wilsden (Bingley)	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	3	1	2	3	0	6
Wyton	1	0	0	0	2	3	2	0	0	[1]—
Yeovilton	1	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	3

[1] Indicates station not used.
[2] The Prime Minister announced a UK-wide trigger for the first two weeks in February. Triggers shown in the table exclude this.
1. The figures show the actual number of weeks for which cold weather payments have been made by weather station for each of the last ten years.

Invalidity and Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of savings resulting from the replacement of invalidity benefit by incapacity benefit for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99 and *(e)* 1999–2000 and of the cumulative total for those years, broken down into structural savings and savings arising from the introduction of the all work test. [13048]

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table.

Estimated annual cash savings (£ million) from the replacement of invalidity benefit by incapacity benefit

	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–1999	1999–2000	cum. total
Changes made to structure of the benefit	220	490	660	820	960	3,140
Medical test	60	300	700	1,010	1,230	3,290
Total	280	790	1,350	1,830	2,190	6,440

1. Savings are rounded to the nearest £10 million.
2. Numbers may not sum because of rounding.
3. Includes offsetting costs of estimated additional expenditure on income-related benefit.

Benefits Fraud Hotline

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many calls have been received by the social security fraud hotline; and what are the estimated resulting savings. [12834]

Mr. Heald: Up to the end of December 1996, calls to the national benefit fraud hotline were in the region of 130,000. The estimated fraud savings resulting from calls to the hotline are over £27 million.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Paramilitary Assaults

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the numbers of paramilitary assaults *(a)* by beating and *(b)* by shooting in the past five years, stating whether committed by loyalist or republican groups, and specify the annual and individual average amounts paid out in compensation each year, and the annual total estimated hospital costs. [12178]

Sir John Wheeler: Casualties as a result of terrorist gang assaults for the past five years are as follows:

Year	Attributed to loyalist	Attributed to republican	Total
1992	38	38	76
1993	35	6	41
1994	38	32	70
1995	76	141	217
1996	130	172	302

Casualties as a result of terrorist gang shootings for the past five years are as follows:

Year	Attributed to loyalist	Attributed to republican	Total
1992	72	61	133
1993	60	25	85
1994	68	54	122
1995	3	0	3
1996	21	3	24

It is not possible to provide details of costs associated with assaults and shootings. However, for illustrative purposes, I can advise that a victim of a "punishment" attack who suffered a broken leg and spent 10 days in hospital could cost the public purse £9,000 in potential medical and policing costs and subsequent compensation awards.

Punishment Beatings

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many assaults described as punishment beatings have taken place in Northern Ireland in each of the last six years and in the current year to date; and what estimate he has made of the number carried out in each year by *(a)* the Provisional IRA, *(b)* other republican terrorists, *(c)* the UDA, *(d)* the UVF and *(e)* other loyalist organisations. [12861]

Sir John Wheeler: The number of assaults described as punishment beatings for the period January 1991 to 26 January 1997 is:

	Attributed to loyalist groups	*Attributed to republican groups*	*Total*
1991	22	40	62
1992	38	38	76
1993	35	6	41
1994	38	32	70
1995	76	141	217
1996	118	158	276
1997[1]	7	12	19

[1] As at 26 January 1997.

It is not possible to specify which individual group carried out an offence. These figures do not include punishment shootings.

Social Fund

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what is the average time taken by each department of government in Northern Ireland to respond to bids for European social funds; [13066]

(2) how much European social funding available to Northern Ireland in each of the past five years could not be drawn down because of delay at Government level in responding to bids submitted. [13067]

Mr. Ancram: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Ian Walters. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Ian Walters to Mr. Roy Beggs, dated 30 January 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me, as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency, to reply to your questions about the European Social Fund (ESF).

Question 13066

The majority of Northern Ireland applications to the Fund are processed by this Agency. Applications are invited through press advertisements each time funds become available. They are then scored against programme criteria and ranked by a Selection Committee. While the time taken to reach decisions is directly related to the number of applications to be assessed at each "call", the process is normally completed within 3 months of the application closing date.

Question 13067

I am pleased to say that at no time over the past 5 years has there been a failure to draw down monies from the European Social Fund because of delays in responding to bids. While there was an underspend on ESF in 1994, this was due to the delay in the approval of the Northern Ireland Single Programme. The full amount of the underspend was rolled forward to subsequent years and so will be fully spent.

Contracts (Andersen Group)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many contracts were awarded by his Department and its agencies to the Andersen group of companies between 1986 and 1993; and what were the gross value of these contracts. [13401]

Sir John Wheeler: Between 1986 and 1993 the Northern Ireland Office, Northern Ireland Departments and their agencies have paid the Andersen group of companies £3,144,010. The number of contracts that this amount covers is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Thornton Report

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what factors underlie his Department's delay in responding to the Thornton report concerning the Casement Three, sent to his office on 11 June 1996; [13297]

(2) when he plans to respond to the Thornton report, concerning the Casement Three; [13298]

(3) what assessment he has made of the implications of the submission from Peter Thornton QC relating to the Casement Three; and if he will make a statement. [13299]

Sir John Wheeler: In June 1996, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State received representations from the Committee on the Administration of Justice arguing that the cases of Patrick Kane, Michael Timmons and Sean Kelly should be referred back to the Court of Appeal. The submission took the form of a lengthy legal opinion from Mr. Peter Thornton QC. Having obtained detailed advice on the complex legal issues raised, he is now considering the representations in depth and hopes to be able to make his conclusions known to the committee within the next few weeks.

Racially Motivated Incidents

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many prosecutions there were for racially motivated incidents in each of the last five years in Northern Ireland. [13834]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is not available.

Minority Communities

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* individuals of (i) Chinese and (ii) Asian ethnicity and *(b)* members of the travelling community he estimates live in Northern Ireland. [13835]

Mr. Ancram: No official estimates have been made of the size of the Chinese and Asian communities in Northern Ireland. In 1996 the university of Ulster carried out research, commissioned by the Government's central community relations unit and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, which estimated between 3,125 and 5,125 members of the Chinese community, 1,050 members of the Indian community and 641 members of the Pakistani community.

A Government survey in March 1993 estimated that there were 1,115 members of the Irish traveller community in Northern Ireland. The 1996 university of Ulster study gave an estimate of 1,366.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of *(a)* assault, *(b)* damage to property and *(c)* verbal racial abuse towards members of ethnic minority communities were reported in 1996 in Norther Ireland. [13836]

Sir John Wheeler: Figures for 1996 are not yet available for publication.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many incidents assessed by the RUC to be racially motivated have been reported in each of the last five years. [13837]

Sir John Wheeler: Figures for the past five years are not available.

In 1995, without a legislation framework, the Royal Ulster Constabulary voluntarily undertook the monitoring of racial incidents among the ethnic minorities using the Association of Chief Police Officers guidelines for England and Wales.

A total of 66 racial incidents were reported to the police in 1995; the nature of the incident reported is shown:

Assault: 10

Damage to property: 27

Verbal abuse: 20

Intimidation (phone call): 1

Other: 8

It is felt that the number of incidents reported is less than the actual number that occurred. Through building a network of contacts with representative groups, and the provision of advice and support to victims, the RUC hopes to encourage victims to report every incident.

Examination Results

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of young people in Northern Ireland achieved two GCE A-levels, advanced GNVQ or NVQ level 3 by the age of 21 in each of the past two years. [13839]

Mr. Ancram: For the most recent two years for which the figures have been compiled, the percentages were as follows:

1992–93: 43.0

1993–94: 42.5

For 1994–95 figures are due to be compiled within the next two months.

For 1995–96 figures will not be available before the summer.

Nature Reserves

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what plans he has to privatise national nature reserves in Northern Ireland; [14014]

(2) what role non-governmental organisations will have in the process of privatising national nature reserves in Northern Ireland. [14015]

Mr. Moss: I have no plans to privatise national nature reserves in Northern Ireland. The environment and heritage service of the Department of the Environment is exploring ways of increasing the involvement of district councils, voluntary organisations and the private sector in the management and maintenance of the service's 250 properties.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

36. **Mr. Bernard Jenkin:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will set a cash limit for the legal aid budget in 1997–98. [12253]

Mr. Streeter: The Government have embarked on a radical reform programme to put in place the controls that we need to cash-limit legal aid spending. The key changes must be carefully piloted and some require legislation. Last year's White Paper made it clear that the reforms will take four to five years to implement in full.

38. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent representations he has received on his proposals for reform of the legal aid system. [12256]

Mr. Streeter: I frequently receive representations on this matter from professional bodies and associations, pressure groups, advice services, individual lawyers, Members of Parliament and members of the public.

40. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many people received legal aid in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [12258]

Mr. Streeter: In 1995–96, being the latest year for which figures are available, the number of acts of assistance totalled 3.5 million. This represents an increase of almost 17 per cent. in the last five years.

Public Defender Services

37. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on his Department's assessment of the operation of public defender services overseas. [12255]

Mr. Streeter: Officials from the Lord Chancellor's Department visited contracted and salaried services for criminal and civil legal aid in north America last year as part of a fact-finding exercise. No general assessment of public defender services overseas has, however, been made.

Magistrates Courts Committees

39. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department which bodies he has met regarding the proposed amalgamations of magistrates courts committees. [12257]

Mr. Streeter: I have recently had a meeting with a delegation from Coventry magistrates courts committee to discuss the proposed amalgamation of the Birmingham, Coventry and Solihull magistrates courts committees.

I have also had meetings with the Magistrates Association, the Central Council of Magistrates Courts Committees, the Justices' Clerks Society, the Standing Conference of Justices' Chief Executives and Clerks to Magistrates Courts Committees, the Association of Magisterial Officers, and Her Majesty's chief inspector of the magistrates courts service, at which the question of the Government's policy on the amalgamation of magistrates courts committees formed part of the agenda.

Sheriffs

41. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will review the *(a)* powers and *(b)* accountability of sheriffs and under-sheriffs. [12259]

Mr. Streeter: In view of the decision that the next stages in the civil enforcement agents review should focus on the conduct of certificated and private bailiffs, as announced by my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans) on 2 April 1996, *Official Report*, column *87*, no review of the powers or accountability of high sheriffs, under-sheriffs and sheriffs officers is planned at this time.

Court Buildings, Normanton

42. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to visit the courts covering the Normanton parliamentary constituency to examine the quality of the buildings used by the courts; and if he will make a statement. [12260]

Mr. Streeter: I currently have no plans to visit courts in the Normanton parliamentary constituency to examine the quality of buildings used by the courts.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Political Movements (Funding)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the financial contribution made by *(a)* Her Majesty's Government and *(b)* the European Union in each year since 1980 to (i) the European Movement and (ii) the Campaign for an Independent Britain. [12475]

Mr. David Davis: Until 1985, the Government made grants of £30,000 a year to the European Movement. Grants given since 1985 were:

1985–86: £20,000
1986–87: £15,000
1987–88: £10,000
1988–89: £5,000
1992: £30,000
1994: £10,000

No grants have been made to the European Movement since 1994.

The Government are not aware of any official funding for the Campaign for an Independent Britain during this period.

Chapter A–30 of the EC budget provides a broad outline of Community subsidies, including to "bodies and projects advancing the idea of Europe".

The European Commission does not, however, publish a detailed list of such grants.

China

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received concerning forced labour in China. [13528]

Dr. Liam Fox: In recent years, we have received a number of representations about forced labour in China from Members of Parliament, human rights groups such as Anti-Slavery International, and individuals, including Harry Wu, the US-Chinese campaigner against prison labour. We regularly raise our concerns about such abuses of human rights with the Chinese authorities.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *423*, when he expects to reach a conclusion concerning what action the EU should take regarding the imprisonment of Ngawang Choepel; and if he will make a statement. [13645]

Mr. Hanley: We have now discussed the case of Ngawang Choepel with our EU partners, who share our concern. The regular representations which we have made, both bilaterally and in conjunction with our EU partners, will have left the Chinese in no doubt about the strength of our concern about the human rights situation in Tibet, and about the harassment and detention of individuals.

Crete

Mr. Eric Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many cases of alleged rape of British holidaymakers in Crete by persons native to Crete were brought to court in Crete in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96. [13515]

Dr. Liam Fox: We are aware of one case. The attack took place in 1994 and was brought to court in 1996.

Mr. Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many accusations of rape were made by British holidaymakers in Crete against persons native to Crete in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96. [13514]

Dr. Fox: The numbers of accusations of rape made by British holidaymakers in Crete which were reported to our consular staff were:

1993: 7
1994: 5
1995: 5
1996: 1

Only two of the alleged perpetrators in 1993 and 1994 were known to be Greek nationals—not necessarily Cretan.

EU Council of Ministers

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will place in the Library a list of section A decisions taken by the Ministerial Council of the European Community during 1996; [13389]

(2) if he will state in respect of section A decisions at meetings of the Ministerial Council of the European Community *(a)* if those decisions can relate to any business within the remit of the council irrespective of its notional subject title and *(b)* where a list of such decisions is available for public inspection. [13388]

Mr. David Davis: Yes. Part A of the agenda of each Council of Ministers meeting covers decisions on which no further discussion is expected to be necessary. The subjects covered therefore need not relate directly to the substantive matters for consideration at that meeting.

A list of part A decisions taken at Council of Ministers meetings is either placed in the Library by the relevant Department, or given in the statement made to the House on the meeting.

Albania

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received of *(a)* British and *(b)* European Union business men being involved in pyramid selling schemes in Albania; what new financial aid is being considered to support that country's economy; and if he will make a statement. [13408]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We have no reports of involvement by British or EU business men in pyramid selling schemes in Albania. Albania will receive £1 million of UK bilateral assistance in 1997 in the form of know-how fund projects. Albania is also set to receive 140 million ecu of EU assistance in the period 1996 to 1999 under the Phare programme.

European Court of Human Rights

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has to reform the European Court of Human Rights. [12254]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I refer the hon. Member to my statement during the debate in the House on 6 March 1996, at columns 314–15.

Mr. Ghazanfer Ali

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will make a statement concerning the application for a visit visa by Mr. Ghazanfer Ali; [13909]

(2) when Ghazanfer Ali was released on bail from prison in Azab Kashmiiz; when he applied for a visa to visit the United Kingdom; when his case was referred to the Home Office in London; when the Home Office made a recommendation; what was the recommendation; how many letters he received from hon. Members in support of Mr. Ali's application; if he will identify the hon. Members and on what date Mr. Ali will be required next to appear in court. [13910]

Dr. Liam Fox: It is policy on the ground of confidentiality for Ministers not to comment publicly on individual applications for entry clearance. I wrote to the hon. Member on 23 January giving most of the information requested. I will write again with the answers to the rest of the hon. Member's question.

Crowd Control Equipment

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the use of United Kingdom-supplied water cannons at the demonstration in Bandung, West Java, in June 1996; and if he will review his policy in respect of the use of United Kingdom-supplied crowd control equipment to disperse demonstrators. [14099]

Mr. Hanley: We are studying reports, including one from the hon. Member, of the use of water cannon in this incident. Export licence applications for all destinations are considered case by case in the light of the established criteria to which we are committed. We have no plans to review this policy.

TRANSPORT

Cap Afrique

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* passengers and *(b)* crew were carried on the motor vessel Cap Afrique on 14 January 1997. [13544]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. Elliot Morley, dated 3 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your Question relating to the sailing of the MV CAP AFRIQUE on 14 January 1997.

The ship's manifest for the date in question indicates that there were 12 drivers (passengers) on board and the crew list records 14 crew.

Prestwick Airport

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what safety requirements are being built into the private finance initiative contract for the new air traffic control centre at Prestwick; and what assessment he has made of these requirements. [13806]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* In common with all current en-route air traffic control centres, safety for the proposed new air traffic control centre at Prestwick is the responsibility of the operator—National Air Traffic Services Ltd. Operational safety at all current and future air traffic control centres is then regulated by the safety regulation group of the Civil Aviation Authority.

The NATS safety management system requires the formal assessment for safety for all systems and services supplied to NATS, irrespective of the contracting process. The safety requirements for the new Scottish centre have been fully specified and tenderers have offered full compliance with these requirements. It is NATS's

responsibility, as the air traffic control operator, to provide an operational safety case encompassing systems and services to the satisfaction of the regulator, SRG. In this respect, the responsibility for safety for the new air traffic control centre at Prestwick will be no different from the current major project to build the new en-route centre at Swanwick.

Departmental Publicity

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list *(a)* his Department's budgeted expenditure on (i) advertising, (ii) publicity and (iii) public information campaigns for the period January to March 1997 and *(b)* the actual expenditure on (1) advertising, (2) publicity and (3) public information campaigns in the period January to March in each of the past five years. [13463]

Mr. Bowis: Most of the Department of Transport's publicity comprises public information campaigns on safer road use. It is not possible to separate advertising, publicity and public information; therefore, the answer is provided in an alternative format to that requested. The major advertising campaigns are planned for the most appropriate time of year with the bulk of the publicity budget spent on the "Kill Your Speed" campaign in May and September and the "Drink Drive" campaign in June and December. The majority of supporting publicity expenditure is on-going and cannot be specifically dated.

Table A: Budgeted expenditure on publicity campaigns for the period January to March 1997

	Campaigns in period January to March	*Budgeted expenditure January to March (£)*[1]	*Budgeted expenditure for all campaigns in full financial year (£)*
1997	Child road safety	500,000	9,648,000
	Kill Your Speed	350,000	

Table (b): The main publicity campaigns for the period run from January to March for the past five years

Year	*Campaigns in period January to March*	*Expenditure January to March (£)*[1]	*Expenditure for all campaigns in full financial year (3)*
1992	—	[2]—	—
1993	Seat belts	990,000	8,760,000
	Cycle helmets	288,000	
1994	Seat belts	584,000	8,275,000
1995	Child road safety	300,000	8,039,000
	Pass Plus	190,000	
1996	Pass Plus	160,000	8,356,000
	Child road safety	470,000	
	Child seat belts	195,000	
	Kill Your Speed	280,000	
	Railtrack	831,000	

[1] Figures include advertising expenditure and supporting publicity where applicable.

[2] I will write to the honourable member with the figures for the period January to March 1992.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Computers (Millennium)

Mr. Hoon: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received from the *(a)* water and *(b)* electricity companies regarding the action they are taking to ensure their computer systems are able to handle the century date change. [14272]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I have not received any direct representation from the water or electricity companies on this issue, but I understand that Taskforce 2000 has written to most of these companies informing them of the problem. As with all companies, urgent managerial attention to the problem is required.

Boeing Airline Merger

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment his Department has made of the impact on *(a)* Airbus Industrie and *(b)* British Aerospace plc of the proposed merger of Boeing and McDonnell Douglas. [12591]

Mr. Greg Knight: It is too early to make a detailed assessment of the impact of the proposed merger, but my Department is considering the implications with Airbus Industrie and British Aerospace.

Offshore Installations (Decommissioning)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade in what circumstances Shell will be permitted to *(a)* withdraw and *(b)* modify its best practicable environmental option statement on deep sea disposal of the Brent Spar. [12599]

Mr. Page: The Government approved a programme for the deep sea disposal of the Brent Spar in the north-east Atlantic. Shell has asked six contracting groups to develop detailed plans for 11 alternative decommissioning schemes for the Brent Spar. Any alternative solution will be judged against the approved best practicable environmental option of deep sea disposal. Any new application must comply with the terms of the Petroleum Act 1987 and will need at least to satisfy those issues which demonstrated that deep sea disposal was the BPEO. Only in these circumstances would the Government modify the programme previously approved.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade in what circumstances a best practicable environmental option would be required for the decommissioning of the Brent Spar outside the United Kingdom; and what authorisation his Department would be required to give in order to permit the decommissioning outside the United Kingdom. [12611]

Mr. Page: While the Brent Spar remains an installation for which the United Kingdom accepts responsibility internationally, its owners and operators are required by section 1 of the Petroleum Act 1987 to obtain the approval of an abandonment programme for its disposal. Under the agreement with Norway under which the Brent Spar is parked in Norwegian waters, the United Kingdom retains responsibility for the installation.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the Government's preferred option for the disposal of the Brent Spar; and what licences or best practicable environmental option would be required to comply with this option. [12596]

Mr. Page: The Government previously approved a deep sea option for the disposal of the Brent Spar. The owners have not followed that option through. Shell is now considering a range of options. For any alternative to be approved under the terms of the Petroleum Act 1987 it must at least match the approved best practicable environmental option.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the status of the draft guidelines published for consultation in 1995 for disposal and decommissioning of offshore redundant oil and gas installations. [12597]

Mr. Page: The guidance notes, which were issued as a consultation document, embodied what Ministers considered were appropriate steps to ensure the proper consideration of any application for the approval of proposals for the removal and disposal of disused offshore installations. We shall reconsider them in the light of the comments made and the outcomes of current discussions in international forums on this subject. In the meantime, we shall follow their spirit in dealing with any applications which have to be decided.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade by what means his Department takes into account public opinion in establishing the best practicable environmental option in pollution control; and to what extent these procedures have been adopted in the disposal of the Brent Spar. [12600]

Mr. Page: Within the statutory requirements, it is for each authority responsible for pollution control to establish its own means of assessing public opinion on the matters which it must decide. In the case of applications for the approval of abandonment programmes for the disposal of disused offshore installations, the owners of an installation are required to carry out consultations with a range of organisations representing fisheries, amenity and environmental interests. This was done in the case of the Brent Spar. There is a need for clear, public understanding of the issues involved in decommissioning offshore installations and the Government accept that the decision-making process should be as transparent as possible. Revised consultation procedures are currently being considered.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what advice his Department has issued to Shell UK, in respect of decommissioning the Brent Spar outside the United Kingdom. [12934]

Mr. Page: My Department has given no such advice.

EU Funds (Applications)

Mr. MacShane: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful applications have been made by United Kingdom organisations in the past four years to obtain financial support from the EU for (i) telematics applications, (ii) controlled thermonuclear fusion projects and (iii) energy infrastructures; and what funds have already been allocated to the United Kingdom for these purposes. [12344]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Financial support from the EU for collaborative research projects in each of the three areas is available from the framework programme. However, full information on research projects funded in individual members states is held only by the European Commission, and is not distributed to member states. Accordingly, information on the numbers of successful and unsuccessful applications from the UK, as well as the precise funds allocated, is not available.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) how much electricity is currently generated per annum in England from combined heat and power plants; and what is the percentage of the total electricity generated in England provided by CHP stations; [13447]

(2) how many sites in Wales presently operate combined heat and power stations; and what is the total output of electricity generated by these plants. [13322]

Mr. Page: My Department collects data relating to electricity generated on a United Kingdom basis. The electricity generated in the United Kingdom from combined heat and power plants and the percentage of electricity provided by CHP are:

	1993	*1994*	*1995*
Electricity generated by CHP	14,171 GWh	12,152 GWh	17,761 GWh
Electricity generated by CHP as a percentage of total electricity generated	4.4	3.7	5.3

Source:
Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics 1996.

Mr. Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the opportunities to increase employment in the power generation sector through the building of further combined heat and power plants. [13398]

Mr. Page: We are committed to the wider use of CHP. The Government recently published a national strategy and has a target to increase CHP capacity to 5,000 MW by the year 2000. This target was set primarily to pursue energy efficiency and climate change objectives, and while increased employment may well also result, no such assessment has been made.

Coal Imports

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the total quantities of coal imported last year by country indicating the primary ports used for import. [13320]

Mr. Page: Latest available data for the quantities of coal imported into the United Kingdom cover the period January to September 1996 and are as follows:

	Thousand tonnes
European Union[1]	324
Non European Union	12,439
Total	12,763

[1] Includes extra EU coal routed through the Netherlands.

Imports of coal into the United Kingdom for 1995 by country are as follows:

	Thousand tonnes
European Union[1]	283
Australia	3,641
Canada	1,364
Columbia	2,687
Czech Republic	2
Estonia	59
India	9
Indonesia	65
Norway	2
People's Republic of China	77
Poland	1,274
Republic of South Africa	1,313
Russia	160
United States of America	4,858
Vietnam	101
Total	15,896

[1] Includes extra EU coal routed through the Netherlands.

From the information available the following ports have been used in 1996 for the import of coal:

Southampton
Newport (Gwent)
Cardiff
Swansea
Goole
Immingham
Ipswich
Belfast
Londonderry
Warrenpoint
Port Talbot
Middlesbrough
London (including Tilbury)
Thamesport
Avonmouth
Liverpool
Felixstowe
Great Yarmouth

Quantities of coal imported through each port are not available because details have been suppressed by HM Customs and Excise to maintain commercial confidentiality.

Source: HM Customs and Excise.

Coal Production

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total quantity of coal produced by *(a)* deep mines and *(b)* opencast mines, in the United Kingdom last year; and what proportion was produced in Wales. [13321]

Mr. Page: My Department's provisional estimates of coal production in 1996 are 33 million tonnes for deep mines and 16 million tonnes for opencast mines. Actual production in 1995 for deep mines and opencast mines was 35.2 million tonnes and 16.4 million tonnes respectively. The Coal Authority has published production data for Wales for the financial year 1995–96 at 3.4 per cent. of total UK deep-mined production and 13 per cent. of total UK opencast production.

Trade and Investment (European Union)

Mr. Colvin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentage of Britain's world trade was with European Union member states in each of the last 10 years; and what has been the rate of growth of this trade relative to Britain's trade with the rest of the world. [13682]

Mr. Greg Knight *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* The available information is given in the table:

UK exports and imports of goods

£ billion, current prices

	EU15	*Rest of the world*	*EU as per cent. of world*
1986	86.7	68.1	56.0
1987	96.2	73.6	56.7
1988	104.6	77.6	57.4
1989	119.7	89.2	57.3
1990	128.9	93.3	58.0
1991	128.1	89.0	59.0
1992	134.4	93.4	59.0
1993	143.2	113.0	55.9
1994	159.1	121.0	56.8
1995	181.6	134.7	57.4
January–November			
1995	166.3	122.9	57.5
1996	176.1	139.0	55.9
Average annual growth rate, 1986–95 (per cent.)	8.6	7.9	

Source:
Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics, November 1996, ONS.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the current value of British investment in European Union member states and of the current value of each member state's investment in the United Kingdom. [13685]

Mr. Knight *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* Information on UK inward and outward investment with the European Union for 1995 was published by the Office for National Statistics in "First Release ONS (96) 268 Overseas Direct Investment 1995" dated 17 December 1996. The publication is available in the Library of the House.

Inward Investment

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the value of inward investment in each of the last five years that has located in Britain from *(a)* the Caribbean, *(b)* South Africa, *(c)* Canada, *(d)* South Korea and *(e)* Japan. [13196]

Mr. Greg Knight *[holding answer 28 January 1997]:* There are no figures available for the Caribbean. However, according to OECD flow figures the value of inward investment into the UK from the other four listed countries is:

£ million

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
(a) South Africa	38	30	84	59	50
(b) Canada	–265	264	–46	34	–113
(c) South Korea	–1,200	–22	105	34	39
(d) Japan	2,091	48	–22	279	–60

Source:
International direct Investment Statistics Yearbook, 1996, OECD.

Notes:
1. These flow figures include UK disposals by foreign companies. Flow figures are volatile and fluctuate year to year in part due to the cyclical nature of reinvestment profits and of mergers and acquisition activity.
2. The negative flow figures represent disinvestment in the UK by inward investors. An inward investor may for example sell a UK-based company to a UK investor. This is not outward investment but negative inward investment.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

BSE

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the total costs of the BSE crisis in Britain from 1 April 1996 to date, categorised according to *(a)* payments to abattoirs, *(b)* payments to renderers, *(c)* compensation paid to farmers and *(d)* other costs. [12772]

Mrs. Browning: Between 1 April and 31 December 1996 the total expenditure on BSE eradication and compensation schemes broken down by recipient was as follows:

	£ million
(a) Payments to abattoirs	161.8
(b) Payments to renderers	104.7
(c) Compensation paid to farmers	553.3
(d) Other costs	35.3

Rabies

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to conclude his review of rabies law. [13255]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 29 January 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on 15 January 1997, *Official Report*, column *288*.

Farm Animals (Breeding)

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he has taken in response to the report of the Committee on Ethical Implications of the Emerging Technologies in the Breeding of Farm Animals. [13446]

Mrs. Browning: The Government have made significant progress in taking forward the various recommendations in this report.

In particular, the Farm Animal Welfare Council has already agreed to adopt the general principles set out in the report and has also established arrangements for liaison with the Animal Procedures Committee.

MAFF holds annual meetings on the need to conserve farm animal breeds, maintains a register of breeds and supports research on animal biodiversity. The Government are continuing to support internationally harmonised controls on genetically modified organisms and efforts to achieve an acceptable EU patents directive.

Cattle Carcases

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what weight of *(a)* meat and bonemeal and *(b)* carcases from cattle slaughtered in the over-30-months scheme have been transported from mainland Britain to Northern Ireland; and at what cost. [13625]

Mr. Baldry: No meat and bonemeal or carcases from cattle slaughtered in the over-30-months scheme have been transported from mainland Britain to Northern Ireland.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what have been the transportation costs in each of the last 12 months of moving BSE waste and carcases between storage, rendering and disposal sites. [13626]

Mr. Baldry: BSE suspects are killed on farm and transported to incinerators for destruction. Transport costs are not recorded separately but are included in an account which covers the costs of transport, incineration and disposal, drugs and miscellaneous other expenses for disposal of BSE suspects. The total expenditure under this account for each month in 1996 was:

Month	*Amount £*
January	327,016
February	205,336
March	407,416
April	140,599
May	234,538
June	213,368
July	215,727
August	141,949
September	155,235
October	248,798
November	162,440
December	153,149
Total	2,605,571

Transportation costs could be separated only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many and what tonnage of cattle carcases destroyed in the over-30-months scheme are currently being stored in the four dry warehouses and six cold storage depots in Northern Ireland in *(a)* tonnes and *(b)* number of cattle carcases. [13624]

Mr. Baldry: The information requested is as follows:

	Tonnes	*Number of cattle*
Dry stores[1]	34,390	—
Cold stores[2]	15,535	45,610

[1] As at 17 January 1997.
[2] Current.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will seek the exclusion of genetically modified organisms and their derivatives from the definition of organic production in the European Union regulations. [13706]

Mrs. Browning: The UK Government believe that genetic technology has the potential for widespread benefit, subject to adequate controls on its use. However, we support the UK organic industry in its wish to see, for the time being, genetically modified organisms specifically prohibited in EC legislation relating to organic farming and food processing.

The position of derivatives from GMOs, particularly those that are indistinguishable from more conventional products, is more complex. These complexities stem from the practicalities of policing and enforcing any prohibition. We will be considering our position in light of any proposals from the EC Commission.

Marine Contracts

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many contracts have been won by his Department for *(a)* consultancy work and *(b)* survey work on behalf of developers in the marine environment in each of the last five years; [14096]

(2) if he will list the contracts carried out by his Department for *(a)* consultancy and *(b)* survey works for developers in the marine environment in each of the last five years; [14095]

Mr. Baldry: The centre for environment, fisheries and aquaculture science, formerly the directorate of fisheries research, which is part of this Department, has been awarded six contracts for monitoring the effects of aggregate extraction on specific aspects of the marine environment. Details of these contracts are:

Project	*Date*	*Duration*	*Number of reports*
Survey of aggregate extraction, licensed area 107[1]	September 1994	8 months	1
1995 survey of area 107	August 1995	9 months	2
Dredger plume survey, area 107	October 1995	3 months	1
Annual monitoring, area 107	October 1995	4 years	1 each year
Shrimp monitoring programme, area 107	October 1995	4 years	1 each year
Sole monitoring survey, Hastings shingle bank	March 1996	5 years	1 each year

[1] Area 107 is of the Wash.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many reports on environmental surveys in the marine environment have been carried out by his Department as the contractor reporting to his Department as the regulator in each of the last five years. [14097]

Mr. Baldry: Aggregate extraction is regulated by the Department of the Environment under the non-statutory government view procedure. MAFF advises on the potential impact of aggregate dredging on the marine environment and on commercial fishing operations. The table sets out the number of applications which have been accepted under this procedure in each of the past five years:

1992: 1

1993: 0

1994: 5

1995: 2

1996: 3

In each of these cases, the centre for environment, fisheries and aquaculture science has contributed a report on its assessment of the application to assist the Department in making its contribution to the Government view. These arrangements will be recognised in a formal relationship with the new agency which will operate from 1 April this year.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures are in place to ensure there is not a conflict of interest between that part of his Department seeking consultancy work on the marine environment from developers and that part of his Department acting as regulator. [14098]

Mr. Baldry: Consultancy assignments are accepted by the centre for environment, fisheries and aquaculture science only on the basis that the work involved requires an objective assessment. Scientists who provide regulatory advice do not contribute to them.

Suckler Cow Premiums

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of suckler cow premium payments in England for the current year had been paid by 1 January 1997. [13940]

Mr. Baldry: By 1 January 1997, approximately 61 per cent. of advance payments under the 1996 suckler cow premium scheme had been made. All advance payments are expected to be made by the citizens charter deadline of 5 March 1997. The vast majority of balance payments will be made between mid-April and 30 June 1997.

WALES

Newcastle Disease

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of *(a)* chickens and *(b)* turkeys on farms in Wales are currently vaccinated against Newcastle disease; and if he will make a statement. [13601]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: There is no statutory requirement for routine vaccination against Newcastle disease, and the information requested is not held centrally.

Illegal Drugs

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what research his Department has commissioned into the causes of illegal drug use in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [13870]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh drug and alcohol unit has produced a review of drug and alcohol research in Wales and is in the process of identifying what further research needs to be undertaken to inform implementation of the Welsh drug and alcohol strategy.

Small Firms

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many business failures among firms employing fewer than 20 employees there were in Wales in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1991, *(c)* 1992, *(d)* 1993, *(e)* 1994 and *(f)* 1995; and if he will make a statement. [13882]

Mr. Hague: Official statistics on business failures are not available separately for Wales.

Planning Appeals

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many planning appeals, decided by inspectors appointed by his Department, were allowed in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993, *(c)* 1994 and *(d)* 1995; and if he will make a statement. [13871]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Apart from 1992, the information available is collected by financial years as follows:

Planning appeals decided by inspectors[1]

	1992	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Allowed	375	323	277	245
Dismissed	745	594	560	456

[1] Appeals under Section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

Community Care (Abuse)

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many community care abuse cases *(a)* have been reported over the last two years and *(b)* are being investigated by his Department and its social services directorate. [13497]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Department is not aware of any such cases.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for the planned spending figures for (i) 1997–98 and (ii) 1998–99 for each of the programmes for which he is responsible, the *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms change on the equivalent amounts for 1996-97 including those shown in his expenditure plans for 1996. [14100]

Mr. Hague: The information is given in the table:

Changes from 1996–97 original plans as set out in Cm 3215

Programme	*1997–98*		*1998–99*	
	Cash prices	*Real terms*[1]	*Cash prices*	*Real terms*[1]
Agriculture	–14	–19	–23	–33
Industry	65	61	84	76
Training	–7	–9	–11	–16
Roads	–63	–67	–97	–103
Housing	–2	–12	–27	–45
Other environmental services (including AEF)	10	–41	24	–79
Education	33	22	11	–9
Arts and libraries	–	–0	0	–1
Health and personal social services	65	19	110	17
Central administration	1	–1	–1	–4

[1] At 1996–97 prices.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what was the percentage increase in inflation which he allowed for settling the level of standard spending assessment and capped expenditure in framing the local government settlement for 1997–98; and what was the cash value of the provisions made; [14101]

(2) what cash provision was made for (i) inflation and (ii) new burdens in setting the level of capped expenditure and standard spending assessment for 1997–98; and if he will list each new burden and the cash value of each allowed for in the settlement. [14102]

Mr. Hague: My settlement proposals take account of inflationary pressures and new burdens on local authorities in the context of what the country can afford and local authorities' capacity to make efficiency savings. It is for local authorities to decide how they allocate the resources available to them. I do not earmark settlement funds for specific purposes. I have, however, made allowance for additional community care money and the transfer of mental handicap/mental illness strategy and capital disregard resources to the settlement in my provisional capping principles.

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the measures taken by his Department to ensure that accurate information on the nursery voucher scheme is disseminated to schools and parents [13935]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Welsh Office issued a question and answer guide to all head teachers in January 1996. Subsequently, the Department issued two detailed guides to the scheme to all potential providers of nursery education, including maintained schools, together with a registration pack for all participants and information leaflets for parents. Parents have been sent notice of the eligibility of their children for vouchers and other details by the nursery voucher centre followed by application forms for vouchers. All parents who have written to the Department about the scheme have been sent an individual response giving accurate information. The nursery voucher centre operates a bilingual helpline for parents and all potential providers.

Local education authorities have been sent copies of all information issued to parents and schools and have been consulted in the detailed development of the scheme. Some authorities and teachers attended the seven information seminars arranged by the Welsh Office for the private and voluntary sectors, which were attended by almost 800 people.

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many head teachers from Denbighshire took up the offer by his Department to be briefed on the nursery voucher scheme; [14058]

(2) how many head teachers from Conwy have been briefed by his Department on the nursery voucher scheme; [13943]

(3) if he will make a statement on the progress made by *(a)* Conwy local education authority and *(b)* Denbighshire local education authority in implementing the nursery voucher scheme. [13947]

Mr. Evans: The Welsh Office ran a series of information seminars for the private and voluntary sectors at the end of 1996 and offered to arrange joint Welsh Office—local education authority seminars for the maintained sector. LEAs preferred to make their own arrangements, although a number of LEA and school representatives attended the Welsh Office seminars. Welsh Office officials met members of the Denbighshire Federation of Headteachers in July 1996. Both authorities have made block applications for their schools to participate in the voucher scheme.

Suckler Cow Premium

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of suckler cow premium payments in Wales for the current year had been paid by 1 January 1997. [13938]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Around 53 per cent. of 1996 eligible suckler cow premium claims had been paid an advance as at 1 January 1997.

By now this figure has increased to 66 per cent.

The Department aim, set out in the charter for farmers in Wales is to complete advance suckler cow premium payments by 5 March 1997.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the allocation of assisted places scheme places to each school for 1996–97 and 1997–98. [14054]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The allocation of new places under the assisted places scheme to each school in Wales in academic years 1996–97 and 1997–98 is as follows:

School	*New places*	*Total places, September 1966 (including "pool" places)*[1]
Christ College, Brecon	26	101
Pfynone House, Swansea	7	7
Howell's, Cardiff	34	186
Howell's, Denbigh	25	83
Kings Monkton, Cardiff	10	11
Llandovery College	18	69
Monmouth Boys	27	146
Monmouth Girls	18	82
Rougemont School, Newport	14	15
Ruthin School	8	11
Rydal Penrhos, Colwyn Bay	43	142
St. Clare's School, Porthcawl	10	14
St. Gerard's School, Bangor	8	9
St. John's College, Cardiff	10	11
Total	258	887

[1] In addition, 14 new places are reserved in a "pool", against which oversubscribed schools can bid annually for additional places. Bids will be invited shortly.

Teachers (Early Retirement)

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of teachers in *(a)* Conwy and *(b)* Denbighshire are expected to have retired before the age of 60 years in 1996–97. [14056]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of teachers in the former Clwyd local education authority retired before the age of 60 years in each of the last five years. [14057]

Mr. Evans: The information requested is shown in the table:

School teachers in the former Clwyd LEA taking early retirement as a percentage of school teachers in service[1,2]

	Percentage of teachers in Clwyd taking early retirement
1991–92	3.0
1992–93	3.4
1993–94	3.6
1994–95	4.2
1995–96	3.1

[1] Includes grant-maintained and independent school staff who are in the Teachers' Superannuation Scheme (TSS). Excludes those returning to non pensionable occasional service for years 1991–92 and 1992–93. Data not available for 1993–94 onwards.

[2] Includes all teachers in service with the LEA and grant-maintained schools.

Education Funding

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will make a statement on the additional finance intended for education in 1997–98; [14060]

(2) if he will make a statement on the consequences of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's announcement that additional funding would be made available for education in 1997–98; and how much additional money he plans to provide to each local education authority to allocate to education. [14059]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The provision for education announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget statement on 26 November relates to England. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales announced his spending plans for 1997–98 on 12 December 1996. He announced direct provision of £566 million for education in Wales, including the highest-ever level of capital provision for schools at £68 million. This is additional to resources provided to local authorities for the running costs of their schools and other education services as part of their standard spending assessments. Overall, these SSAs are increased by 2.3 per cent. for 1997–98, in line with the increase in English total standard spending for local authorities. They are not hypothecated to particular services. It is for individual local authorities to decide what they wish to spend on education.

Rhuddlan Bypass

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he estimates the Rhuddlan bypass will be *(a)* completed and *(b)* open. [13942]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Denbighshire county council estimates completion and opening by late April or early May.

Dental Services

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the schemes to improve NHS dentistry in *(a)* Conwy and *(b)* Denbighshire. [13944]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The £3 million initiative announced in September 1995 enabled Welsh health authorities to offer grants to attract new dentists into those parts of Wales where they are most needed, and to expand the community dental service.

The effect of the initiative in Conwy and Denbighshire is that, in Conwy, grant aid has been offered for three new dental practices, one of which is already open, and to the Clwydian Community Care NHS trust to recruit an additional dentist in the community dental service. In Denbighshire, grant aid has been offered to one new dental practice that is already open, and to one existing practice that has taken on additional dentists. The Clwydian Community Care NHS trust has also been offered grant aid to recruit a new dentist for a new mobile surgery which is being funded by the Welsh Office initiative.

Beef Industry

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on measures taken to help the beef sector since 1992. [13945]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The package of reforms to the common agriculture policy agreed in 1992 provided for the introduction in 1993 of the beef special premium scheme and suckler cow premium scheme. These schemes have injected £164.4 million into the beef sector in Wales since 1 January 1993.

Following the statement by my right hon. Friend on 20 March 1996, the Government have committed £3.5 billion to support the industry in the UK, over four years, on the following measures in response to the BSE crisis:

Scheme	*Payments in Wales*
Beef marketing payments scheme 1	£1.27 million (paid early October 1996)
Beef marketing payments scheme 2	Estimated £1.6 million to be paid
Slaughtering industry (emergency aid) scheme	£622,863 paid to Welsh abattoirs
Beef stocks transfer scheme	£312,494 paid to Welsh participants (to 24 January 1997)
Beef special premium supplementary payments	£4.47 million paid to date
Suckler cow premium supplementary payments	£4.1 million paid to date
Over thirty months scheme	—[1]
Calf processing scheme	—[1]
Selective cull	—[1]
Clean beef top up	—[1]
Beef and beef products disposal service	—[1]
Animal feed disposal service	—[1]
Intervention support	—[1]
Aid to the rendering industry	—[1]

[1] Not disaggregated from United Kingdom total

Working Time Directive

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the impact of implementing the working time directive on *(a)* the tourism industry and *(b)* the agriculture sector. [14055]

Mr. Hague: The impact would depend on the implementing legislation. Decisions on legislation have not yet been taken and the Government are consulting on the options. A compliance cost assessment was published as part of the consultation document, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Ministerial Committees

Mr. Key: To ask the Lord President of the Council on what date in December 1996 and January 1997 he attended the Ministerial Committee on Co-ordination and Presentation of Government Policy. [14126]

Mr. Newton: In accordance with the principle of collective responsibility for Government decisions, including the need to maintain the frankness and candour of internal discussion and advice, details of proceedings of Cabinet committees are not published.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 4 February 1997

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Members' Staff

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many right hon. and hon. Members employ *(a)* no staff, *(b)* one member of staff, *(c)* two members of staff and *(d)* more than two members of staff. [13088]

Mr. Newton: The information requested is as follows:

(a) eight Members

(b) 92 Members

(c) 249 Members

(d) 299 Members

These figures relate to the 648 right hon. and hon. Members currently sitting at 31 January 1997.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many staff are employed by right hon. and hon. Members. [13087]

Mr. Newton: At 31 January 1997 there were 1,753 staff employed by right hon. and hon. Members.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Magistrates Courts

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what are his current proposals for the amalgamation of magistrates courts in England and Wales; if he will list the consultation processes on those proposals with starting dates and deadlines for submissions; what representations he has received so far (i) in favour and (ii) against the proposals; if he will list the costs of the proposed amalgamations; what account has been taken of *(a)* the number of cases to be heard in and *(b)* the catchment areas of and maximum travel distances to, the newly amalgamated courts; and if he will make a statement. [14108]

Mr. Streeter: I have no proposals for the amalgamation of magistrates courts in England and Wales. Magistrates courts are provided by the local paying authority for the use of the magistrates courts committee. Closure decisions are for the MCC to determine, after consultation with the paying authority. The paying authority can appeal to the Lord Chancellor against the MCC's decision within one month of its receiving written notice of the determination.

The following magistrates courthouse closures are currently the subject of appeal: Biddulph, Blaenau Ffestiniog, Cheadle, Kidsgrove, Llangollen, Otley and Pontadawe. There have been a number of written and oral representations both in favour and against these appeals. Costs, work load, catchment areas and maximum travel distances are all taken into account in reaching decisions on appeals.

PRIME MINISTER

Chequers

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what have been the running costs of Chequers for each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement. [13612]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* Chequers is established under the Chequers Estate Acts 1917 and 1958 and is administered by independent trustees who receive an annual grant from public funds towards its maintenance in accordance with the Acts. In the last five years the grant has been:

1992–93: £260,000

1993–94: £266,000

1994–95: £226,000

1995–96: £233,000

1996–97: £226,000.

The Government also contribute to the cost of the household staff at Chequers. Over the same period expenditure—net of VAT refunds—has been:

1992–93: £428,287

1993–94: £251,460

1994–95: £301,960

1995–96: £221,280

1996–97: £240,000 (estimate).

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister how many days he has spent in residence at Chequers in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [13613]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* In the last five years, my family and I have made regular use of Chequers for a variety of purposes, in accordance with the wishes of the donor, Lord Lee, and the Chequers Estate Acts.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 February. [12877]

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 February. [12878]

The Prime Minister: This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the impact on the Lockerbie case of the recent acquittal by the United States authorities of Mr. Juval Aviv on charges of deception. [13089]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply he received from the Minister of State, Scottish Office, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton), on 27 January, *Official Report*, columns *70–71*.

The acquittal of Mr. Juval Aviv by a jury after trial in the New York southern district court on charges of deception has no bearing on the validity of the case against the two Libyans accused in respect of the Lockerbie bombing.

Ministerial Severance Payments

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister whether Ministers leaving office immediately following the general election will have their severance payments based on the salary scale in force on polling day or that applicable on the day after polling day. [14150]

Mr. Freeman: I have been asked to reply.

Severance payments will be made in accordance with the Ministerial and other Pensions and Salaries Act 1991 and will, therefore, mean that severance pay to former Ministers is based on the same rate as the salaries paid to new and continuing Ministers.

DEFENCE

Joint Services Command and Staff College

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress there has been on inviting industrial consortiums to provide a permanent joint services command and staff college. [14588]

Mr. Soames: I am pleased to announce that the Joint Services Command and Staff College will be at Shrivenham from September 1999. The college will be a centre of military excellence, building on the worldwide renown of its prestigious predecessors to maintain our global reputation for command and staff training.

A Serco/Laing consortium, Defence Management, has been selected as the preferred bidder. We shall be assisted in the academic support for the new college by Kings college London which is world renowned for its contribution to military studies.

The new college will be in purpose built accommodation on a greenfield site within the perimeter of the Royal Military college of science. Subject to successful detailed negotiations Defence Management will be awarded a contract for the provision of the accommodation, facilities management and academic support required for the new college, in June 1997. Until the permanent site is available, we shall run courses at interim sites, mainly at Bracknell.

The staff college at Camberley has played an important and historic role for the Army. We intend to identify a fitting and appropriate military use for this historic building. I intend to report on our plans for its future occupancy before the summer recess.

Trades unions were consulted fully when the decision to explore the options for private financing was made. In accordance with normal procedures, they are being informed of the choice of the preferred bidder and will be consulted again, after a contract has been placed, about the possible transfer arrangements for civilian staff working at the interim sites.

Cigarettes (Service Personnel)

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the number of cigarettes purchased at discounted or duty-free prices by service personnel serving outside the United Kingdom in each of the last three years; and what is the number of people eligible for those supplies. [12409]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 28 January 1997]:* I have made no such estimate. The figures requested are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Arms Sales (Turkey)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the arms sales to Turkey assisted by the Defence Export Services Organisation in each of the last three years. [13936]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 3 February 1997]:* DESO facilitates contact between British industry and Turkish Government officials to help them promote their products and services. Comprehensive records are not kept of those export orders which result directly or indirectly from DESO involvement and such information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Admiralty House

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what were the running costs of Admiralty house for each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [13618]

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* Responsibility for Admiralty house transferred from the Department of the Environment to the Cabinet Office on 1 April 1996. The approximate running costs for each of the last five years are as follows:

1992–93: £779,000
1993–94: £755,000
1994–95: £601,000
1995–96: £723,000
1996–97 (to date): £184,000.

Ministerial Committees

Mr. Key: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister on what date he chaired the Ministerial Committee on Co-ordination and Presentation of Government Policy which considered the outcome of the competition for the food supply contract for the armed forces. [14122]

The Deputy Prime Minister: In accordance with the principle of collective responsibility for Government decisions, including the need to maintain the frankness

and candour of internal discussion and advice, details of the proceedings of Cabinet and Cabinet Committees are not published.

Mr. Key: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) on what dates in December 1996 and January 1997 he attended the Ministerial Committee on Co-ordination and Presentation of Government Policy; [14124]

(2) what dates in December 1996 and January 1997 the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury attended the Ministerial Committee on Co-ordination and Presentation of Government Policy. [14123]

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 3 February 1997]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to him yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council.

Mr. Key: To ask the Minister without Portfolio on what dates in December 1996 and January 1997 he attended the Ministerial Committee on Co-ordination and Presentation of Government Policy. [14125]

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 3 February 1997]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to him yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council.

ENVIRONMENT

Housing

7. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the impact of the Budget on housing. [12506]

Mr. Curry: We receive representations and pursue discussion on all issues relating to housing.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is his latest estimate of the total number of houses in multiple occupation in England and the total number of occupants of such accommodation using the categories contained in his Department's consultative paper on the licensing of multi-occupied houses; [13786]

(2) what is his latest estimate of the total number of *(a)* multi-occupied houses in England which are occupied by no more than three persons other than the responsible person and any other member of his household and *(b)* occupants of such accommodation; [13784]

(3) what is his latest estimate of the total number of multi-occupied houses in England which are owned by *(a)* housing associations, *(b)* universities and *(c)* other educational establishments; and what is the total number of occupants of such accommodation; [13783]

(4) what is his latest estimate of the total number of multi-occupied houses in England which consist entirely of self-contained flats where *(a)* at least one-third are let on leases of 21 years or more and are occupied by the lessees and their households and *(b)* the building work carried out when the flats were created had to comply with the relevant fire safety requirements in the Building Regulations 1985 or Building Act 1984 regulations; and how many occupants of such accommodation there are currently; [13780]

(5) what is his latest estimate of the total number of *(a)* multi-occupied houses in England occupied by no more than four persons who form more than two households and *(b)* occupants of such accommodation. [13785]

Mr. Curry: The following information on numbers and occupants of houses in multiple occupation is available from my Department's survey of English local authorities in 1995. All figures relate to 1995.

Category of house	*Number of houses*	*Number of occupants*
Traditional HMOs	110,642	631,467
Shared houses/flats	100,043	343,187
Households with lodgers	41,272	106,645
Purpose built HMOs	17,399	246,354
Hostels, guest and boarding houses	16,665	237,717
Converted self contained flats	352,285	1,533,597
Totals	638,306	3,098.967

According to this survey, a total of 47,171 HMOs were owned by housing associations.

The other information requested is not available.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table on a similar basis to the one included in the 1995 White Paper, "Housing: Our Future Homes", showing the total expenditure planned for 1997–98 and equivalent figures for 1978–79, breaking down expenditure to show *(a)* capital investment by local authorities, *(b)* capital investment by housing associations and other social landlords, *(c)* general and means-tested subsidies to home owners, *(d)* general and means tested subsidies to council tenants and *(e)* means-tested subsidies to private and housing association tenants. [13794]

Mr. Curry: The information is as follows:

£ billion in 1996–97 prices

England	*1979–80*	*1995–96*	*1997–98*
Capital investment by local authorities	7.8	2.1	1.7
Capital investment by housing associations and other social landlords (public finance element, excluding capital investment by local authorities)	1.1	1.3	0.8
General and means-tested subsidies to home owners	3.8	3.9	n/a
General and means-tested subsidies to council tenants	8.4	5.4	5.3
Means-tested subsidies to private and housing association tenants	0.5	5	5.6
Total	21.6	17.8	n/a

n/a = not available.

The table summarises help given towards housing costs through public spending and mortgage interest tax relief on the basis requested. Information for 1978–79 is not

kept in this format. Figures for 1997–98 are preliminary forecasts and such forecasts are not available for mortgage interest tax relief.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the local reference rent for *(a)* a self-contained one bedroomed flat and *(b)* a single room in shared accommodation for each local authority in England. [13782]

Mr. Curry: My Department produces the "Rent Officer Statistics" publication on a quarterly basis which includes averages of all the rent determinations made by rent officers for private lettings, by property type and size, in each registration area in England and Wales. The publication covering the first quarter of 1996 was published on 17 January 1997. Copies are available in the Library. The only statistics produced at the local authority level are those for the London boroughs.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the total number of homes for renting from local authorities, housing associations and other registered social landlords which will be started in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000. [13790]

Mr. Curry: My Department does not make forward estimates of the total number of homes for renting which will be started by local authorities, housing associations and other registered social landlords. The Housing Corporation's central estimate of the number of approvals which will be granted to registered social landlords under the rental component of its approved development programme over the three years 1997–98 to 1999–2000 is 48,100. The Corporation will be publishing details of its approved development programme shortly. Further homes for rent will also be started under other programmes including local authority housing association grant, the single regeneration budget and the rough sleepers initiative.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the total number of council homes sold *(a)* under the right to buy and *(b)* otherwise in each local authority area in England, in the periods (i) 1979 to 1983, (ii) 1984 to 1987, (iii) 1988 to 1992 and (iv) 1993 to 1996. [13792]

Mr. Curry: Tables showing the available information on total right-to-buy sales in each English local authority for each financial year from 1979–89 are in the Library. An update of the tables including data for sales in the period April to September 1996 will be placed in the Library in the next few weeks.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many homes have been acquired under the rents-to-mortgages scheme in *(a)* 1994, *(b)* 1995 and *(c)* 1996; and what is his estimate of the number likely to be acquired in 1997. [13787]

Mr. Curry: Local authorities in England have reported seven sales under the rent-to-mortgage scheme in 1994, nine in 1995 and seven in the first nine months of 1996. My Department has made no estimate of future sales.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the total number of new lettings which will be generated for social housing purposes in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000. [13789]

Mr. Curry: On current plans, we estimate that the total number of new lettings for social housing purposes will be *(a)* 58,500, in 1997–98, *(b)* 47,200 in 1998–99 an *(c)* 42,000 in 1999–2000.

Rented Accommodation

10. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many new rented housing starts he estimates will be created by *(a)* housing associations and *(b)* local authorities in (i) 1995–96 and (ii) 1996–97. [12510]

Mr. Clappison: In England, the Housing Corporation granted approvals to housing associations for 38,700 new rented homes in 1995–96 and 38,900 in 1996–97. These figures include new build and rehabilitation using funding from the approved development programme and local authority housing association grant. Further homes are provided through single regeneration budget funding and housing associations' own resources. Local authorities started around 500 new homes in England in 1995–96 and a similar figure is expected for 1996–97.

Packaging Waste

14. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received regarding the regulations on producer responsibility for packaging waste. [12514]

Mr. Gummer: The regulations were laid on 29 January and are based on the industry agreement reached on 15 December 1995. The final version of the regulations took into account responses representing more than 53,000 businesses.

Regional Government (South-East)

18. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received concerning regional government in the south-east. [12518]

Mr. Curry: I receive representations on regional government from time to time. The Government see no case for setting up new bodies to provide regional government which would simply add an unwanted and unnecessary additional tier of bureaucracy and cost to existing arrangements.

Local Government Finance (Manchester)

19. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the revenue support grant settlement for Manchester. [12519]

Sir Paul Beresford: The local government finance report for 1997–98 was laid before the House on Monday 27 January and was debated yesterday.

Contaminated Land

20. **Mr. Faulds:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received regarding the guidance that his Department gives on contaminated land. [12520]

Mr. Clappison: We have received some 300 responses to the consultation document published on 18 September on draft statutory guidance to be issued under part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Environmental Information (Open Government Code)

21. **Dr. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what contribution his Department has made to the publication of environmental information under the terms of the open government code. [12522]

Mr. Gummer: On more than 40 occasions environmental information was made available when policy proposals and decisions were announced.

Air Pollution

23. **Mr. Olner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received regarding air pollution. [12523]

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Hammersmtih (Mr. Soley) earlier today.

Local Government Finance

24. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received on proposed changes to the calculation of the area cost adjustment. [12524]

Sir Paul Beresford: During the consultation period on the 1997–98 local government finance settlement I received 87 representations proposed changes to the calculation of the area cost adjustment.

25. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many councils have spent above their capping limit. [12525]

Sir Paul Beresford: Legally no authority can set a budget above its cap. However, an authority can set a budget above the level of its provisional cap and be designated by the Secretary of State at a level at or below its budget. A total of 46 authorities have done so since 1991–92, of which 17 have been designated at a level above their provisional cap. A local authority's budget for capping purposes excludes some types of spending, such as spending financed by specific grant.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each local authority in England the total amount of *(a)* usable and *(b)* set-aside capital receipts estimated to be held at 31 March 1996. [13791]

Mr. Curry: A list of the amounts of accumulated usable capital receipts for each local authority in England at 31 March 1996 has been placed in the Library of the House.

Figures for the amounts of set-aside capital receipts are not available. These form part of the provision for credit liabilities, which is reported to the Department, but which also includes amounts set aside from revenue.

Local Government Finance (North Yorkshire)

26. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total amount spent on local government in North Yorkshire in the year *(a)* before and *(b)* after reorganisation. [12526]

Mr. Curry: The total budgeted net revenue expenditure by authorities in North Yorkshire was *(a)* £546.3 million in 1995–96 pre-reorganisation, and *(b)* £568.9 million in 1996–97 post-reorganisation.

Comparable pre-and post-reorganisation estimates of capital expenditure are not yet available. However, central Government support—credit approvals and grants—for capital expenditure by authorities in North Yorkshire is estimated as *(a)* £36.2 million in 1995–96, and *(b)* £35.2 million in 1996–97.

Ministerial Visit (Redbridge)

27. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next plans to visit the London borough of Redbridge to discuss local authority spending plans. [12527]

Sir Paul Beresford:: I met the London borough of Redbridge on 7 January to discuss its local authority spending plans. I have no plans at present to visit Redbridge. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced details of the 1997–98 local government finance settlement, affecting the spending plans of all local authorities in England, in a written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, (Mr. Congdon) North-East on 27 January 1997 *Official Report,* column *11.*

Local Authority Appointments (Indemnity)

28. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will consult the local authority associations on the arrangements for persons appointed by local authorities to sit on outside bodies being indemnified for their costs in legal actions relating to such bodies. [12528]

Mr. Curry: The Government have no plans to consult the local authority associations on this matter but will, of course, consider any representations that they may wish to make.

Non-departmental Bodies (Appointments)

29. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment for how many posts in non-departmental bodies he is responsible for making appointments. [12529]

Mr. Gummer: I am responsible for 962 appointments to 61 non-departmental public bodies.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what account he will take of the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee report on Nirex's proposals for publication and peer review in his consideration of the inspector's report on Nirex's application to build a rock characterisation facility. [13516]

Mr. Gummer: I am considering the matter.

Swansea Canal

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the amount *(a)* spent by British Waterways on maintaining the Swansea canal and *(b)* received by British Waterways from the sale of water to INCO in Clydach, Swansea, in each of the last five years. [13315]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: It costs British Waterways £180,000 each year to maintain the canal, of which about half is met by income from the sale of water to INCO.

Waterways (Safety)

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what sum the Government propose to allocate for maintaining the safety of British waterways in 1997–98. [13445]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: British Waterways' grant in aid allocation for 1997–98 is £50.89 million. This includes an extra £5 million in recognition of the backlog of maintenance. It is for the board of British Waterways to determine its priorities for maintenance and ensure the safety of the network.

UN General Assembly

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations he has had with *(a)* environmental, *(b)* industrial and *(c)* other non-Governmental organisations, on the United Kingdom's input to the proposed agenda for the United Nations General Assembly special session on the environment to review progress since the Rio earth summit in 1992; and what future consultations he plans. [13851]

Mr. Gummer: My Department issued on 30 December a consultation paper entitled "Five Years On From Rio: Special Session of the UN General Assembly: UK Position Paper". This was sent to a wide range of bodies, including those from industry, environmental and other non-governmental organisations. A copy of the paper was placed in the Library. I will consider the need for further steps in the light of comments received.

Government Office for the South-West

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the value of grants and financial support *(a)* disbursed and *(b)* administered by the Government office for the south-west for each year since its inception. [13881]

Mr. Curry: Information on GOSW's programme expenditure for 1994–95 and 1995–96 is contained in the office's annual reports. I have arranged for copies to be sent to the hon. Lady.

The figures for funding administered through the Government office, as recorded in the annual reports, were: 1994–95—£293.835 million; 1995–96—£324.463 million. The budget for 1996–97 is £388.363 million. This excludes European funding which is not administered on a fiscal basis. The precise manner in which funding is disbursed differs between individual programmes.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what have been the *(a)* capital and *(b)* administration costs of the Government office for the south west in (i) Bristol and (ii) Plymouth for each year since its establishment. [13880]

Mr. Curry: GOSW's running cost expenditure for 1994–95 and 1995–96 is contained in the office's annual reports. I have arranged for copies to be sent to the hon. Lady. More detailed information is available in GO-MINIS 1 and 2, copies of which are available in the Library of this House.

For 1994–95 records are not split between Bristol and Plymouth because funding was via the 4 Departments and not through the single accounting system. Capital costs were nil and the final outturn for administrative expenditure was £6,778,000. In 1995–96 the published costs are: £317,000 capital spend in Bristol, £44,700 capital spend in Plymouth; £5,802,400 Bristol and £1,866,300 Plymouth administrative expenditure. To date, the budget allocations for 1996–97 are: for capital spend £68,200 Bristol and £48,300 Plymouth; for administration, £5,252,100 Bristol and £1,886,000 Plymouth.

Energy Conservation (Pensioners)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the schemes funded by his Department relating to energy conservation for retirement pensioners; and what his proposals are in respect of these schemes. [13659]

Mr. Clappison: Our home energy efficiency scheme provides grants for basic home insulation and energy advice for householders aged 60 or over, as well as householders receiving income-related benefits or certain disability allowances. More than 2 million grants under this well-regarded scheme have increased comfort and improved energy efficiency for vulnerable people; £75 million has been allocated for 1997–98, an increase of 3 per cent. on 1996–97, and later this year a revised, improved scheme will be launched. A wider range of energy efficiency measures will be available, giving greater benefits because more appropriate improvements can be offered to individual homes.

In addition, we are paying the Energy Saving Trust grant towards a pilot scheme to demonstrate how local authorities and private finance providers in partnership can help pensioners to make energy efficient improvements to their homes.

Planning Consents

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many applications for planning consent he has called in in each of the years 1994 to 1996, in *(a)* London and *(b)* each other region of England; how many of these involved housing; what percentage of these involved (i) mixed tenure and (ii) special needs housing; what was the average length of time taken to reach a decision on the application; how many are still awaiting a decision; and what percentage of those decided have been (1) approved and (2) refused. [13778]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The number of planning applications called in in each Government office region in England in the years 1994 to 1996 is as follows:

	1994	1995	1996
North East	9	4	7
North West	7	10	9
Yorkshire and the Humber	12	15	12
Merseyside	0	4	6
West Midlands	24	7	9
East Midlands	14	17	16
Eastern	25	30	17
South West	34	'60	29
South East	5	15	15
London	12	15	14

[1] Some 30 of these cases relate to a single site in Devonport. Further applications were called in in 1994–96 in Cornwall. Following the Lees report on the operation of the planning system in North Cornwall, the Government has been monitoring development control in Cornwall as a whole.

In total, the number of call-ins per calendar year for 1994, 1995 and 1996, excluding the Devonport and Cornwall cases, was some 120, 133 and 120 respectively.

Of those shown in the table, 85 applications involved housing development of which approximately 9 per cent. involved mixed tenure housing and approximately 13 per cent. special needs housing. Of those applications that have been decided, 38 per cent. were approved and 62 per cent. were refused permission. The Department does not keep information centrally on the average length of time to reach a decision. However, from Government offices' records of those cases called in in 1994 to 1996, the average time to reach a decision following receipt of the inspector's report was 15 weeks; 37 applications are awaiting determination following receipt of the inspector's report.

Local Authority Pension Schemes

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what guidelines he issues to local authorities concerning the management of their pension funds; [13773]

(2) if he will collate information on the pension fund managers used by each local authority in England. [13772]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 1995 set out comprehensive statutory requirements under which local authorities are required to manage their pension funds. The regulations allow authorities to select and appoint to select and appoint external fund managers authorised under the Financial Services Act 1986. Collated information on fund managers is available commercially.

UN Environment Programme

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the findings contained in the United Nations environment programme's first global environmental outlook report published on 27 January, in respect of its relevance to the United Kingdom environment and United Kingdom involvement in environmental technology and policy abroad; and if he will place a copy of the report in the Library. [13850]

Mr. Gummer: The Government welcome the first UNEP global environment outlook report, a copy of which I am arranging to have placed in the Library. Assessment and monitoring of the global environment is a core function of UNEP. We very much hope that the current session of the governing council will endorse a refocusing of its overall mandate enabling UNEP to concentrate on its core functions. I shall be attending the governing council myself to set out the United Kingdom's position on this important issue.

Overall, the report is pessimistic about the state of the global environment. The UK can, however, be proud of its achievements both at home and in the international arena. We will ensure that the UK continues to implement Agenda 21. We were one of the first countries to publish both a sustainable development strategy and indicators, and annual reports on progress. We will also continue to play a leading part in international discussions on environmental issues, and in encouraging a climate of policy and programmes which stimulates a positive and active contribution by business, for example, in the provision of environmental technology to developing nations.

The Prime Minister's recent announcement that he will attend the special session of the United Nations General Assembly in June, demonstrates the Government's commitment to sustainable development and preservation of the environment.

EC SAFE Programme

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what Her Majesty's Government's policy is on the European Community's SAFE programme; and what position he intends to adopt on it at the Council of Ministers meeting on 25 February. [13917]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Government supports the general aims of the SAFE programme, but there are a number of detailed budgetary and procedural issues relating to the Commission's amended proposal which have yet to be resolved. The SAFE programme is not on the agenda for adoption at a Council of Ministers meeting on 25 February. It is not clear whether it will appear on the agenda for the Labour and Social Affairs Council meetings on 17 April or 12 June.

Opencast Mining

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions his Department has had with private sector firms during the last year about the possible opencasting of coal in north Warwickshire. [14226]

Sir Paul Beresford: None.

Green Belt (Harrow)

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he plans to visit the green belt areas on the northern borders of the London borough of Harrow in the constituency of Harrow, East. [12847]

Mr. Gummer: I have no current plans to visit the green belt areas in my hon. Friend's constituency, although I have committed myself to protect them along with the rest of the green belt.

Noise Act 1996

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what *(a)* guidance and *(b)* resources he is giving to local authorities in respect of the implementation of the Noise Act 1996; and if he will make a statement. [12975]

Mr. Clappison: My Department will be issuing a circular to local authorities to give guidance on the implementation of the Noise Act 1996.

We have estimated that the overall additional cost to local authorities in England to enforce the night noise offence would be in the region of £1 million in 1997–98, rising to £3 million in 1999–2000. This assumes a gradual rate of adoption and takes account of the extent of out of hours noise services currently being provided. This was taken into account in the 1997–98 local government finance settlement and in the baselines for future settlements.

Council Leaseholders (Service Charges)

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when and how he will use his powers under the Housing Act 1996 to help council leaseholders in difficulty with high service charges. [14460]

Mr. Clappison: Research published in 1995 showed that, while the great majority of people who bought their council flat saw it as good value for money, a small proportion were in particular difficulties with service charges which were often much higher than they expected when they bought. Sometimes costly works were needed to maintain or repair large system-built blocks and leaseholders received little or no benefit from the work. In some cases, the landlord had received special assistance—for example, from the estate action programme—to carry out the works, but his leases still obliged him to charge leaseholders.

Following public consultation, we have today introduced two measures which will come into force later this month. They will lead to reductions in some of the highest bills for maintenance, repair and improvement works.

The first measure is the Social Landlords Discretionary Reductions of Service Charges (England) Directions 1997. This allows local authorities and other social landlords to reduce or waive service charges for past, current and future works of repair, maintenance or improvement carried out with assistance from estate action, city challenge, the single regeneration budget challenge fund or the estates renewal challenge fund, where the assistance was applied for before 25 February. It will also allow them to reduce or waive charges for works—even if they did not receive such special assistance—so that total service charges do not exceed £10,000 for the same property over any five-year period. Landlords will be able to reduce bills, including those which have already been sent out, and they will be able to offer refunds. We have set out criteria that they will have to consider in deciding whether and by how much to reduce charges.

The second measure is the Social Landlords Mandatory Reduction of Service Charges (England) Directions 1997. This requires social landlords to charge no more than £10,000 for the same property over any five-year period for repair, maintenance or improvement works carried out with assistance from the single regeneration challenge fund or the estates renewal challenge fund, where assistance is bid for on or after 25 February. They may only charge more if the benefit to the leaseholder from the works exceeds that amount. In some cases, they must charge less. The cost of complying with the mandatory directions can be included in the bid for assistance.

The measures use our new powers in sections 219 and 220 of the Housing Act 1996. They will come into force on 25 February 1997. They are being sent to English local authorities and other social landlords, together with detailed guidance on how to comply. This will enable them to bring relief to some of their leaseholders who face difficulties with high bills.

Access to Information

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the Government have responded to the House of Lords Select Committee report on freedom of access to information on the environment. [14498]

Mr. Gummer: I have today published the Government response and I have thanked the committee for its timely report. The Select Committee's report has helped the Government in reviewing the workings of our own environmental information regulations and in reporting to the Commission on the implementation of the EC directive.

I am happy to accept most of the committee's recommendations although the majority of these involve revisions to the directive rather than to our own regulations. Although I accept that certain revisions to the regulations and guidance are desirable, I am less clear as to when these might best be made. There are external factors to consider.

The Commission is reviewing the directive and changes are possible. We will need to respond to these. However, there is a further complication. Negotiations are proceeding on a UN-EC convention on access to environmental information etc. The final agreed to text will probably necessitate further changes to both the directive and the regulations.

That does not mean, though, that we should do nothing now. As the report indicates, the regulations and the open government code of practice are providing the public with improved access to environmental information. I would like this improvement to continue.

I accept that access will be significantly extended if there is a more satisfactory machinery for appeals and enforcement. I propose, therefore, to seek ways to establish an independent appeals procedure as a matter of urgency and will give serious consideration to the Select Committee's preference for an information commissioner. I will also ensure that the guidance is revised to cover this change and to improve clarity elsewhere.

I have placed copies of our response in the Libraries of both Houses.

Storm Damage (North Devon)

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide assistance to North Devon

district council under the Bellwin scheme for the costs incurred in dealing with exceptional storms in October 1996. [14499]

Mr. Curry: I am satisfied that financial assistance under the Bellwin scheme is justified given the exceptional nature of the storms on 28 October 1996. A scheme will, therefore, be established under section 155 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. Grant will be paid to cover 85 per cent. of eligible costs which are above a threshold, and which have been incurred by North Devon district council in dealing with the immediate aftermath of those storms.

County Councils (Statutory Functions)

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the statutory functions for which non-metropolitan county councils have ceased to have financial responsibility since the beginning of the financial year 1993–94, indicating in each case the date on which financial responsibility ceased. [13174]

Mr. Curry *[holding answer 28 January 1997]:* Responsibility for funding further education colleges was transferred to further education funding councils on 1 April 1993; responsibility for the Careers Service was transferred to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on 1 April 1994; the special educational needs tribunal took over responsibility for special educational needs appeals on 1 September 1994; responsibility for police services passed to the new police authorities established on 1 April 1995; and responsibility for waste regulation transferred to the Environment Agency on 1 April 1996.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Court of Human Rights

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's policy on referring cases to the European Court of Human Rights following receipt of the opinion of the Commission; and what are the procedures for implementing that policy. [13569]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The handling of each case is decided on its merits, taking into consideration factors such as the opinion of the European Commission of Human Rights and the desirability of obtaining a Court ruling having regard to the potential wider significance of the case.

Referral of a case by the Government is by letter from the Government agent to the registrar of the Court in Strasbourg.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what records are kept by his Department of cases brought against the United Kingdom before *(a)* the European Commission and *(b)* the European Court of Human Rights; and if he will publish such records. [13567]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The case files relating to each case are of necessity confidential to the Government as a party to the litigation. Proceedings before the Commission are, under its own rules, confidential save to the extent that the Commission publishes its decisions. Court proceedings are in principle public and application for information concerning them may be made to the Court registry.

We do not keep a complete record of judgments affecting the UK. A comprehensive list is openly available from the registrar of the European Court of Human Rights. The publication is entitled "Statistics".

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what compliance measures have been taken and by whom in respect of the 1989 European Court of Human Rights case concerning Graham Gaskin; what obligation there is on his Department as regards the timing of compliance measures; when he expects measures to be introduced in respect of the Graham Gaskin case; and what conclusions he has drawn from the Graham Gaskin case as regards policy on compliance. [13574]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We are aware that there has been a delay in implementation of the judgment in the Graham Gaskin case. This is an exception to what is in general an excellent record of prompt compliance with judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. Under the convention, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe oversees the implementation of judgments. Payment of any compensation and costs awarded must be made within three months of the judgment. There is no set limit for any other measures of implementation required, but the committee expects them to be introduced within a reasonable time. We expect measures in respect of the implementation of this case to be in place within the next year.

As this is exceptional, the Government see no reason to alter their current practice in relation to the implementation of judgments.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many cases against the United Kingdom before *(a)* the European Commission and *(b)* the European Court of Human Rights have involved friendly settlement negotiations in the past 10 years; which cases were settled as a result of friendly settlement negotiations; what were the terms of such settlements; and what is the Government's policy on friendly settlement. [13577]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We keep no consolidated records of the numbers of cases brought against the United Kingdom before the European Commission and Court of Human Rights where friendly settlement was attempted or achieved, nor of the terms of those settlements.

We address each case before the ECHR organs on its merits. We support the friendly settlement mechanisms and employ them wherever the circumstances of the case suggest that such a settlement would be negotiable and in the interests of both parties.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the cases brought before the European Court of Human Rights since 1 January 1975 which have resulted in a finding of a violation of the convention on human rights against the United Kingdom, indicating when such findings were made. [13571]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The list is published in the Council of Europe reference charts, "Judgments of the European Court of Human Rights", published in 1995, which is available from the House of Commons Library.

The list is accurate to October 1994. Since then, violations have been found in the following cases:

Welch (February 1995), McMichael (February 1995), Tolstoy (July 1995), McCann, Farrell and Savage (September 1995), John Murray (February 1996), Hussain (February 1996), Singh (February 1996), Goodwin (March 1996, Benham (June 1996), Chahal (November 1996), Saunders (December 1996).

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what account is taken of *(a)* costs of litigation and *(b)* the consequences of any adverse finding by the European Court of Human Rights in determining the Government's approach to such litigation, including its policy towards friendly settlements. [13579]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We deal with each case before the European Commission and Court of Human rights on its merits. We take a variety of factors into consideration in deciding how to respond to applications, including whether to attempt friendly settlement negotiations. Potential costs and legislative consequences of adverse decisions are two such factors. Their relative weight in deciding the Government's approach will depend on the circumstances of the case under consideration.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will list for each European Court of Human Rights finding requiring United Kingdom legislation or other compliance measures the time taken to introduce such measures, indicating in each case the Government Department principally responsible; what were *(a)* the average and *(b)* longest times taken; in how many cases legislation or other compliance measures have not yet been introduced; and what obligations there are on the Government in respect of the time taken to introduce compliance measures; [13572]

(2) what legislation or other compliance measures have been introduced as a result of findings of violation of the convention on human rights against the Government, specifying in respect of each case the date of the finding and the date and nature of the legislation or other compliance measures introduced. [13580]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We have no consolidated record of the time taken to introduce legislation or other compliance measures in each violation found against the United Kingdom at the European Court of Human Rights.

The Council of Europe reference chart book, "Judgments of the European Court of Human Rights," which is available from the House of Commons Library, contains some details of the measures taken by states parties, including the United Kingdom, to implement judgments of the Court, up to the end of 1994.

Under the convention, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe supervises the implementation of judgments. There are no set time limits for general compliance measures, but the Committee expects them to be introduced within a reasonable time.

The provision of the additional information required to answer this question would require considerable research. We have assessed the volume of work involved and concluded that it would involve a disproportionate cost.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many cases against the United Kingdom have been referred to the European Court of Human Rights since 1 January 1975; and how many of these were referred by *(a)* the European Commission and *(b)* the Government. [13568]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: A total of 87 cases against the United Kingdom have been referred to the European Court of Human Rights since 1 January 1975.

We do not keep records of the additional information, but whether the Government or Commission or both have referred a case to the court is stated in each judgment, as published by the Council of Europe. These are available in the Library of the House of Commons.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what procedures there are for obtaining advice from other Departments in respect of cases before the European Court of Human Rights. [13578]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The Government agency, who is an FCO official, consults other Government Departments as necessary on cases before the European Court of Human Rights.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's policy as regards the timing of the implementation of legislation or other compliance measures following European Court of Human Rights findings; what guidelines exist for officials in implementing such policy; what steps are taken to ensure that the necessary work is undertaken; and what performance-related sanctions or bonuses exist for officials in this respect. [13573]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: According to article 54 of the European convention on human rights, the Committee of Ministers is responsible for supervising the execution of the judgments of the Court. It is Government policy to implement the judgments of the Court as soon as practicable.

Responsibility for the effective implementation of ECHR judgments falls to Ministers and not to officials. There are no performance-related bonuses or sanctions for officials in respect of implementation of ECHR judgments.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in how many cases in the past 10 years the Government have considered referring a case to the European Court of Human Rights but decided not to do so; and if he will list each such case. [13570]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We keep no consolidated record of such matters. The formulation of an answer to this question would require considerable research. We have assessed the volume of work involved and concluded that it would involve disproportionate cost.

Burma

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to discuss with British companies the problems associated with investment in Burma. [14003]

Mr. Hanley: Through our officials in London and our embassy in Rangoon we regularly brief UK companies considering investment in Burma on the political and economic factors which may affect their decision.

Satellites

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those satellites controlled by Her Majesty's Government indicating their owners. [13154]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I have been asked to reply.

The following satellites are controlled and owned by the UK Ministry of Defence:

SKYNET 4A

SKYNET 4B

SKYNET 4C.

The following are controlled by the UK Ministry of Defence but owned by NATO:

NATO IVA

NATO IVB.

The Ministry of Defence also owns two small space technology research satellites—STRV–1a and STRV–1b. These were launched in June 1994 but following successful mission completion they were transferred to the university of Colorado in 1996. They remain the property of MOD.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Crime Reduction Measures

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures have been introduced since 1992 to reduce crime; and what assessment he has made of their effectiveness. [13513]

Mr. Maclean: Since 1992, we have continued to develop and implement measures designed to make life more difficult for criminals and easier for law abiding citizens. This has involved major new legislation; substantial changes in the criminal justice system, including the creation of new offences and the revision of penalties so as to ensure that the courts have the powers they need to deal with criminal behaviour; new money for the police and for closed circuit television; the development of new ideas on crime prevention; and the targeting of persistent offenders.

We are determined to fight crime effectively and, with full backing for the police, the support of the community, proper emphasis on crime prevention and severe punishment for serious persistent and dangerous offenders, we have demonstrated that progress can be made. Through partnership initiatives to combat crime and the steadfast work of the police, we have seen recorded crime fall by 10 per cent.—a reduction of over half a million offences—for the last three years for which figures are available.

Crime and Detection Statistics

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each metropolitan city in 1994–95 and 1995–96 *(a)* the crime figures and *(b)* the detection rate by category of crime. [13300]

Mr. Maclean: The table gives the available information for the City of London as a whole, which comprises the Metropolitan police and the City of London police force areas. Information for other cities is not available since the statistics collected centrally on recorded crime are broken down only as far as police force area.

Notifiable offences recorded by the police and clear ups[1]

City of London (including the Metropolitan Police District)

Offence group	*Number of offences*		*Percentage cleared up*[2]	
	1994–95	*1995–96*	*1994*	*1995*
Violence against the person	42,770	40,365	69	65
Sexual offences	6,815	6,121	65	58
Burglary	162,146	170,916	20	22
Robbery	26,175	30,166	14	18
Theft and handling stolen goods	392,942	390,165	16	18
Fraud and forgery	31,907	34,474	45	46
Criminal damage	157,763	146,679	16	31
Other offences	8,622	9,320	90	87
Total	829,140	828,206	22	25

[1] Excluding criminal damage value £20 and under.

[2] Published on a calendar year only.

Telephone Taps

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the investigation into transcripts of telephone taps missing from the National Criminal Intelligence Service; and how many transcripts are unaccounted for. [13405]

Mr. Maclean: The Director General of the National Criminal Intelligence Service invited John Stevens, formerly the chief constable of Northumbria police, to conduct an inquiry following a case in which telephone intercept material was supplied unlawfully to defence counsel. He also looked at administrative processes for handling intercept material and future safeguards. The inquiry found no evidence of corrupt practice at NCIS and all the intercept material has been accounted for. The director general has welcomed the inquiry's review of procedures for handling intercept material and all its recommendations are being taken forward.

North-east Regional Crime Squad

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about the role of the north-east regional crime squad in the cases of R *v.* Beriman and R *v.* Charrington and others; and what action he has taken; and if he will make a statement. [13585]

Mr. Maclean: I have received representations from hon. Members in the case of R *v.* Charrington but not in the case of R *v.* Berriman. I have taken no action in either case: the issues raised are within the responsibility of the chief constables of the forces concerned.

Prison Governors

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what training is given by the Prison Service to people recruited to fill governor grade positions. [13898]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 4 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the training given to those recruited to governor grades.

On promotion to Governor 5 from Principal Officer it is mandatory for all newly promoted governor 5s to attend a two week New Governor 5 course, which deals with general prison management issues and a one week Incident Command course. They attend further courses which help them deal specifically with the demands of their post.

The Prison Service also recruits individuals onto the Accelerated Promotion Scheme (APS). Those selected for the APS, who are not already serving prison officers, undergo mandatory Prison Officer initial training to enable them to serve as prison officers for one year. They then undertake management training in the form of a seven week Principal Officer course which deals with prison procedures and introduces management training. APS students attend a one week course which gives a non-operational overview of the Prison Service and a one week course on the operational responsibilities of a governor 5. They attend the Incident Command course and a series of developmental workshops as well as role specific training.

In addition the Prison Service is piloting a cross hierarchical move scheme in which experienced individuals have been appointed to governor grades. These individuals have received specific training to meet their individual needs to perform in the governor grades.

Prison Suicides

Mr. George Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the rate of self-inflicted deaths which have occurred in *(a)* each prison, *(b)* each prison type and *(c)* the prison estate for each year since 1990. [13821]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 4 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your question about the rate of self-inflicted deaths in prisons.

The attached tables show the numbers of self-inflicted deaths that have occurred in each prison; in each type of prison, and totals for the prison estate for each year since 1990. It is not possible to display the information as a rate without incurring disproportionate costs.

Establishment	*Type*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*
Acklington	Category C	1					1		
Albany	Category B					1			
Ashwell	Category C			2					
Aylesbury	Young offender institute						1		1
Bedford	Male local	2				1	2		
Belmarsh	Male local				1		2		
Birmingham	Male local	1	3	1		1	2	1	
Blakenhurst	Male local						1	2	
Blundeston	Category B						2		
Brinsford	Male remand centre			1		1		1	
Bristol	Male local	3	1	1	2		1	1	
Brixton	Male local	6	1	1	1	3		1	
Buckley Hall	Category C							1	
Bullingdon	Male local			1			1	1	
Camp Hill	Category C	1							
Canterbury	Male local				1				
Cardiff	Male local		2			2			
Chelmsford	Male local					1	1	1	
Dartmoor	Category B	1			1	1		2	
Deerbolt	Young offender institution			1					

Establishment	Type	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Doncaster	Male local					2	2	1	
Dorchester	Male local		1	1				2	
Dover	Young offender institution						1		
Downview	Category C						1		
Durham	Male local	3	1	2	1			1	
Elmley	Male local			1		1			
Erlestoke	Category C						2		
Exeter	Male local				4	1	2	1	
Featherstone	Category C		1				1		
Feltham	Male remand centre		2	2				1	
Frankland	Dispersal						1		
Full Sutton	Dispersal		2		1		1	1	
Garth	Category B		1			1	1		
Gartree	Category B			1		1		1	
Glen Parva	Young offender institution	1	1	1				2	1
Gloucester	Male local		1				1		
Grendon	Category B	1	2			2	1		
Haverigg	Category C		1				1		
Highdown	Male local				1	1	4	2	
Highpoint	Category C	1							
Hindley	Male remand centre	3		1	1				1
Holloway	Female local			1	1		2	1	
Holme House	Male local				2			1	
Hull	Male local	1		2	1	2	1	2	
Kirkham	Male open							1	
Leeds	Male local	1	2	2	2	1	1	1	
Leicester	Male local			1	3	3	1	1	
Lewes	Male local	2		1	1		1	1	
Lincoln	Male local	1			3	1	2	2	
Lindholme	Category C				1			1	
Littlehey	Category C			1					
Liverpool	Male local	4	3	1	2	5	1	3	
Long Lartin	Dispersal		1	1	1	1	1	2	
Low Newton	Male remand centre					2	2		
Maidstone	Category B			1					1
Manchester	Male local	3	2		2	2		4	
Moorland	Category C					3			
The Mount	Category C		1				1	1	
New Hall	Female local					1			
Norwich	Male local		2	2	2		4	1	
Nottingham	Category B		1		1		1	1	
Oxford	Category C	1	1						
Parkhurst	Category B	1	1	1	1	2		1	
Pentonville	Male local	2	1	4			2	2	
Portland	Young offender inst.	1				1		1	
Preston	Male local		1			1	1	2	
Risley	Category C					1		1	1
Rochester	Male local							1	
Shepton Mallet	Category C				1				
Shrewsbury	Male local					1		1	
Stafford	Category C		1	1					
Stocken	Category C							1	
Stoke Health	Young offender institution		1				1		
Styal	Female closed			1					
Swaleside	Category B			1		1			
Swansea	Male local	2				1	1		
Swinfen Hall	Young offender institution							2	1
Usk	Category C					1			
The Verne	Category C	1				1			
Wakefield	Dispersal	2	1	1	3	1	1		
Wandsworth	Male local	1	1		2	4		1	
Wellingborough	Category C			1					
Wetherby	Young offender institution				1				
Whatton	Category C						1		
Whitemoor	Dispersal						1		
Winchester	Male local	2	1		1	1		2	
Wolds	Male local				1		1	1	
Woodhill	Male local				1	1			
Wormwood Scrubs	Male local	1	1	1		4		1	
PECS (prison escort court custody service)	n/a							1	
Totals		50	42	41	47	62	60	64	[1]6

[1] 1997 total up to 30 January 1997.

Type of establishment	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Male local	35	24	22	34	40	35	41	—
Dispersal	2	4	2	5	2	5	3	—
Male remand centre	3	2	4	1	3	2	2	1
Category B	3	5	4	3	10	5	5	1
Category C	5	5	5	2	5	8	5	1
Female local	—	—	1	1	1	2	1	—
Young offenders institution	2	2	2	1	1	3	5	3
Male open	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Female closed	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
PECS. (Prison escort court custody service)	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—

Several establishments have changed their roles during the time period specified.

Self-inflicted deaths in custody

	Totals
1990	50
1991	42
1992	41
1993	47
1994	62
1995	60
1996	64
1997[1]	6

[1] 1997 total up to 30 January 1997.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many suicides occurred in Her Majesty's prisons in the last three complete years and in the half year to October 1996; and if he will express these figures as a rate per head of the population. [11615]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 21 January 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 4 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your Question about the number of suicides at prison establishments in the last three complete years, and in the half year to October 1996.

The figures on self-inflicted deaths are given below. Self inflicted deaths do not necessarily conclude with a verdict of suicide.

Financial year	Number of self-inflicted deaths	Average prison population	Rate of self-inflicted deaths per 100,000 prisoners
1993–94	47	45,827	103
1994–95	65	49,308	132
1995–96	60	51,614	116

During the first six months (April to September) of the financial year 1996–97 there were 36 self-inflicted deaths. Based on current population projections for 1996–97 this represents a rate of 127 self-inflicted deaths per 100,000 prisoners.

Colchester Young Offenders Institution

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what factors have led to the delay in opening HM YOI Colchester; [13900]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 23 January to the hon. Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale), *Official Report*, columns *729–30*, what training the proposed governor of HM YOI Colchester received from the Prison Service to prepare him to take up his position. [13899]

Miss Widdecombe: This is a unique initiative which has required much careful preparation. It was necessary to complete the appointment of military staff to the young offender institution and determine the final details of the regime before agreeing to open the establishment in February.

The commandant of the military corrective training centre, who has been appointed governor of Colchester young offender institution, has undertaken Prison Service training in relation to prisoner adjudications, the command of serious incidents, finance and staff appraisal, and has made several familiarisation visits to Prison Service establishments. He will shortly receive training in the staff code of discipline.

Consultants

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many contracts worth more than £250,000 his Department gave to external consultants in each of the last five years; to whom these contracts were let; and what work the consultants were contracted to undertake. [13761]

Mr. Howard: The following 17 contracts worth more than £250,000 were given by my Department to external consultants in the last five years.

Company	Description
1992	
DBI Associates	STRATEG—prison service computer package to aid industrial production and stock control
Ernst and Young	Pay and grading review for prison service
Harvey Consultants	Phoenix project software package (Home Office wide arrangement)
1993	
SEMA	Immigration and nationality directorate caseworking study
1994	
Lazard Brothers and Company Limited	Financial services—secure training centres—Cookham Wood and Gringley, Home Office, Juvenile offenders unit
Lazard Brothers and Company Limited	Financial services Bridgend and Fazakerley prisons
Coopers and Lybrand	Project Management—Fazakerley and Bridgend prisons.
1995	
Information Marketing Associates	National automated fingerprinting information system simulation model—police information technology organisation
Terry Hamer Associates	Programming and application project management of public safety radio

Company	Description
	communications project—police information technology organisation
Coopers and Lybrand	Private finance initiative advice—prison service
Charterhouse Bank	Financial services—Lowdham Grange prison and future prison projects
Ove Arup and Partners	Compliance monitoring—Bridgend prison
Mouchel Management	Compliance monitoring—Fazakerley prison
1996	
Mott Ewbank Preece	Technical and commercial advice for fire service radio communications strategy—police information technology organisation
Charterhouse Bank	Financial services—police radio communications project—police information technology organisation
KPMG	Quantum scoping study, procurement and implementation—Prison Service
Mouchel Management	Compliance monitoring—Lowdham Grange prisoners

Cornwall and West Plymouth Euro-constituency

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many representations were received by the Boundary Commission regarding the review of European parliamentary constituencies in England; and how many of these related to the proposed Cornwall and West Plymouth Euro-constituency; [13237]

(2) how many representations were received by the Boundary Commission from local councils regarding the current review of European constituencies in England; and how many *(a)* related to the proposed Cornwall and West Plymouth Euro-constituency and *(b)* favoured a European parliamentary constituency for Cornwall; [13238]

(3) where and when the Boundary Commission proposes holding a public inquiry into the proposals for a Cornwall and West Plymouth Euro-constituency. [13239]

Mr. Sackville: The Boundary Commission published its provisional recommendations for changes to the boundaries of the 71 European parliamentary constituencies in England on 7 November 1996. A period for submission of representations in respect of those proposals immediately followed, ending on 7 December 1996.

The commission, which is an independent and politically impartial body, has not yet announced how many representations it has received in respect of its recommendations, nor whether it intends to hold a local inquiry in respect of any of its provisional recommendations.

Coroner Procedures (Muslim Communities)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received in the past three years from *(a)* the Bradford Council for Mosques and *(b)* other Muslim organisations in respect of the expedited release of dead bodies over weekends and public holidays by coroners serving large Muslim communities. [14104]

Mr. Sackville: We have no record of representations on this matter form the Bradford Council for Mosques. Representations have, however, been received from the Aylesbury Mosque Committee, the Burial Council of Leicestershire Muslims and from Kashmir Centres Europe.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has initiated with the representative local government organisations to make funding available to coroners, serving large Muslim communities, for the issue, over weekends and public holidays, of the necessary documentation to permit the transport of bodies overseas. [14105]

Mr. Sackville: None. Funding of the coroners' service is entirely a matter for the relevant council.

Sean O'Callaghan

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the Republic of Ireland about the extradition of Sean O'Callaghan for the alleged murder of Mr. John Corcoran. [14017]

Mr. Kirkhope: None.

Disabled Access (Police Stations)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Dpearmtent what is his policy regarding disabled access to police stations; and if he will make a statement. [14107]

Mr. Maclean: the Home Office police buildings design guide, issued in April 1994, recommends that all new police buildings in England and Wales, to which civilian employees or the public are expected to have access, should afford access for disabled people. Existing buildings which do not fulfil these requirements are being upgraded by police authorities as resources permit.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the recent report by Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary on No. 4 area (south-east) of the Metropolitan police; [14408]

(2) if he will make a statement on the recent report by Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary on the personnel function of the Metropolitan police. [14409]

Mr. Maclean: Yes. I have today placed in the Library a note of the recommendations from the report, together with the commissioner's responses and the police authority responses, which take into account the advice my right hon. and learned Friend and I have received from the Metropolitan police committee.

Ethnic Minorities (Hong Kong)

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what will be the status after 30 June of those ethnic minorities in Hong Kong who hold only British nationality. [14587]

Mr. Howard: I have carefully reviewed the position of the solely British ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, in the light of expressions of concern, in both Houses of Parliament here and in Hong Kong, that their nationality status will be uncertain after 30 June 1997. It is clear that the assurances which they have been given over a number of years have not allayed this concern. I therefore intend to make provision enabling them to apply for registration as British citizens, giving them right of abode in the United Kingdom, after 30 June 1997. I expect that the great majority of them will continue to reside in Hong Kong, where they have right of abode.

Whitemoor Prison

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost of Sir John Woodcock's inquiry into the 9 September 1994 escape from the special secure unit at Her Majesty's prison, Whitemoor, Cambridgeshire. [12619]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 24 January 1997]:* The cost of Sir John Woodcock's inquiry which was met by the Home Office was £349,760. This included the fees of Sir John Woodcock, the salary costs of the police officers and Home Office staff in the inquiry team and support costs, such as accommodation and travel and subsistence expenses.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average length of time asylum seekers have been kept in prison; and what is the longest time an asylum seeker has been held in prison. [13062]

Mr. Kirkhope *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* Information on the average length of time an asylum seeker has been kept in prison can be obtained only by examination of individual case records. The information requested is, therefore, available only at disproportionate cost.

As at 24 January 1997, the longest currently detained person who had sought asylum, irrespective of their detention location, has been held—solely under Immigration Act powers—since 12 October 1993. The individual concerned was detained at the end of his prison sentence following a court recommendation for deportation following his conviction for supplying class A drugs. He subsequently claimed asylum and the application was refused in February 1994. After exhausting rights of appeal before the domestic courts, he made an application to the European Court of Human Rights and a date for the full hearing is awaited.

Secure Units

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are currently held in special secure units in England and Wales; and how long they have been held in such units. [13413]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Phil Wheatley to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 4 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the number of prisoners held in special secure units and how long they have been held in such units.

There are currently 29 prisoners being held in special secure units. The details requested are set out in the following tables:

Number of prisoners	*Length of current detention in SSUs*
Belmarsh (remand)	
1 prisoner	10 months (March 1996)
7 prisoners	6 months (July 1996)
4 prisoners	4 months (September 1996)
1 prisoner	14 months (November 1995)
Belmarsh (convicted)	
1 prisoner	10 years 7 months (June 1986)
1 prisoner	9 years 7 months (June 1987)
1 prisoner	9 years 3 months (October 1987)
1 prisoner	6 years 1 month (December 1990)
1 prisoner	4 years 9 months (April 1992)
1 prisoner	4 years 7 months (June 1992)
Full Sutton	
1 prisoner	1 year 4 months (September 1995)
1 prisoner	1 year (January 1996)
1 prisoner	6 months (July 1996)
Whitemoor	
1 prisoner	3 years 4 months (August 1993)
1 prisoner	8 years 5 months (July 1988)
1 prisoner	1 year 4 months (September 1995)
2 prisoners	1 year 1 month (December 1995)
1 prisoner	10 months (March 1996)
1 prisoner	5 months (August 1996)

Geoffrey Thomas

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Prison Service inquiry into the death of Geoffrey Thomas was completed; and when he received a copy of the report of the inquiry. [13934]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 3 February 1997]:* The inquiry was completed on 17 January. I received a copy of the report on 29 January. The Director General of the Prison Service made an announcement on 31 January.

Prison Inspectorate Reports

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Her Majesty's inspectorate of prisons reports are awaiting publication. [14013]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 3 February 1997]:* As at 31 January, 25 reports submitted by Her Majesty's inspector of prisons are awaiting publication.

Murderers (Publications)

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are in place to prevent imprisoned murderers from publishing material which could cause distress to the families of their victims. [13946]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 3 February 1997]:* The Prison Service has a range of measures in place, the details of which are set out in standing order 5, circular instructions 10/1991 and 21/1992 and instruction to

governors 73/1995. Copies of these are in the Library. The Government have considered the recent High Court judgment in the case of Simms and O'Brien about visits by journalists and authors to prisoners, and has decided to appeal.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Rwanda

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what sums were promised by his Department in 1994 for the provision of reconstruction and development in Rwanda; and how much has been disbursed for that purpose to date. [14109]

Dr. Liam Fox: We have provided a total of £175 million, including our share of EU assistance to the Rwanda crisis since 1994. In 1994, no pledges for reconstruction and development were made, but emergency assistance worth more than £57 million, including our share of EU assistance, was disbursed. Since January 1995, we have agreed to provide bilateral assistance totalling £19.5 million in rehabilitation assistance for the period 1995–96 to 1998–99; £12.2 million has been disbursed to date.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

The Ridings School

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many additional teaching staff have been drafted into the Ridings school, Halifax, as part of the school's recovery plan; and what their functions will be. [13526]

Mr. Forth: According to the action plan and statement of action submitted to the Secretary of State by the Ridings school and Calderdale LEA, five additional teaching staff have been drafted into the Ridings school. One is the associate head teacher whose role is to assist the head. Another has been appointed to provide staff cover for staff absences. The remaining three will cover a range of subject specialisms.

Departmental Publicity

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list *(a)* her Department's budgeted expenditure on (i) advertising, (ii) publicity and (iii) public information campaigns for the period January to March 1997 and *(b)* the actual expenditure on (1) advertising, (2) publicity and (3) public information campaigns in the period January to March in each of the past five years. [13466]

Mr. Robin Squire: In the first three months of 1997, this Department plans to spend an estimated £3.13 million on advertising and £6.45 million on publicity to provide public information. Producing comparable information for the past five years, isolating particular parts of those years as requested, would involve disproportionate cost.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the principal expenditure items and the total expenditure by her Department and its predecessors on advertising and publicity in each year since 1987–88. [13672]

Mr. Squire *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* Pursuant to my reply of 30 January, total spending on advertising and publicity for the Department is given below in financial years. Before the merger in July 1995, the Department operated separately funded programmes of publicity. This continued until the end of the financial year 1995–96.

	£ million
Department for Education	
1987–88	1.7
1988–89	1.6
1989–90	1.4
1990–91	4.5
1991–92	9.0
1992–93	8.0
1993–94	10.1
1994–95	9.4
1995–96	5.4
Department of Employment	
1987–88	[1]6.9
1988–89	[1]5.7
1989–90	[1]3.0
1990–91	[1]2.6
1991–92	18.3
1992–93	7.2
1993–94	11.1
1994–95	11.1
1995–96	11.0

[1] Figures for these years do not include expenditure by the Training Agency, Training Commission and Manpower Services Commission.

Current estimated spending for the Department for Education and Employment for 1996–97 is £18.9 million.

Principal expenditure items since the creation of the Department for Education and Employment in July 1995 have been publicity campaigns covering the school and college performance tables, the nursery education voucher scheme, modern apprenticeships, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, career development loans and "Just the Job". A detailed breakdown of principal expenditure items by both of the former Departments prior to the merger, could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many places are available in England under the assisted places scheme in the current academic year; and how many have been taken up so far. [14085]

Mrs. Gillan: Some 37,800 assisted places are available in England in the current academic year, 1996–97. Final figures will be available when all participating schools' returns have been received and processed.

Mr. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to announce further allocations in England under the assisted places scheme for new entry for September 1997. [13923]

Mrs. Gillan: I shall shortly announce further details about the assisted places scheme.

Surplus Places

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to the oral statement by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment of 28 January, *Official Report*, columns 191–92, concerning the reduction of the number of surplus places in maintained schools *(a)* what was the reduction in numbers over the last 10 years and *(b)* what is the arithmetical basis used to calculate future reductions. [14089]

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on a comparable basis on the number of surplus places was collected for the first time in 1994. Between January 1994 and January 1996, there was a reduction of just under 201,000 in the number of surplus places in maintained schools. A reduction of about half in the level of surplus places over the past 10 years is derived from the comparison with estimated figures recorded in Audit Commission reports in the mid-1980s and early 1990s. We do not seek to calculate future reductions precisely. The annual surplus place return asks authorities to provide projections of future pupil numbers—four years hence in the case of primary, and seven years in the case of secondary—and to comment on expected changes, both additions and reductions, to the capacity of schools. On the basis of that broad indication of the likely future position, we consult authorities which will apparently continue to have high levels of surplus about the extent to which any of that surplus is in practice removable.

Jobseekers (Benefit Sanctions)

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what benefit sanctions can be imposed on an unemployment claimant if he *(a)* does not apply for a part-time job of less than 24 hours per week if a jobseeker's direction is issued instructing him to make this type of application and *(b)* does not accept the offer of a part-time job of less than 24 hours per week from the Employment Service; which jobseeker's allowance regulations provide the basis for these sanctions; and if she will make a statement. [14243]

Mr. Forth: Section 19 of the Jobseekers Act 1995 provides that jobseekers are subject to a benefit sanction if they refuse or fail, without good cause, to carry out a reasonable jobseeker's direction. A direction must be given in writing by an employment officer with a view to assisting the jobseeker to find employment or improving his prospects of being employed. Regulation 69 of the Jobseeker's Allowance Regulations 1996 provides that the sanction in these circumstances is loss of benefit for two weeks, or four weeks if a separate fixed-length sanction has already been imposed within the previous 12 months.

Section 19 of the Act also provides that jobseekers are subject to a benefit sanction of up to 26 weeks if they refuse, without good cause, to apply for or accept an employment opportunity notified to them by an employment officer. Regulation 72(5)(c) provides they have good cause for refusing jobs of less than 24 hours a week. A short fixed-length sanction can therefore be imposed for an unreasonable failure to act on a direction to apply for a particular job of less than 24 hours, but a further sanction of up to 26 weeks cannot be imposed for a refusal to accept the same job.

The guidance issued to Employment Service jobcentres stresses that staff should be particularly careful before giving a jobseeker's direction in respect of a job of less than 24 hours a week. Jobseekers should be directed to apply for such jobs only if this would improve their prospects of finding further work, or the job is sufficiently well paid to enable them to leave JSA altogether.

Pupil Referral Units

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of the number of children in England currently attending pupil referral units; and what is the average cost of such a place. [14149]

Mr. Forth: The latest information collected by the Department through the schools census shows that, as of January 1996, there were 11,055 pupils registered at pupil referral units. Of those, 4,183 were also registered at a mainstream school. We do not hold information centrally on the average cost of a place in a PRU.

Beijing Platform for Action

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress the Government have made in fulfilling their commitment to implement action 190(d) of the Beijing platform for action; and what future action the Government plan to take. [14222]

Mrs. Gillan: The Government report "One Year On", a copy of which has been placed in the Library, outlines Government action taken in the last year to implement the platform for action and plans for further implementation. No action on recommendation 190(d) has been taken to date. The Council of Europe fourth European ministerial conference on equality between women and men, to be held in November 1997, will consider the impact of different electoral systems on the representation of women in elected bodies in different countries; we await the outcome of that meeting.

National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will place in the Library the evidence submitted by her Department to the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education since the papers submitted in July 1996. [14497]

Mr. Forth: A copy of the recent evidence submitted by the Department on the size and structure of higher education has today been placed in the Library.

Low Pay Scheme

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when the low pay scheme was introduced in Southend-on-Sea; how many grants have been awarded; what is the total Government expenditure involved; and if he will provide details of the range of payments made under the scheme. [13509]

Mr. Roger Evans: Earnings top-up was introduced on October 8 1996 in eight pilot areas, including Southend. The three-year pilot has started successfully with more than 7,000 people receiving earnings top-up'—more than 350 of them in the Southend area. The pilot is expected to cost a total of £65 million over three years.

Two benefit rates—scheme A and scheme B—are being piloted to test how different amounts of earnings top-up influence the decision to take up and remain in work. Southend is a scneme A pilot area.

Information on the maximum possible awards in each scheme is set out in the table. The minimum award possible is 50 pence in all cases.

Maximum earnings top-up awards

	Single person under 25 £	*Single person 25 and over* £	*Couple* £
Scheme A			
Working 16–29 hours per week	22.75	28.00	46.45
Working 30+ hours a week	33.05	38.30	56.75
Scheme B			
Working 16–29 hours a week	22.75	28.00	56.05
Working 30+ hours a week	33.05	38.30	66.35

1. As at 31 January 1997.

2. Payments at the maxima quoted were in payment at 31 January 1997.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Post Offices

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many post offices there were in *(a)* Carmarthenshire, *(b)* Dyfed and *(c)* Wales in each year since 1979. [13090]

Mr. Page: I understand from the Post Office that, due to boundary changes in Wales and changes to administrative boundaries at Post Office Counters Ltd., data on the number of post offices in Carmarthenshire and Dyfed in each year since 1979 could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

The table given shows the number of post offices in Wales for each year from 1987 to 1993. Equivalent data for 1994 to 1996 are not available due to Post Office Counters' administrative boundary changes following a major reorganisation of its business structure. Post Office Counters' best estimate of the current total number of post offices in Wales is 1,700.

Year	*Number of post offices in Wales*
1987	2,134
1988	2,138
1989	2,104
1990	2,087
1991	2,057
1992	2,004
1993	1,986

Dr Howells: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the number of sub-agency Crown status and franchised post offices in *(a)* each English region, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Northern Ireland in each year since 1979; how many of each category of post office in each case were opened or closed since 1979; and how many have changed their status since 1979. [11001]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 16 January 1997]:* I understand from the Post Office that, due to reorganisation and changes in administrative regional boundaries at Post Office Counters Ltd., records are no longer available to provide the information for the full period requested. The information which Post Office Counters Ltd. have available is set out in tables, copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of the House. Tables 1 to 10 show a breakdown of the national network of post offices as at the end of March for each year since 1987 between directly operated main post offices—Crown offices—other main post offices, which include franchise offices, and sub-post offices. The geographical apportionment of these figures is Post Office Counters' best estimate. Table 11 shows the net change in the number of offices in each of the three categories during the 1995–96 financial year. Comparable figures for earlier years are not available.

Departmental Publicity

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his Department's budgeted expenditure on *(a)* advertising, *(b)* publicity and *(c)* public information campaigns for January to March 1997; and what was the outturn expenditure on *(a)* to *(c)* for the same period for each of the last five years. [13306]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information requested is not collected centrally and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Privatised Companies

Mr. Salmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will calculate the current market capitalisation value of each of the privatised companies supervised by a regulator, at 1996-97 prices. [14009]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Market capitalisation values for each of the privatised companies supervised by a regulator, and quoted on the stock exchange, are regularly published in the financial press, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Imperial Weights (EU Directives)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which European *(a)* directive and *(b)* proposed directive contains provisions relating to the offer for sale of goods whose weight is specified in pounds and ounces; and which directive or proposed directive applies the criminal law to such offer for sale. [14091]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Goods sold by weight, measure, length or square area are required under Directive 80/181, as amended, to use metric units as the primary indications of quantity, with the option to use imperial units as supplementary indications. Goods sold loose by the pound and the ounce may continue to use imperial units as the primary indication until 31 December 1999.

A number of other directives that harmonise national provisions concerning weighing instruments and the labelling of packaged goods give effect to the provisions of directive 80/181.

As regards proposals under discussion, the new price indications directive would—if adopted—require the price per unit (the "unit price") to be indicated by reference to either the kilo, litre, metre or square metre.

Neither the existing directives nor the proposed price indications directive include specific enforcement provisions. It is a matter for member states to introduce measures necessary to implement the directives, with appropriate disincentives for non-compliance.

Satellites

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the satellites *(a)* wholly and *(b)* partly owned by Her Majesty's Government since 1967, indicating their operator. [13251]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I refer the hon. and learned Member to the answer I gave on behalf of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs today. In addition, the satellites wholly owned and operated by Her Majesty's Government since 1967 are as follows:

Name	*Operator*
SKYNET 1A	MOD
SKYNET 1B	MOD
SKYNET 2A	MOD
SKYNET 2B	MOD
ARIEL 3	SERC
ARIEL 4	SERC
ARIEL 5	SERC
ARIEL 6	SERC
X-3 (PROSPERO)	RAe Farnborough
X-4 (MIRANDA)	RAe Farnborough
AMPTE-UKS	SERC
IRAS[1]	SERC[1]

MOD—Ministry of Defence.
SERC—Science and Engineering Research Council. SERC is no longer in existence, its space research responsibilities having passed to the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council and the Natural Environment Research Council.
RAe Farnborough—Royal Aerospace Establishment, Farnborough is now part of the Defence Evaluation Research Agency.
[1] Operated but not owned by SERC.
ARIEL 1 and ARIEL 2 were launched in 1962 and 1964 respectively, their missions coming to an end in 1976 and 1967 respectively.
There are no satellites partly owned by Her Majesty's Government.

Nuclear Safety

Mr. McAllion: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent discussions he has held with environmental groups relating to nuclear safety. [12508]

Mr. Page: None. A number of environmental groups, including Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace, set out their views on nuclear safety issues in evidence contributed to the 1994 nuclear review. The Government have consistently made clear their position that safety is the highest priority and that the UK's nuclear licensing and regulatory regime provides a rigorous and robust system for ensuring high standards of safety at UK nuclear facilities.

Exotic Animal Imports

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what requirements have to be satisfied by those intending to import into the United Kingdom exotic animals not listed in the convention on international trade in endangered species; [12579]

(2) if his Department requires prior notification of the numbers and destination of non-CITES-listed venomous snakes imported into the United Kingdom. [12624]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answers 29 January 1997]:* My Department does not require prior notification of, or impose requirements relating to, the import of venomous snakes or any other exotic animals. This is because, alongside the import restrictions applied to species covered by CITES, a range of other controls on the possession and treatment of animals within the United Kingdom apply regardless of whether the animals are bred here or imported. The main regulatory measures include the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976, for which the Department of the Environment is responsible, together with a network of health, welfare and anti-rabies rules enforced by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Home Office and HM Customs and Excise.

European Union (Investment)

Mr. Colvin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his estimate of the value of investment by countries outside the European Union in EU member states in each of the last 10 years; and in each case what percentage of that investment came to the United Kingdom. [13686]

Mr. Greg Knight *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* The available information is given in the table.

Inflow of foreign direct investment by countries outside the European Union into EU member states 1984–1994

	EU(12)[1] *£ million*	*Percentage invested in UK*
1984	3,634	32
1985	3,365	11
1986	4,781	47
1987	9,155	43
1988	12,054	48
1989	18,817	56
1990	23,395	45
1991	14,680	27
1992	14,365	45
1993	15,562	40
1994	13,485	15

Note:
[1] EU(15) 1992 onwards.
Source:
European Union Direct Investment 1984–1993, Eurostat.
Eurostat estimate 1992–1994.

Since investment flows are volatile, it is more meaningful to look at investment flows over a number of years. Over the period as a whole, the UK attracted around 40 per cent. of investment into the EU. According to UK figures, investment from outside the EU more than tripled between 1994 and 1995.

Business Links

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what extra resources have been allocated to

business links to ensure that they are able to maintain support currently provided by the Rural Development Commission to their small business clients in rural development areas. [13887]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* None. Business links already provide support to all small and medium-sized enterprises in their areas—rural or urban. In addition, an element of the local competitiveness challenge has been earmarked for bids from rural development areas. Projects with a rural dimension have featured strongly at the outline bid stage of the challenge.

TREASURY

Employment Statistics

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many economically active people aged under 25 years whose highest qualification was a degree and who had been in full-time education in the previous year, broken down where possible by ethnic group, were unemployed in *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* at the latest available date; [6645]

(2) how many economically active people aged under 25 years who did not have a higher education qualification and who had been a full-time student or pupil the previous year, broken down where possible by ethnic group, were unemployed in (i) 1992 and (ii) at the latest available date; [6646]

(3) how many people aged 16 to 24 years with no higher education qualification who were in full-time education in the previous year sought a full-time job but accepted a part-time job in (i) 1992 and (ii) 1996, broken down where possible by ethnic group; [6648]

(4) how many people aged 16 to 24 years with no higher education qualification who were in full-time education in the previous year, sought a permanent job but accepted a temporary job in (i) 1992 and (ii) 1996, broken down where possible by ethnic group. [6649]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Ms Judith Church, dated 4 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your four outstanding questions (6645, 6646, 6648 and 6649) on under 25 year olds.

These questions were originally tabled along with four others due for reply on 27 November last year. However, because the necessary variable concerning qualifications was not then available for spring 1996 your office said they would wait until the questions could be answered using spring 1996 rather than use spring 1995 figures. In the event it took longer than expected for the necessary variable to become available. I apologise for this delay.

The estimates for Great Britain available from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) are shown in the tables below. The LFS uses the International Labour Office (ILO) definition of unemployment. As in the case of any sample survey, estimates from the LFS are subject to sampling variability. Figures below 10,000 are considered too small to provide reliable estimates and this is why the data on those ILO unemployed can only be broken down into white and non-white and why the figures on those accepting temporary or part-time jobs cannot be broken down at all by ethnic group.

Your questions about those unemployed according to qualification refer to those with degrees and those without a higher education qualification. To ensure that the two categories added up to the total, we have interpreted "without a higher qualification" to be all those without degrees for all the questions answered here. The definition of a higher qualification which we normally use for our analyses covers everything above 'A' level. If you would like further analyses based on this definition your researcher should contact Tim Thair (LFS Analysis at ONS) on 0171 533 6142. I understand he and your researcher discussed the questions answered previously.

Employees aged 16–24 with highest qualification below degree[1] level who were full-time students a year ago

Great Britain (000)

	Sought full-time job but accepted a part-time job	*Sought permanent job but accepted a temporary job*
Spring 1992	24	20
Spring 1996	25	24

Notes:
It is not possible to give the ethnic breakdown as the sample size is too small.
[1] Includes those with no qualifications.
Source:
ONS, Labour Force Survey.

Unemployed persons aged 16–24 who were in full-time education a year ago by highest qualification[1]

Great Britain

	000's				*ILO unemployment rate[2]*			
	Degree[3]	*Non-degree[4]*			*Degree[3]*	*Non-degree[4]*		
ILO unemployed		*All*	*White*	*Non-white*		*All*	*White*	*Non-white*
Spring 1992	21	134	122	12	22.1	18.4	17.8	27.8
Spring 1996	22	178	157	20	17.7	22.3	21.3	35.2

Notes:
[1] It is not possible to give any other ethnic breakdowns as the sample sizes are too small. Estimates for degree and non-degree, non-white are subject to considerable sampling variation.
[2] Total ILO unemployed as a percentage of all economically active persons in the relevant group.
[3] Degree in 1996 includes NVQ level 5 but NVQ level 4 has been included in non-degree.
[4] Includes those with no qualifications.
Source:
ONS, Labour Force Survey.

National Savings

Mr. Hall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he decided to require accounts for each product run by the National Savings agency; and what were the reasons for that decision. [13092]

Mrs. Angela Knight: National Savings has produced accounts for all the savings products for a number of years and has published a statement of business results in its annual report. However, currently the only statutory requirement is to produce accounts for the ordinary account and the investment account, and these are the only accounts which are audited and certified by the Comptroller and Auditor General. It has now been agreed by National Savings, the National Audit Office and the Treasury that the accounts for all products will be audited and certified by the Comptroller and Auditor General from 1996–97 onwards, and the National Audit Office is currently conducting a trial audit of the 1995–96 accounts.

Mr. Hall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each year since 1990–91 *(a)* the original supply estimate, *(b)* any supplementary estimate and *(c)* the final outturn for the accounts of the Department of National Savings; and what were the reasons for the mid-year adjustments. [13091]

Mrs. Knight: The original Supply estimates, supplementary estimates and appropriation accounts for each year since 1990–91 for the Department of National Savings are detailed in the table. Reasons for the supplementary estimates are detailed in the notes to the table:

Year	*Supply estimate net total*	*Supplementary estimate*	*Appropriation account net total*
1990–91	174,169	[1] 1	173,224
1991–92	181,732	[2] 2,082	181,714
1992–93	195,066	[3] 2,611	196,960
1993–94	199,300	[4] 734	198,769
1994–95	199,057	0	196,701
1995–96	192,261	[5] 1,350	193,520
1996–97	179,793	[6] 1,942	—

[1] Token supplementary estimate to take provision for additional payments to certain holders on index-linked savings certificates, additional prizes to certain premium bond holders and compensation for the delay in making these payments arising from a new legal interpretation of the regulations under which the securities were administered (£1,000).

[2] Take-up of end year flexibility (EYF) to finance cost of introducing children's bonus bonds (£582,000) and increase in publicity budget for launch of CBB (£1,500,000).

[3] Transfer from Department of the Environment for buildings maintenance (£181,000). Take up of EYF to meet payments to Post Office for new products (£814,000), and to fund projects originally planned for 1991–92 and to help finance the costs of the new central mainframe (£1,616,000).

[4] Take-up of EYF to part fund introduction of pensioners guaranteed income bond (£579,000), and transfer from Property Holdings for building-specific maintenance (£155,000).

[5] Take-up of EYF to fund voluntary redundancy (£700,000) and delayed information system projects (£650,000).

[6] Take-up of EYF to help fund voluntary redundancy programme (£1,942,000).

Mr. Hall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the stringency of the performance targets set for the National Savings agency relative to its performance in the year prior to executive agency status, with particular reference to the target for customer satisfaction; and if he will set out the method by which the targets were calculated. [13093]

Mrs. Knight: National savings targets were set to reflect the priorities for the agency for its first nine months of operation. The targets were announced to Parliament in my reply to a written parliamentary question from my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) on 1 July 1996 *Official Report*, column *284*. In setting the targets, consideration was given to the performance of the agency in recent years, particularly to the need for various new measurement systems to be developed as a priority for the agency.

Prior to agency status, National Savings carried out a trial customer satisfaction survey in autumn 1995. The 85 per cent. target for 1996–97 was set against the context of that developmental work and to reflect rising customer expectations in the financial services sector.

Added Value

Mr. Hain: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest available figures for the added value per worker for *(a)* United Kingdom, *(b)* France, *(c)* Germany, *(d)* the European Union and *(e)* Japan. [13444]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Peter Hain, dated 4 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the added value per worker.

The figures requested are not available for the whole of the United Kingdom economy. This is because all the component variables necessary to produce gross value added per head data, is not collected by all of the relevant inquiries. Therefore, only partial data is available for the United Kingdom. The following 1994 data represents those sectors where the data can be calculated, and is the latest year available.

	Gross added value per head, £
Mining and quarrying	30,819
Manufacturing	28,969
Electricity, gas and water supply	79,511
Services	22,154
Catering	n/a
Retail	n/a
Wholesaling and dealing	n/a
Motor trades	n/a
Property	n/a

Gross value added per head data for France, Germany, Japan and European Union are not available due to disproportionate cost.

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the net capital stock of manufacturing industry at 1990 replacement cost for each year since 1979. [14240]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Alan Milburn, date 4 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the net capital stock of manufacturing industry at 1990 replacement cost for each year since 1979.

The figures are shown in the attached table.

Gross capital stock at current prices for the United Kingdom

Year	*Billions of pounds*
1979	182.1
1980	183.9
1981	183.1
1982	181.7
1983	180.1
1984	180.2
1985	181.9
1986	182.6
1987	184.0
1988	185.9
1989	189.2
1990	191.3
1991	191.3
1992	190.3
1993	188.9
1994	188.4
1995	188.6

Single Currency

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent steps he has taken in respect of the presentation of Government policy relating to the proposed introduction of the European single currency. [11137]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* I keep the House regularly informed of the Government's policy relating to the single currency. Most recently, I set out Government policy in my opening speech to the Europe debate of 11 December 1996, and my two statements to the House of 25 November and 3 December.

Unemployment (Financial Effects)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the savings to the Exchequer in each of the next five financial years which would result from unemployment being 100,000 lower during that period than assumed in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1997–98"; and what proportion of the savings would reflect *(a)* higher tax revenue and *(b)* lower Government spending. [12769]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 28 January 1997]:* The effect of lower unemployment on public sector borrowing is extremely uncertain. For example, the effect on tax receipts in particular will depend on the extent to which lower unemployment reflects changes in the labour force and/or changes in the level of gross domestic product and, to the extent that it reflects higher GDP, the effect on tax receipts will vary according to the sectoral effects on incomes and expenditure. It is not possible, therefore, to give even approximate estimates of the type requested.

Within public expenditure, the largest direct impact of lower unemployment will be seen in social security spending. The Department of Social Security estimates that a 100,000 reduction in unemployment might reduce benefit expenditure by around £350 to £400 million per annum.

Spend to Save Programme Bids

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the bids for funding for the spend to save programme received by HM Treasury prior to the 1996 Budget which were not accepted for immediate implementation, from the *(a)* Inland Revenue, *(b)* Customs, *(c)* Department of Social Security, *(d)* Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *(e)* Home Office, *(f)* Department of Transport, *(g)* Legal Aid Board and *(h)* Northern Ireland Office, with in each case the projected spending and saving numbers involved in each of these rejected bids; and if he will make a statement. [13259]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 29 January 1997]:* It is not the Government's practice to provide information in relation to internal discussion and advice, including rejected policy options.

Royal Yacht

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what considerations led him to propose using the contingency reserve to finance a replacement for the royal yacht. [13696]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* The Government believe the benefits of a new royal yacht will accrue to the nation as a whole. There is no defence requirement for a replacement yacht, although it will be crewed by the Royal Navy. No other Department's budget is suitable to fund the yacht. As the cost of the yacht is additional to existing expenditure plans, the Government concluded it was appropriate to finance it from the reserve.

TRANSPORT

Rail Routeing Guide

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will instruct the Rail Regulator to ensure that an accurate and up to date routeing guide is published and made available *(a)* for public inspection at each staffed railway station and *(b)* to each public library authority. [14092]

Mr. Watts: The routeing guide was introduced on 29 September 1996 for an introductory period until 31 May 1997. It has been made available to station staff, and passengers have a right to obtain details of the routes permitted for their journey.

A revised guide will be issued by the Association of Train Operating Companies at the end of the introductory period and will take account any comments received. At that stage, consideration will be given to how information can be made available to passengers in a readily accessible form.

A copy of the current routeing guide has been placed on the public register of the Rail Regulator and can be inspected at the Office of the Rail Regulator's library.

Jubilee Line Extension

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his Department's current policy regarding the employment of agency or self-employed labour on the construction of the Jubilee line extension; and what is his estimate of the impact of this policy on the in-service date. [13918]

Mr. Bowis: The employment of labour for the construction of the Jubilee line extension is the responsibility of London Underground Limited's contractors, who are required to employ the necessary work force to complete the job by the target date.

Buses

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 29 October 1996, *Official Report*, column *102*, on European Commission proposals for a directive on the standards of buses, what proposals his Department has made that the directive should make provision for the construction of new open-platform buses. [13920]

Mr. Bowis: I have been concerned that the current generation of Routemaster buses should be protected and that European directives do not rule out the possibility of similar buses being built and operated in the future.

No specific proposals for the provision of the construction of new open-platform buses have been suggested by my Department. When the Commission's proposals are published, we shall study them to see what the implications will be for the future construction of open-platform buses.

Fifth Freedom Cargo Charters

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what grounds his Department upheld an objection by Air Atlantic to a flight by a British cargo airline, for the transport of film equipment from Luton to Rhodes on 22 January; what assessment he has made of the economic impact of this decision; and if he will make a statement. [13764]

Mr. Bowis: The objection by Air Atlantic, a British carrier, to a fifth freedom flight by a foreign carrier, Air Sofia, was upheld on the basis that Air Atlantic had available suitable aircraft to undertake the flight in question. This is in accordance with the Department of Transport's procedures, which have been widely circulated to the airline industry, for considering applications for fifth freedom cargo charters. No specific assessment of the effect of this decision has been made.

British carriers cannot object to cargo flights by other British carriers. In this case, I understand that another British carrier was simply acting as the sales agent of the foreign carrier concerned.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what grounds his Department upheld an objection by Air Atlantic to an Air Sofia flight from East Midlands airport to Madrid carrying automotive parts on 23 to 24 January; what factors led to the subsequent cancellation of the flight; what assessment he has made of the economic impact of this decision; and if he will make a statement. [13765]

Mr. Bowis: The objection by Air Atlantic, a British carrier, was upheld on the basis that it had suitable aircraft available to undertake the flight in question. Because Air Sofia's application was made less than five working days before the flight in question, my Department's normal requirement that a UK carrier match the price offered by the foreign carrier did not apply. This is in accordance with my Department's procedures, which have been widely circulated to the airline industry, for considering applications for fifth freedom cargo charters. No specific assessment of the effect of this decision has been made.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to prevent abuses of the fifth freedom policy. [13766]

Mr. Bowis: My Department has established clear procedures for handling applications for both passenger and cargo charter flights operated on a "fifth freedom" basis, and these have been widely disseminated within the UK and to foreign carriers and their representatives. My officials will investigate any cases where it is alleged that these procedures are being abused.

Commercial Pilots

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what medical requirements have to be met before a person is licensed to fly a commercial aeroplane; how often that person is required to be examined; and what details of their medical history are referred to in the licence. [13776]

Mr. Bowis: The medical requirements that have to be met before a person can be licensed to fly a commercial aeroplane are set by the International Civil Aviation Authority and contained in annex 1 to the Chicago convention on international civil aviation. Medical

examinations are carried out by authorised medical examiners, who receive guidance on the interpretation of those requirements from the medical division of the Civil Aviation Authority.

The initial medical for commercial pilots will include a full physical examination together with a chest x-ray, electrocardiograph, and hearing and vision tests. After this, medical examinations are carried out annually until the pilot reaches the age of 40 and every six months thereafter. Medical information is not referred to on licences.

Freight Handling, Ostend Airport

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what actions he has taken to prevent under EU competition law the subsidy granted by the Belgian Government for new freight handling facilities at Ostend airport. [13763]

Mr. Bowis: Enforcement of the state aid rules in the treaty of Rome is a matter for the European Commission. We are not aware that the European Commission has been notified of any plans by the Belgian authorities to grant subsidy for freight loading facilities at Ostend airport. If my hon. Friend would let us have further information we shall investigate.

Birmingham Northern Relief Road

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the role of the Birmingham northern relief road in the Government's plans for transport in the west midlands. [14217]

Mr. Watts: No statement would be appropriate in advance of the decision following the public inquiry.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what evaluation he has made of the problem of traffic congestion at the junction of the A446 and the M42 and the contribution which the Birmingham northern relief road will make towards resolving it. [14220]

Mr. Watts: The Highways Agency is considering present and likely future conditions at the A446-M42 junction, having regard to developments in that locality.

The contribution which BNRR might make was discussed in detail at the BNRR public inquiry. The inspector's report is awaited, and further comment would be inappropriate in advance of the decision following the inquiry.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when he expects to publish the report of the public inquiry into the Birmingham northern relief road; [14218]

(2) if the report of the inspector who conducted the public inquiry into the Birmingham northern relief road has been *(a)* completed, *(b)* sent to his Department and *(c)* considered by the Minister; and on what dates. [14219]

Mr. Watts: The inspector's report has not yet been submitted to my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport. The report will be published when the decision on the scheme is announced in the light of consideration of the inspector's conclusions and recommendations following the public inquiry.

Coastguard (Staff)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessment he has made of the effect of fears of job insecurity on the level of performance of employees of Her Majesty's Coastguard; [13431]

(2) if he will make a statement on current levels of job insecurity in Her Majesty's Coastguard service. [13432]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 3 February 1997]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Coastguard agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 4 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about job insecurity in the Coastguard Agency.

The Chief Coastguard has given assurances to staff and the Trade Unions that the Agency has no plans for compulsory redundancies. The performance of employees is continually assessed and there are no indications at present that concerns about job insecurity are having a significant effect on the performance of staff.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people are currently employed by the Coastguard agency; how many were employed in 1992; and what projections he has made of the number who will be employed in 2001. [13435]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 3 February 1997]:* The number of people employed by the Coastguard agency at the end of 1996 was 666. The number of people employed in 1992 was 522. The agency is developing a strategy for using the benefits of new communication technology to meet its requirements into the 21st century. The strategy is under development, and there are currently no projections for the number of staff the agency will employ in 2001.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will make a statement on the reported levels of stress incurred by those employed by Her Majesty's Coastguard; and what measures he has put in place to reduce them; [13430]

(2) on what date the most recent assessment was made of levels of stress incurred by employees of the Coastguard agency; [13433]

(3) what surveys he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into levels of stress incurred by employees of the Coastguard agency; and if he will place copies of them in the Library. [13434]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 3 February 1997]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Coastguard agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 4 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about levels of stress in the Coastguard Agency.

The Agency takes the issue of stress in the workplace very seriously and has initiated a series of stress management workshops aimed at recognising and dealing with stress. We also provide post incident traumatic stress counselling to all staff as required. We have not yet conducted a survey into the level of stress incurred by staff. We have, however, recent commissioned a thorough study of sick absence amongst staff, which is currently being evaluated. Initial conclusions from the study suggest that the levels of sickness and absenteeism in the Agency, including stress-related illness, are below those for the civil service as a whole and compare favourably with other emergency organisations.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

BSE

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farms in the United Kingdom *(a)* have been and *(b)* have not been affected by BSE; and how many farms in each category have used the product Phosmet on their farms. [12288]

Mrs. Browning: The number of farms in the United Kingdom which have had a BSE confirmed case was 35,047 as at 17 January 1997.

It is not possible to provide the information in part *(b)* in the form requested as the number of farms is not static.

Information on use of Phosmet is not centrally available. However, epidemiological studies carried out at the beginning of the BSE epidemic have shown clearly that there is no correlation between the use of agricultural chemicals and the incidence of BSE.

Certified Herds Scheme

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the Government will present their detailed documentation to the European Commission proposing a United Kingdom certified herds scheme; and what is the estimated timetable for the discussion of these proposals. [12828]

Mr. Baldry: We will shortly submit our proposals for a certified herds scheme, which will be the basis of the first step towards the phased lifting of the export ban; we will press the Commission to give them urgent consideration so that we can begin exports of meat and meat products from these herds as soon as possible.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to ensure that the value of hill livestock compensatory allowance is maintained in real terms; and if he will make a statement. [13922]

Mr. Boswell: Decisions on the rates of hill livestock compensatory allowances are taken each year in the light of the autumn review of economic conditions in the hills and uplands. The review, which involves the farming unions, takes account of a wide range of economic data, including changes in the value of HLCA payments in real terms.

Stilboesterol

Ms Corston: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the use of stilboesterol in the dairy industry; and if he will indicate when it was *(a)* introduced in the United Kingdom and *(b)* discontinued; and if he will make a statement. [14277]

Mrs. Browning: Stilboesterol was used from the 1960s until its prohibition in bovine and other animals on 31 May 1982 by the Medicines (Stilbenes and Thyrostatic Substances) Regulations 1982. From the Ministry's on-going statutory residues surveillance programme, there is no evidence that stilboesterol or any other growth promoting hormones are being used in Great Britain. The results of this surveillance are published in the Veterinary Medicine Directorate's annual report on surveillance for veterinary residues and updated quarterly in its Medicines Act Veterinary Information Service—MAVIS—newsletter.

Food Safety

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which *(a)* committees and *(b)* other bodies his Department consults regularly on food safety policies; and how many of these represent scientific interests. [13313]

Mrs. Browning: The main committees which provide advice on food safety issues are: the Food Advisory Committee; the Advisory Committee on Microbiological Safety of Food; the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes; the Advisory Committee on Pesticides; the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy; the Committees on Toxicity, Carcinogenicity, and Mutagenicity; the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee; and the Veterinary Products Committee. The Food Advisory Committee has a widely based membership including some scientific experts, although it mostly relies on other specialist committees for advice on scientific matters. In the case of the other committees most of the members have scientific expertise.

Views from many other bodies with scientific interests are sought during the extensive consultation which takes place when policies are being formulated.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many improvement notices were served on establishments subject to food safety enforcement law in *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* 1995. [14247]

Mrs. Browning: In non-metropolitan English districts 22,414 food premise were issued with improvement notices in 1992 and 2,314 in 1995. For all English authorities, 34,474 food businesses were issued with improvement notices in 1992 and 4,541 in 1995.

Wildlife (Arable Areas)

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will take further action to encourage wildlife in arable areas. [14410]

Mr. Boswell: We intend to introduce a pilot incentive scheme to promote techniques of arable farming which might benefit wildlife across England.

The objectives of the scheme will be to test the practicability of specific management measures and the extent to which they bring benefits for biodiversity, including farmland birds.

We have listened carefully to advice from the National Agri-environment Forum, which we created last year. We are grateful for detailed proposals made by the Game Conservancy Trust, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and English Nature, which have been welcomed by a working group of the forum. Next month the Ministry will consult forum members on arrangements for the pilot scheme, which will take these proposals fully into account.

The pilot scheme will be managed as a separate element of the countryside stewardship scheme, with farmers being offered five-year agreements to manage arable fields according to specific requirements. It will apply in one or more pilot areas of England. We intend to open the scheme to applications in spring 1998.

Beef Stocks

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will use part of the additional £52 million at his disposal for support of the beef and veal sector to compensate holders of beef stocks made worthless by the ban on over-30-months beef. [13683]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* The Government have already provided a substantial package of assistance to help UK holders of beef stocks affected by the BSE crisis. Under the beef stocks transfer scheme, introduced in May 1996, the Government offered to purchase stocks of beef held by slaughterhouses and cutting plants, for which there was no market demand, at 65 per cent. of the pre-crisis market price. In the interests of public health and market confidence, arrangements were also made to dispose of unsaleable stocks of beef and beef products outside the slaughtering sector at public expense. The total estimated expenditure under these two schemes is about £70 million. We have no plans to allocate new funds to these activities.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will consider compensating exporters for the stocks of beef which they have been unable to sell as a result of the export ban. [13684]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* The Government sympathise with the exporters whose businesses have suffered since the BSE crisis. Some beef exporters, as cutting plants, have benefited from the beef stocks transfer scheme applying to the slaughtering sector. But our support has been targeted at the essential links in the beef supply chain, not to compensate for BSE-related losses. The High Court upheld our decision to exclude other exporters from eligibility for support under the scheme. We do not intend to bring such exporters within its scope.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support Agency (Logo)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much has been spent by the Child Support Agency in changing its logo, separately identifying the costs of *(a)* new stationery, *(b)* signage and *(c)* designing the new logo; what agencies were involved in this work; when the decision was taken to change the logo; and what involvement Ministers had in this decision. [10966]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant CB. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 3 February 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency logo.

The basic answer to your question is that costs will be reduced as a result of this change.

The new Child Support Agency corporate identity was introduced following approval by the Agency Board in July 1996. The decision fell within the Agency's authority given that we met Departmental standards of procurement and compliance with DSS corporate identity restrictions but Ministers were made aware of the change in the course of normal discussions on operational issues.

The new logo has been in use since 4 November 1996 but changes to our stationery will only be made as existing stocks fall to be reprinted. There have therefore been no additional stationery costs. Indeed, as the new logo (unlike the old one) only uses two standard colours, can easily be altered in size and copies and faxes very well, there will be substantial savings from its use, costed at a minimum of £60,000 per annum.

The work to develop the new corporate identity was undertaken by the Agency in conjunction with the Central Office of Information. The cost was £2,427, and was met from within this year's existing publicity budget.

As far as external signage goes, the costs have been met from this year's existing printing budget. The contract has been let under Departmental call-off contract arrangements and we have opted for the most economical solution of merely modifying the existing signage with an overlay rather than a full replacement. In due course, over 500 signs will be modified in this way, at a maximum cost of £40,000.

Independent Tribunal Service

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the report of the review of the organisation and management of the independent tribunal service, referred to in paragraph 3.16 of the consultation paper on decision making and appeals, Cm 3328, and the report of the independent tribunal service issued on 20 September 1996. [11090]

Mr. Roger Evans *[pursuant to his reply, 24 January 1997, columns 769–70]:* The results of the review of the organisation and management of the independent tribunal service were summarised in the consultation paper Cm 3328. We do not intend to publish the report as a whole.

I have been advised that "The Report of the Independent Tribunal Service (ITS) 1996" has been widely distributed and that copies are available on request from ITS offices.

Invalidity and Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many and what proportion of invalidity benefit claimants who were disallowed following a medical examination appealed against the disallowance in *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94 and *(c)* 1994–95. [13047]

Mr. Burt: Information is not available in the format requested as details of the specific reason for an invalidity benefit appeal are not routinely recorded, except for the 1994–95 year.

Such information as is available is in the table.

Period	Number of invalidity benefit terminations following medical examinations[1]	Number of invalidity benefit appeals registered[2]
April 1992 to March 1993	[3]18,000	12,000
April 1993 to March 1994	[3]36,000	21,000
April 1994 to March 1995	28,000	21,000

[1] Figures for invalidity benefit terminations are taken from a 1 per cent. sample of all claims to benefit in Great Britain. Figures exclude terminations because of final medical certificates, deaths, awards of retirement pension or other benefits.

[2] Includes appeals other than those against disallowance of benefit following medical examination.

[3] Figures include some cases where the reason for termination was not recorded.

1. Figures rounded to nearest 1,000.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many and what proportion of incapacity benefit claimants who have failed the all work test have appealed against the subsequent disallowance. [13046]

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table.

Period	Number of incapacity benefit claimants who failed the all work test	Number of appeals against disallowance	Proportion of claimants who appeal
April 1995 to November 1996	230,100	100,100	44 per cent.

1. Sources Benefits Agency and independent tribunal service.

2. Figures include incapacity benefit claimants, national insurance credit only claimants and some severe disablement allowance claimants.

3. Figures are rounded to nearest 100 and are subject to revision.

Benefits Fraud Hotline

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to monitor calls to the fraud hotline. [13052]

Mr. Heald: Calls to the national benefit fraud hotline are monitored on a daily basis to identify emerging trends.

Departmental Costs

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of his Department's costs for each (i) outsourcing and (ii) private finance project within his Department. [13307]

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table.

Department of Social Security—private sector projects

Project	Estimated total cost (£ million)
Benefits Agency	
ADAPT 98	
A competition to select private sector companies to work in partnership in three area directorates	1.87
PROSPECT 98	
Outsourcing Child Benefit operations	1.23
IMPACT 97	
Outsourcing Benefits Agency medical services	1.63
BA POCL	
Private finance initiative to automate payment of DSS benefits through Post Office Counters and introduce plastic benefit card. Initial trial in 10 post offices	56.8
Contributions Agency	
NIRS2	
Private finance initiative to replace national insurance recording system (NIRS1)	1.23
Newcastle estates redevelopment	
Private finance initiative to rationalise and improve accommodation of DSS agencies in Newcastle	3.15
Information Technology Services Agency	
ACCORD (Access to corporate data)	
Private finance initiative to award a contract for delivery of a range of IS/IT services. Three private sector organisations have been shortlisted to work as a joint team with DSS staff to identify requirements	3.6
SASA (StandAlone Support Applications)	
Outsourcing the development and support of those small, non-strategic computer applications	1
Child Support Agency	
Royal Mail	
Outsourcing post opening in six CSA centres	0.06
Departmental	
PRIME (Private sector Resource Initiative for Management of the Estate)	
Private Finance Initiative to transfer ownership and management of DSS premises to the private sector	6.9
PARENT PLUS	
Outsourcing four of the twelve pilot areas running a new service to help lone parents into work	0.03

Golf Links Estate (Fire Compensation)

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what help is available from the social fund to people on income support who have suffered loss and damage as a result of the recent fire on the Golf Links estate, Southall; and if he will make a statement. [14380]

Mr. Roger Evans: Disaster relief following any such crisis is essentially a matter for the relevant local authority. However, through the social fund, crisis loans can be made available to help those in such unfortunate circumstances and community care grants are also available to help those who find themselves under

exceptional pressure. Applications to the social fund are dealt with, as speedily as possible, by specially trained social fund officers who look carefully at the individual circumstances surrounding each application and use discretion and flexibility when forming their decisions.

On January 18, Ealing district reported that a total of 79 community care grant awards had been made to people most affected by the fire, at a total cost of £56,819. I have therefore agreed to a request for an additional allocation of £50,000 to reimburse Ealing's community care grant budget.

Classroom Assistants

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if classroom assistants employed in schools during the term times only are eligible for unemployment benefit when schools close. [13861]

Mr. Roger Evans: Jobseeker's allowance replaced unemployment benefit as the main benefit for the unemployed as from 7 October 1996.

Jobseeker's allowance is not payable to people who work for, on average, 16 hours a week or more—24 hours or more in the case of partners of people receiving income-based jobseeker's allowance. For people whose working pattern is such that, either they do not work every week or they work a different number of hours each week, the average hours worked are normally calculated with reference to their usual pattern of work.

For school ancillary workers, such as classroom assistants, who have continuing contracts of employment, school holidays, when the person does no work, are not included in the average calculation. The effect of excluding school holidays from the averaging calculation normally means that school ancillary workers are working for more than 16 hours a week on average and therefore not entitled to jobseeker's allowance. They can, however, claim family credit, subject to their satisfying the normal conditions for entitlement.

School ancillary workers whose employment terminates at the end of each term and who therefore become unemployed are not affected by the averaging rules. Eligibility to jobseeker's allowance in these circumstances will depend on their satisfying the normal conditions of entitlement, for example available for and actively seeking work.

Benefits in Kind

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what margin of error is applied to in his Department's calculation of the revenue effects of extending employer national insurance contributions to all taxable benefits in kind. [13333]

Mr. Heald *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* The current estimate of £250 million is based on the Inland Revenue's 1994–95 expenses and benefits survey. Owing to the complex methodology employed in producing the survey data, a robust calculation of the margin of error could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

SCOTLAND

Eye Tests

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the numbers of people aged over 60 years who are deterred from having eye tests as a result of the charges imposed. [13707]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There is no evidence that people aged over 60 years are deterred by charges from seeking sight tests. The Government believe that people who can afford to do so should pay for their own sight tests and that help with optical costs should be based on ability to pay rather than age. Many people of 60 and over fall within the groups who are eligible for free NHS sight tests or for help with private tests through the NHS low income scheme.

NHS Auditing

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much *(a)* health authorities and *(b)* trusts have spent on auditors' remuneration in each year since 1992 in Scotland. [14295]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is detailed in the table. It is not, however, possible to identify expenditure split between health boards and trusts prior to 1995–96, therefore the figure given for each year is the audit remuneration for both health boards and trusts. In 1995–96 the Accounts Commission took over responsibility for the audit of the NHS in Scotland.

Year	*Audit remuneration £000*
1992–93	1,070
1993–94	1,314
1994–95	1,828
1995–96	2,968

Executive Pay (Water and Sewerage Authorities)

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much remuneration has been paid to the directors and executives of the three water and sewerage authorities since their formation on 1 April 1996. [14296]

Mr. Kynoch: Remuneration for the period 1 April 1996 to 31 December 1996 of the chief executives of the three water authorities and their teams of directors has been estimated by the authorities as follows:

	£
North of Scotland	278,942
East of Scotland	333,450
West of Scotland	447,557

Management Allowances (GP Fundholders)

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary for Scotland how much has been allocated to GP fundholders in management allowances in each year since the start of the scheme. [14297]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is as follows:

1990–91: £25,000

1991–92: £252,000

1992–93: £1,554,000

1993–94: £3,114,000

1994–95: £4,333,000

1995–96: £4,756,000'

' Provisional'.

NHS Trust Remuneration

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the estimated remuneration to be paid to NHS trust chairs and non-executive directors in Scotland for 1996–97. [14299]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is estimated that the maximum sum payable to the chairmen and non-executive directors of the 47 NHS trusts in Scotland during 1996–97 will be £1,083,975; of this, £848,975 is payable to chairmen and £235,000 to non-executive directors.

A more precise figure cannot be given since vacancies which have arisen during the current year will reduce the total payable. Additionally, a number of individuals decline any remuneration for these public appointments.

Hospital Waiting Times

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many new patients seeking out-patient consultations in 1996 involved a wait longer than nine weeks; and what proportion of the total number of referrals these patients represent. [11952]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* The number of new outpatient referrals in the year to 31 December 1996 where the patient waited more than 9 weeks was 325,689 out of a total number of 1,199,027. This represents 27.2 per cent. of the total number of referrals. These figures are provisional.

Council Duties

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the extra duties given to councils in 1996–97 and 1997–98. [12762]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 28 January 1997]:* Councils in Scotland have, since 1 April 1996, taken on the following statutory duties in policy areas for which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is responsible:

Duty to bill and collect water and sewerage charges from domestic customers on behalf of the new water authorities;

Duty to appoint a chief social work officer;

Duty to assess carers' needs;

Duty to take air quality into account before making traffic orders;

Duty to prepare a plan to achieve significant improvements in energy efficiency in residential accommodation;

Duty to consult other planning authorities about planning applications for certain retail developments;

Duty to notify the Secretary of State about planning applications for certain retail developments;

Duty to consult community councils, water and sewerage authorities, and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency about certain planning applications;

Duty to review and update old mineral planning permissions within a statutory timetable;

Duties relating to the compulsory competitive tendering of council contracts, including provision for the progressive re-introduction from 1 April 1997 and 1 July 1997 of compulsory competitive tendering for construction and maintenance services under the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 and services under the Local Government Act 1988;

Enforcement of additional rules on the use, production, storage and handling of mammalian meat relating to the Government's policy to eliminate bovine spongiform encephalopathy from the food chain; and

North Ayrshire, Fife, North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire and West Lothian councils have also taken on responsibility for various functions formerly exercised by new town development corporations within their areas.

In addition, the responsibility for the organisation of polling districts has transferred to the councils from parliamentary returning officers.

The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 will impose new duties on councils in relation to children's welfare from 1 April 1997.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what additional financial resources he has allocated to councils to meet changes in their obligations in 1996–97 and 1997–98. [12763]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 28 January 1997]:* The amounts included in the 1996–97 and 1997–98 local government finance settlements in respect of new financial burdens on local authorities are as follows:

1996–97: £178.354 million

1997–98: £61.177 million

In both cases, the figures are net of the minimum level of savings which the Government assume will be achieved from local government reorganisation.

Woodlands

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he proposes to take to promote the development of natural woodlands. [12584]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 3 February 1997]:* The protection and enhancement of our ancient and semi-natural woodlands is a key aim of our forestry policy. We are committed to the steady expansion of tree cover, using native species and natural regeneration where appropriate, with the support of the woodland grant scheme and the farm woodland premium scheme. We have also recently introduced woodland improvement grants and challenge funds for forestry projects to help further achieve these aims and significant funds have been provided by the Millennium Commission for a range of native woodland projects through the country. In addition, schemes in the Government's agri-environment programme such as the environmentally sensitive area scheme and the countryside stewardship and proposed countryside premium schemes, provide payments to farmers to manage native woodlands and for planting of native species.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Arts Forum

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) if she will publish a list of members of the Arts Forum; [12319]

(2) with what frequency she intends her Arts Forum to meet; and what is its remit. [12320]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Following the publication in July of my Department's policy document "Setting the Scene: The Arts and Young People", I announced on 14 October 1996 the establishment of a new Arts Forum, to be a joint forum with the Royal Society for the encouragement of the Arts, Manufactures and Commerce. It is intended that the forum should meet roughly four times per year. Membership if the forum is not fixed, and varies according to the subject under discussion. The first meeting of the forum, on 7 November 1996, considered its terms of reference and adopted the following:

"The terms of reference for the forum will be:

to highlight issues which impact on the future of the arts, to stimulate and broaden the debate;

to suggest strategies which can best sustain the arts economy;

to advise on and help the process of government policy making;

in particular to consider, advise on and where appropriate assist with implementation of the recommendations arising from the Department of National Heritage's policy document "Setting the Scene";

to bring together and make connections between organisations and individuals involved in the arts, and other sectors with an interest in them."

National Lottery

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she expects to reply to the letter dated 6 August 1996 from the hon. Member for Western Isles regarding Government policy on lottery funding. [12186]

Mr. Sproat: I apologise that, due to an administrative error, the hon. Member has not received a reply to his letter. A reply has been sent to the hon. Member today answering his points in full.

Sports Council

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the restructuring of the Sports Council. [14381]

Mr. Sproat: Further to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) on 18 December 1996 *Official Report*, column *590*, I am pleased to inform the House that the United Kingdom Sports Council and the English Sports Council became fully operational as independent bodies from 1 January 1997.

On 31 December 1996, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage issued directions to the United Kingdom Sports Council and to the English Sports Council requiring them to accept responsibility for the assets, liabilities and undertaking of the Great Britain Sports Council. At a joint meeting on 6 January 1997 of the Great Britain Sports Council, the United Kingdom Sports Council and the English Sports Council, and at separate meetings of the UK and the English Sports Councils held on the same day, formal agreement was made to the aforesaid transfer.

The United Kingdom Sports Council

The United Kingdom Sports Council is responsible for fostering, supporting, and encouraging the development of sport and physical recreation and the achievement of excellence and the provision of sporting facilities at a UK level. The focus of the United Kingdom Sports Council will reflect the policies "Sport: Raising the Game". It will take a lead among the sports councils in all aspects of sport and physical recreation that require strategic planning, administration, co-ordination or representation for the benefit of the UK as a whole. Within the objects and powers provided by its royal charter, the UK Sports Council's functions are:

To identify sporting policies that should have a UK-wide application; to identify areas of unnecessary duplication, overlap and waste in the way sport is administered in the UK; to consider with the Sports Councils of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland how grant programmes for sports bodies with a UK or Great Britain remit could best be administered, and to administer those programmes; to oversee policy on sports science, sports medicine, drug control, and coaching and other areas where there may be a need for the home country sports councils to deliver a consistent UK-wide policy; to co-ordinate policy for bringing major international sporting events to the UK; and to represent the UK internationally and to increase the influence of the UK at international level.

The members of the United Kingdom Sports Council are:

Lord MacLaurin of Knebworth, DL, Chairman (Chairman of Tesco plc, Chairman of the Test and County Cricket board)

Sir Rodney Walker (Chairman of the English Sports Council, Chairman of the Rugby Football League)

Mr. Graeme Simmers, OBE, CA (Chairman of the Scottish Sports Council, former Chairman of the Scottish Highlands Hotels Group)

Mr. Ossie Wheatley, CBE (Chairman of the Sports Council for Wales, former Chairman of Glamorgan County Cricket Club)

Mr. Don Allen (Chairman of the Sports Council for Northern Ireland, former Irish League footballer).

Dr. Mary Nevill Lecturer in Sports Science, Loughborough University, former world-class hockey player and international coach)

Mr. Craig Reedie (Chairman of the British Olympic Association, International Olympic Committee member)

Prof. Sarah Springman (Professor of Geotechnical Engineering, former world-class triathlete)

There are, at present, two vacancies on the council, following the resignations of Mr. Rob Andrew and Mr. Clive Lloyd due to pressures of business. Candidates have been considered in line with the procedures recommended by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. Completion of the consultation with the Chairman of the UK Sports Council and the home country Secretaries of State is nearing completion and an announcement will be made shortly about who the new appointments will be.

The English Sports Council

The English Sports Council has similar responsibilities to those of the Sports Councils in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It is responsible for fostering, supporting and encouraging the development of sport and physical recreation among the public at large, and the

achievement of excellence in England, and for the provision of facilities. It will take a lead in all aspects of sport and physical recreation that require administration, co-ordination or representation from the public sector in England.

The focus of the English Sports Council will reflect the policies in "Sport: Raising the Game", concentrating on support to the governing bodies of sport, in-so-far as they are concerned with the administration and development of sport in England; help the grassroots of sport; services in support of sporting excellence in England; and the national lottery. Within the objects and powers provided by its royal charter, the English Sports Council will aim:

> To provide opportunities for all young people to become involved in sport and physical recreation and to realise their full potential, particularly through sport in schools; to ensure that a framework exists to help those with talent, commitment and interest to realise their performance potential within their chosen sports; to advise and support the effective planning, design and management of facilities and services where they are of direct relevance to sport for young people and the development of excellence; and—to raise the expertise of people who encourage sports participation and improve sporting performance.

The English Sports Council also becomes responsible from 1 January 1997 for the distribution in England of lottery proceeds for expenditure on or connected with sport.

The members of the English Sports Council are:

Sir Rodney Walker, Chairman (Chairman of the English Sports Council, Chairman of the Rugby Football League)

Mr. Trevor Brooking, MBE, Vice-Chairman (Football broadcaster, former professional footballer)

Mr. Gerald Dennis, Vice-Chairman (Part-time Chairman of Alexandra Workwear and Domino Printing Sciences)

Mr. Peter Blake (Headmaster of Windsor boys' school, school rugby and cricket coach)

Mr. Chris Boardman, MBE (World class professional cyclist)

Ms Julia Bracewell (Former international fencer, qualified referee and barrister)

Mr. Tim Marshall, MBE (Senior Lecturer in Public Health and Epidemiology, Birmingham University, involved with wheelchair roadracing)

Mr. Keith Oates (Deputy Chairman of Marks and Spencer plc)

Mr. Jeff Probyn (England international Rugby Union footballer)

Mr. Geoff Thompson, MBE (Chairman of the Youth Charter for Sport, former world-class karate player)

Mrs. Phyllis Avery (President of the South Region Netball Association, netball coach, umpire and former England selector and trialist)

Mr. Jim Munn, MBE (former Director of Recreation and Community Services, Birmingham city council)

Mr. David Oxley, OBE (former Chief Executive of the Rugby Football League and teacher)

Mr. Sam Stoker (Principal St. Cuthbert's Society and Schools/Access Liaison Officer for the University of Durham)

There is, at present, one vacancy on the council, following the resignation of Mr. Ian Botham due to pressure of business. Replacement names are being considered in line with the procedures recommended by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. An announcement will be made soon about who the new appointment is to be.

The Great Britain Sports Council

The Great Britain Sports Council will continue to exist as a body corporate under the terms of its 1972 royal charter for the immediate future. This will enable the council to handle any residual matters arising.

The former membership of the Great Britain Sports Council is continuing for the interim. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, in consultation with the chairman and members of the Sports Council, will wish to review in due course the practicality of this arrangement.

History Museum

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what response she has given to the proposal for an official museum of British history. [12463]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 3 February 1997]:* The proposal to establish a museum of British history, which is the subject of an application to the Millennium Commission, does not require the approval of the Department of National Heritage. This is an interesting proposal, and I am sure that the Millennium Commission will give the application careful consideration.

World Cup 2006

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the latest meeting between the Football Association and the Minister of State in connection with the Football Association's bid to host the World cup in 2006. [14622]

Mr. Sproat: I met the FA yesterday afternoon to discuss concerns about their World Cup bid.

The FA explained that they had made the formal decision to go ahead with a World cup bid after the success of Euro 96, and publicly announced the bid on 1 July last year. Since July, there have been several occasions on which the FA's bid had been publicly referred to in the presence of both UEFA officials and the German FA. These included a dinner held to mark the retirement of Sir Bert Millichip at the London Hilton on 19 September and a UEFA dinner held to congratulate England on the success of Euro 96 in Geneva on 12 November.

On 30 October FA officials visited the headquarters of FIFA, the world football governing body, in Zurich and were briefed about the World cup bidding process. I understand that this meeting followed a letter from the FA's chief executive, Graham Kelly, to both the president of FIFA, Dr. Havelange, and the general secretary, Sepp Blatter, on 10 September confirming that the FA had decided to bid. At this stage, countries interested in bidding for the World cup can only make their intentions known publicly. The formal submission of bids does not take place until 1999, and the decision is made in 2000. Apart from England and Germany, other possible contenders are Brazil, Argentina, South Africa, Morocco, Egypt, Peru and Ecuador.

The FA explained that a fax had arrived at the FA's headquarters on 31 January from the general secretary of UEFA, Gerhard Ainger, which said that that week's meeting of the UEFA committee had

"recalled that it had already committed itself to supporting the candidature of the Football Association of Germany as organiser of the World Cup of 2006".

This recollection apparently referred to discussions that had been held several years previously. I understand that this was the first time that any such endorsement of the German bid had been communicated to the FA. Since receiving this information, the FA has asked UEFA for the minutes of the meeting or meetings at which this issue was discussed and an indication of how the decision taken was communicated to the member associations within UEFA.

To date, I understand that no records of the decisions have been forthcoming from UEFA and UEFA officials are now reported to have acknowledged that no such records exist. Its media director is quoted in today's newspapers as saying that

"UEFA's official support for Germany is not recorded in any minutes".

In these circumstances, the FA has drawn the obvious conclusion that any discussions that took place could not have been of any great significanceor they would have been formally minuted and notified to the member associations.

The FA believes that UEFA has a responsibility to all member associations and should consider carefully the merits of any case presented by any one of them to stage the World cup. It also sees a clear need for an open and democratic assessment of all bids so that football secures the best venue possible to stage the World cup. I understand that the FA will be meeting UEFA shortly, and will be seeking clarification of UEFA's intentions.

From the information presented to us, we find it difficult to understand UEFA's position. FIFA makes the decision on where the tournament will be held, and has indicated that it will not be influenced by UEFA's decision.

I have written today to my opposite number in Germany to express my hope that our bids can be conducted in a spirit of friendly rivalry. I have also sought to ascertain whether or not he understood that a decision had already been made by UEFA to back the German bid.

The Government strongly support the FA. We believe that the FA's bid is an excellent one, and one that has every chance of success. We staged an outstanding Euro 96, the facilities at our grounds are second to none and lottery funds have been earmarked to ensure that the new stadium at Wembley will be the finest in the world and a fitting venue for the 2006 World cup final. We ask only that there is a level playing field, and that the respective bids be judged on their merits.

I am very much looking forward to the dinner I am hosting on 11 February and the reception on 12 February to promote this excellent bid, which will provide a further opportunity to demonstrate our support.

WALES

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the current situation in the BSE crisis. [13566]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The measures introduced by the Government to protect the public health from any risk from BSE continue and returns for BSE enforcement measures show continuing high compliance rates. The BSE epidemic is in sharp decline as a result of the controls in place, particularly the ruminant feed ban.

We have been working actively to meet the pre-conditions in the Florence agreement and will continue to work for a progressive lifting of the export ban. The Government have committed over £250 million in direct financial support to producers to help keep the production and marketing chains open and thereby ensure the survival of the UK beef industry.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many meetings he has had with National Farmers Union representatives to discuss BSE and related matters. [13627]

Mr. Evans: Welsh Office Ministers and officials have had numerous meetings with the NFU to discuss BSE.

Departmental Publicity

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide *(a)* his Department's budgeted expenditure on (i) advertising, (ii) publicity and (iii) public information campaigns for the period January to March 1997 and *(b)* the actual expenditure on (1) advertising, (2) publicity and (3) public information campaigns in the period January to March in each of the past five years. [13458]

Mr. Hague: Welsh Office budgeted expenditure on advertising and publicity, which includes public information campaigns for the period January to March 1997, and out-turn expenditure for the period January to March 1996 is set out in the table. For previous financial years comparable information is not readily available.

Period	*Advertising* £	*Publicity and public information campaigns*[1] £
Budgeted expenditure		
January–March 1997	47,133	758,378
Actual expenditure		
January–March 1996	216,460	863,099

[1] Expenditure figures for publicity and public information campaigns cannot be disaggregated.

Conferences (Ministerial Participation)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which conferences he has addressed since taking office. [13555]

Mr. Hague: Since taking office I have addressed the following conferences on official business:

	Conference	*Location*
12 July 1995	Consumer and Local Government Conference	Cardiff
29 September 1995	Launch of World Health Organisation Collaborating Centre of International Toxicovigilance	Cardiff
22 October 1995	University of Wales/Welsh Secondary Schools Association Conference	Pontypridd
29 November 1995	Transtech Conference	Videolink
25 January 1996	Tourism and Access in Wales	Cowbridge
26 January 1996	European Regional Strategies for the Automotive Industry Colloquium	Cardiff
13 February 1996	ICL Lunch-part of a conference	London
30 April 1996	Student Disability Conference	Video Message
15 May 1996	Wales European Business Fair	Cardiff
20 May 1996	Food Seminar	Llandudno
3 June 1996	Launch of Regional Technology Plan	Cardiff
25 September 1996	National Parks Authorities Conference	Llandudno
16 October 1996	Council of Mortgage Lenders	Cardiff
7 November 1996	Welsh Association of Health Authorities and Trusts	Ewloe
13 November 1996	IOD Conference	Cardiff

Pensioners (Care Homes)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the average weekly cost of a place in *(a)* a statutory residential home, *(b)* a voluntary residential home and *(c)* a private residential home for an individual over pensionable age who is in receipt of income support. [13554]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The information requested is not held centrally.

Severn Trent Water Authority

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the division of responsibilities between the Environment Agency regional offices in Wales and the midlands for the monitoring of the Severn Trent water authority. [13317]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment on 19 July 1995 at columns *1431–32*. The recommendations of the Environment Agency advisory committee on regional boundaries were placed in the Library of the House. In accordance with those recommendations the Environment Agency has drawn up a memorandum of understanding on inter-regional operating arrangements between its Welsh and Midland regions and this has been agreed with the Welsh Office.

Road Traffic Mileage

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total mileage travelled in Wales by cars and taxis in *(a)* 1987 and *(b)* 1996. [13319]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The total mileage travelled on major roads in Wales by cars and taxis is estimated at 5.40 billion vehicle miles in 1987 and 6.98 billion vehicle miles in 1995, the latest year for which data are available. Comparable estimates for minor roads are not available.

Poll Tax Arrears

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the amount of poll tax now outstanding for each former district council area. [13556]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The estimated arrears of community charge at 31 March 1996 are given in the table.

Estimated arrears of community charge at 31 March 1996[1]

District/borough council

£ thousand

District/borough council	
Aberconwy	256
Alyn and Deeside	213
Arfon	532
Blaenau Gwent	523
Brecknock	125
Cardiff	3,413
Carmarthen	216
Ceredigion	367
Colwyn	303
Cynon Valley	239
Delyn	191
Dinefwr	464
Dwyfor	32
Glyndwr	183
Islwyn	373
Llanelli	561
Lliw Valley	170
Merionnydd	63
Merthyr Tydfil	245
Monmouth	438
Mongomeryshire	89
Neath	405
Newport	1,545
Ogwr	1,253
Port Talbot	213
Preseli Pembrokeshrie	172
Radnorshire	36
Rhondda	184
Rhuddlan	818
Rhymney Valley	638
South Pembrokeshire	287
Swansea	1,139
Taff Ely	529
Tofaen	847
Vale of Glamorgan	645
Wrexham Maelor	1,985
Ynys Mon	482

[1] The figures shown are the amounts outstanding at 31 March 1995, less amounts written off as bad debts up to 31 March 1995, less amounts collected between 1 April 1995 and 31 March 1996.

Rural Dentists

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many dentists set up in practice in rural areas in Wales in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993, *(c)* 1994 and *(d)* 1995; and if he will make a statement. [13866]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is not available centrally.

Welsh Language

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many Government Departments have an approved Welsh language policy; and if he will make a statement. [13869]

Mr. Hague: The approval of Welsh language schemes is an operational matter for the Welsh Language Board. However, the board informs me that, to date, three Government Departments, including the Welsh Office, have an approved Welsh language scheme in place.

Tourism

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the income derived from tourism in Wales in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [13867]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: In 1995, it was estimated that tourism generated £1.6 billion in direct visitor spending in Wales.

Teachers' Pensions

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received covering the new pension regulations for teachers. [13878]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Department has received to date a total of 143 representations from individuals and organisations in Wales about the proposals for changes to the teachers' superannuation scheme.

School Funding (Flintshire)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school funding in Flintshire. [14049]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Primary and secondary school funding in Flintshire is a matter for Flintshire county council.

Planning Appeals

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the longest time it has taken for him to make a decision on a planning appeal submitted to his Department in the past 10 years. [13997]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: One hundred and twelve weeks. The inspector's report on the inquiry into the appeal by the British Coal Corporation for opencast mining on land south-west of Llanharan was submitted to the Secretary of State on 17 September 1990 and the decision issued on 19 November 1992.

Marshalls Food Group Ltd.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what financial assistance has been provided to Marshalls Food Group Ltd. in each year since 1993, including assistance form European Coal and Steel Community Funds, in respect of its production plant at Sandycroft; on what terms; and if he will make a statement. [14245]

Mr. Hague: Marshalls Food Group was offered a regional selective assistance grant of £4 million in January 1993 to enable it to invest in the facilities at Sandycroft. As a result, 370 jobs were forecast to be safeguarded and 313 created. The project has been partially completed.

Special Schools (Residential Places)

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the *(a)* maximum and *(b)* minimum cost of a full residential place at each of the special schools. [14246]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The information requested is not held centrally.

Meningitis

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what reports he has received from Bro Taf health authority and university of Wales, Cardiff, concerning the outbreak of meningitis last year; and if he will make a statement. [14500]

Mr. Hague: I have received reports from the Bro Taf health authority and the university of Wales, which I am making available in the Library. My officials will discuss the details of the reports with the health authority and the university, including in connection with the health authority report the response of general practitioners to the outbreak.

The university's report records the action taken by the university authorities during the outbreak. It also contains brief details of complaints received by the university concerning communication with students. Like that of the health authority, the university's report identifies lessons to be learned. I endorse the proposals for action, including a joint workshop with the health authority, and would wish to receive a report of its conclusions in due course.

The report of the health authority outbreak control team has been prepared at my request in accordance with the requirement for a report to the chief medical officer on any serious outbreak of infectious disease. It records the actions taken to identify and alert those at risk from infection, and to prevent further spread of the infection among residents of University hall. I am satisfied that these actions were in accordance with the then current advice on good practice provided by the public health laboratory service meningococcus working group. It describes the epidemiological investigation undertaken to identify the type of meningococcal infection. The action taken to provide information to the students, university authorities and general practitioners is also described.

In its conclusions the health authority's report outlines the particular features of this outbreak and addresses the criticism that has been made of apparent delay in recognising and declaring an outbreak. It recommends that the public health laboratory service meningococcus working group considers the need for revision of the guidelines of the control of meningococcal outbreaks in

the university residential setting. It also recommends that the implications of the epidemiological investigation be considered by the working group.

Finally, the report recommends that the health authority reviews the communication arrangements in the light of the experience of this outbreak. I accept these recommendations and, with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, am pleased that the public health laboratory service meningococcus working group has already reviewed its guidelines for outbreak control in single educational establishments. Revised guidelines were published in the communicable disease review of 10 January. In order to ensure that the full implications of this outbreak are properly considered and appropriate action is taken, I am requiring a further immediate review to take account of the findings of these two reports.

HEALTH

Mental Health

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the Green Paper on mental health. [14320]

Mr. Dorrell: The Green Paper, "Developing Partnerships in Mental Health", is published today. Copies are available from the Vote Office and the Library. It reviews the progress which health and local authorities have already made in developing joint working in the delivery of mental health and social care services and looks at ways to build on this. The Green Paper considers how the current organisational framework for commissioning and providing services could be used more effectively and also sets out four options for structural change. We are seeking views on these proposals from those with an interest in developing mental health services during a three-month consultation period.

Hospital Emergency Cases Report

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the chief medical officer's inquiry into the reasons for the rise in hospital emergency cases to report; and if he will make a statement. [13403]

Mr. Horam: The chief medical officer is not making any inquiries into the numbers of hospital emergency cases. He is, however, leading a group reviewing the provision of emergency services in the community. The group published a consultation document called "Developing Emergency Services in the Community" in November 1996, copies of which are available in the Library. A final report will be published later this year.

Chief Medical Officer

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what prior ministerial approval the chief medical officer requires before *(a)* giving media interviews and *(b)* responding to parliamentary inquires and questions which relate to his responsibilities. [13404]

Mr. Horam: The chief medical officer, in his capacity as the Government's chief adviser on public health, responds as he considers appropriate to requests for media interviews and parliamentary enquiries on any matters that fall within his responsibility, in consultation with Ministers.

Cottage Hospitals

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of cottage hospitals closed in 1996 and planned to be closed in 1997; and if he will make a statement on the future of cottage hospitals. [13639]

Mr. Horam: The term "cottage hospital" is used to describe a wide range of facilities, data on which are not held centrally. The NHS and Community Care Act 1990 led to the development of numerous community and primary care facilities, and recent White Papers have announced further ways in which a range of local services might be further developed.

Mixed-sex Wards

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the costs of conversion of hospitals from mixed-sex wards. [13640]

Mr. Horam: No such estimates have been made. Costing work to meet patients charter standards is a matter for local management.

Public Health Laboratory Service

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of state for Health what plans he has to privatise the public health laboratory service. [13641]

Mr. Horam: None. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) on 29 January at column *275*.

Prodigy Programme

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the Prodigy programme takes into account individual patient needs. [13814]

Mr. Malone: The assessment of individual patient needs is a matter for the clinical judgment of the general practitioner concerned. The Prodigy clinical recommendations take account of systematic factors, where relevant, such as age, sex and co-morbidity. General practitioners are under no obligation to accept any recommendation advised by the Prodigy system and are free to prescribe any treatment they see fit.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what systems other than Prodigy for computer-based decision support for general practitioners are under consideration by his Department. [13812]

Mr. Malone: We are happy to consider any system which satisfies the system specification. We are, under the umbrella of Prodigy, testing a wide range of systems with five major general practitioner computing suppliers who maintain seven different clinical systems.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on research on the outcomes for patients resulting from the Prodigy programme. [13811]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) on 12 November 1996, *Official Report*, columns *155–56*.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements are in place to enable the Prodigy programme to ensure full and immediate access to innovations in therapy and new medicines. [13813]

Mr. Malone: A working party has been drawn together to advise Ministers on a process to develop and update a clinical guidance base for general practitioners' decision support. As part of its remit, we would expect the working party to look at access to innovative treatments and additions of new drugs to the Prodigy system. The first meeting of the working party is planned for spring 1997 and its report will be expected in the autumn.

Consultants

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the numbers of consultant posts currently vacant by *(a)* specialty and *(b)* health authority. [13653]

Mr. Malone: The latest available information is shown in the table. However, data on vacant posts are difficult to interpret and do not necessarily imply a shortage. The census is a snap shot of 30 September each year. Some vacancies will be wholly or partly filled by locums. For others, national health service trusts may find alternative ways to provide the service rather than re-advertising. The numbers give no indication of how long the post has been empty; some of these will be in the process of being filled.

(a) Vacant consultant posts in specialty in England as at 30 September 1995 (whole-time equivalent rounded to the nearest 10):

Specialty	*Vacant posts*
Accident and emergency	30
Anaesthetics	110
Cardiology	10
Child and adolescent psychiatry	30
Dermatology	10
Forensic psychiatry	10
General surgery	30
General medicine	30
Geriatric medicine	20
Histopathology	10
Mental handicap	10
Mental illness	100
Neurology	10
Obstetrics and gynaecology	30
Old age psychiatry	30
Ophthalmology	20
Otolaryngology	10
Paediatrics (including paediatric neurology)	30
Plastic surgery	10
Radiology	30
Trauma and orthopaedic surgery	50
Urology	20
Other	10

The following specialties had five or fewer vacancies:

Gastroenterology
Nephology
Palliative medicine
Thoracic medicine
Audiological medicine
Clinical genetics
Clinical physiology
Rehabilitation
Genito-urinary medicine
Medical oncology
Occupational health
Rheumatology
Cardio-thoracic surgery
Neurosurgery
Paediatric surgery
Nuclear medicine
Clinical oncology
Chemical pathology
Haematology
Medical microbiology
Neuropathology
Psychotherapy

All other specialties had no recorded vacancies. The total number of vacancies, rounded to the nearest 10 was 690.

(b) Vacant consultant posts by region in England as at 30 September 1995 (whole-time equivalent):

Region	*Vacant posts*
Anglia and Oxford	40
North West	140
North Thames	110
Northern and Yorkshire	100
South and West	60
South Thames	90
Trent	50
West Midlands	100
Special Has	0
Total	690

Source:
The Medical and Dental Workforce Census 30 September 1995.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the NHS management executive spent on external consultants in each year since 1989. [13649]

Mr. Horam: Running cost expenditure on external consultancy by the Department of Health, its agencies and the national health service executive—formerly the NHS management executive—is as shown:

1989–90: Not available[1]
1990–91: £18,398,000[2]
1991–92: £24,258,000[2]
1992–93: £18,399,000[3]
1993–94: £15,933,037[4]
1994–95: £18,479,405[5]
1995–96: £18,363,000[6]

Notes:

[1] Details of consultancy expenditure for 1989–90 are not available as the Department of Health formed part of the Department of Health and Social Security until July 1988 and the Department's accounting records did not identify consultancy expenditure separately.

[2] Expenditure by the NHS Executive in the years 1990–91 and 1991–92 cannot be disaggregated.

[3] Includes expenditure of £6,675,821 by the NHS Executive.

[4] Includes expenditure of £4,975,579 by the NHS Executive.

[5] Includes expenditure of £4,339,752 by the NHS Executive.

[6] Includes expenditure of £6,353,220 by the NHS Executive.

General Practitioners

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GPs were involved in commissioning by *(a)* health authority and *(b)* region in the last year for which figures are available. [13655]

Mr. Malone: Around the country, many groups of general practitioners, both fundholding and non-fundholding, are working closely with their health authorities to improve purchasing. Detailed information is not collected centrally. The White Paper, "Primary Care—Delivering the Future", sets out proposals to pilot closer collaborative arrangements in a number of sites.

Accident and Emergency Units

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of attenders at casualty and accident and emergency units in each of the last five years. [13663]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is in the table.

Attendances at accident and emergency departments

Thousands

	New attendances	*Total attendances*
1991–92	11,035	13,305
1992–93	10,993	13,070
1993–94	11,365	13,289
1994–95	11,943	13,812
1995–96	12,404	14,234

Source:
Form KHO9.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the number of attenders at casualty and accident and emergency units in each acute trust in each of the last five years. [13662]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is contained in the annual Department of Health publication, "Outpatients and ward attenders, England", copies of which are available in the Library.

Aspartame

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the health effects of the use of aspartame in food, with particular reference to epilepsy; and if he will make a statement. [13818]

Mr. Horam: The Department has not commissioned any research in this area.

The Department regularly reviews new information on food chemical safety and, when appropriate seeks advice from its experts advisory committees. The Department is aware of the anecdotal reports linking aspartame with a variety of adverse effects such as epilepsy and behavioural difficulties in children. Such claims have not been substantiated in controlled studies in humans. In 1986, the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment—COT—reviewed all the available data on the possible link between aspartame and epilepsy. The COT's conclusions reaffirmed its previous advice given in 1982, that aspartame is acceptable for use in food. A further review of the safety of aspartame in food was completed by the COT in 1992, when it formulated its advice in terms of an acceptable daily intake of 0-40 mg/kg bw/day of aspartame.

In 1996, the Committee on Carcinogenicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment—COC—considered an American paper by Olney et al. which suggested that there may be a link between aspartame and brain tumours. The COC expressed strong misgivings about the quality of this report, and concluded that it did not raise any concerns with regard to the use of aspartame in the United Kingdom.

Butane Gas Lighters

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with the manufacturers of butane gas lighters and refills regarding the sale of products to people under the age of 16. [13643]

Mr. Burns: Department of Health Ministers have not met recently with manufacturers. Officials in the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Health attend meetings of the volatile substance abuse industry forum to discuss issues of common concern.

Dental Health (Children)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the dental health of school children in Lancashire since 1979. [13853]

Mr Malone: The British Association for the Study of Community Dentistry conducts annual surveys of dental caries prevalence in children within a four-yearly cycle comprising those aged five, 12, and 14, throughout Great Britain. The BADCD began these surveys in 1985–86 in England and Wales. The tables show the mean number decayed, missing and filled in the deciduous teeth only of five-year-old children and in the permanent teeth only of 12 and 14-year-old children in Lancashire.

Tables of dmft/DMFT for five-year old, 12-year-old and 14-year-old surveys carried out for Lancashire as part of the BASCD co-ordinated surveys

Mean number of dmft of five-year-olds[1] in Lancashire since 1987–88

	1985–86	*1987–88*	*1989–90*	*1991–92*	*1993–94*	*1995–96*[2]
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble	2.62	2.22	2.50	2.51	3.06	2.57
Balckpool, Wyre and Fylde	2.46	2.00	2.16	1.97	2.62	1.97
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	2.58	3.37	3.10	3.31	3.23	3.12
Chorley and South Ribble	2.03	1.61	1.90	1.68	1.90	2.06
Lancaster	2.52	2.41	2.75	2.71	2.79	2.53
Preston	3.83	2.05	2.43	1.92	2.68	2.83
West Lancashire	2.37	1.67	1.89	1.34	2.46	2.18

[1] Deciduous teeth only.
[2] Verified but not published.

Mean number of DMFT of 12-year-olds[1] in Lancashire since 1988–89

	1988–89	1992–93
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble	2.21	1.88
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde	2.03	1.74
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	3.09	2.45
Chorley and South Ribble	1.59	1.43
Lancaster	2.16	1.71
Preston	1.87	2.08
West Lancashire	1.79	1.46

[1]Permanent teeth only.

Mean number of DMFT of 14-year-olds[1] in Lancashire since 1986–87

	1986–87	1990–91	1994–95
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble	4.21	2.64	3.35
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde	3.90	2.99	2.35
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	5.60	4.87	3.78
Chorley and South Ribble	3.83	2.35	2.58
Lancaster	3.78	3.67	2.62
Preston	4.08	2.32	2.69
West Lancashire	4.19	2.37	2.52

[1] Permanent teeth only.

Royal London Hospital Trust

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the progress of the private finance initiative in relation to the Royal London hospital trust. [13875]

Mr. Horam: The Royal Hospitals NHS trust and its preferred bidder are currently holding detailed negotiations prior to submission of the full business case for the proposed private finance initiative scheme.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many TB notifications there were for each local authority in London for each of the last five years and 1996 to date. [13757]

Mr. Horam: The number of cases of tuberculosis—excluding chemoprophylaxis—notified to the Office for National Statistics is published annually by local authority in the publication "MB2 Communicable Disease Statistics". Copies are available in the Library and the latest published year is 1994. Figures for 1995 and provisional figures for 1996 are given in the table.

Number of notifications of tuberculosis—excluding chemoprophylaxis—London local authorities 1995 and 1996

District	1995	1996[1]
City of London	1	0
Barking and Dagenham	27	19
Barnet	66	58
Bexley	13	14
Brent	193	190
Bromley	13	12
Camden	78	74
Croydon	47	60
Ealing	127	130
Enfield	48	44

Number of notifications of tuberculosis—excluding chemoprophylaxis—London local authorities 1995 and 1996

District	1995	1996[1]
Greenwich	30	45
Hackney	106	129
Hammersmith and Fulham	40	60
Haringey	92	111
Harrow	79	67
Havering	16	11
Hillingdon	56	78
Hounslow	74	97
Islington	57	66
Kensington and Chelsea	38	68
Kingston upon Thames	15	12
Lambeth	104	111
Lewisham	38	46
Merton	24	29
Newham	194	186
Redbridge	74	67
Richmond upon Thames	12	13
Southwark	56	79
Sutton	16	13
Tower Hamlets	97	92
Waltham Forest	57	65
Wandsworth	64	61
City of Westminster	90	94

[1] Provisional.

Parkinson's Disease

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total amount of Government research expenditure on Parkinson's disease in 1996–97; and how many people received treatment for Parkinson's disease in 1996–97. [14001]

Mr. Horam: Figures for Government research expenditure in 1996–97 are not yet available. However, in 1995–96, the latest year for which figures are available, the Medical Research Council, the main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research, awarded £53.6 million for research in the field of neurosciences and mental health, of which £6.2 million was specifically for research on Parkinson's disease and nerve regeneration.

Information about the number of people with a particular condition treated by the national health service is not collected centrally. However, figures are available for the number of finished consultant episodes. The number of FCEs of admitted patient care, with a primary diagnosis of Parkinson's disease, to NHS hospitals in England during 1994–95, the latest year for which figures are available, is estimated at 10,700.

Dental Services

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists were *(a)* registered for and *(b)* undertaking NHS work in (i) 1979 and (ii) at the latest date for which figures are available. [14307]

Mr. Malone: The number of dentists registered with family practitioner committees on 30 September 1979 was 12,146. The number of dentists registered with health authorities on 30 September 1996 was 16,336.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Publicity

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list *(a)* his Department's budgeted expenditure on (i) advertising, (ii) publicity and (iii) public information campaigns for the period January to March 1997 and *(b)* the actual expenditure on (1) advertising, (2) publicity and (3) public information campaigns in the period January to March in each of the past five years. [13468]

Sir John Wheeler: The information is not available in the format requested. The following information is available from the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments:

Advertising, publicity and public information campaign costs

	£000
January–March 1997 Budgeted	[1]2,469
January–March 1996	2,755
January–March 1995	3,216
January–March 1994	[2]2,309
January–March 1993	[2]1,875
January–March 1992	[2]1,553

All figures exclude the Department of Environment and Department of Education.
[1] Also excludes the Department of Health and Social Services.
[2] Also excludes the Northern Ireland Office.

Beef Special Premium

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when checks on the applications by beef producers for the beef special premium were first introduced; what proposals there are for monitoring these applications in the future; and if he will make a statement. [13661]

Mr. Ancram: The beef special premium scheme has operated in Northern Ireland since 1989 and during that time all applications have been subject to on-farm inspections, when animals are marked by ear-punching. During 1997 the Department plans to make greater user of its computerised cattle records system in cross-checking of BSPS applications. The Department then intends to review the need for 100 per cent. inspection/marking of animals in the light of the experience gained from this additional checking.

Department of Education Offices, Rathgael

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many civil servants were located at the Department of Education offices at Rathgael, Bangor in 1992; how many are currently based at these premises; and how many will be able to be accommodated at Rathgael when the proposed building extensions are completed. [13664]

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows:

Number of staff

Staff located at	*Permanent*	*Casual*	*Total*	*Date*
Rathgael House	604	30	634	1 January 1992
Bangor	473	21	494	1 January 1997

The building currently under construction—estimated completion date spring 1998—is not an extension but rather a replacement of existing sub-standard accommodation. The Rathgael house complex will then be able to accommodate around 500 staff. Teachers salaries and pensions branches— approximately 100 staff—relocated to Londonderry in 1993.

Casement Three

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to refer the case of the Casement Three to the criminal appeal board. [14018]

Sir John Wheeler: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron) on Monday 3 February 1997.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 5 February 1997

HOME DEPARTMENT

Coroner Procedures (Muslim Communities)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice or guidance has been issued to coroners by the Home Office coroners study committee concerning suitable arrangements to enable coroners serving large Muslim communities to issue the necessary documentation to permit the transport of bodies overseas, with particular reference to weekends and public holidays. [14106]

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 4 February 1997]:* The attention of coroners has been drawn to the need, when considering requests to expedite applications, for the religious feelings of the bereaved to be taken into account and for their concerns to be dealt with sensitively.

Gilbert McNamee

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will allow Gilbert McNamee open visits with his family and friends. [13281]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 5 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about open visits for Gilbert 'Danny' McNamee with his family and friends.

Mr. McNamee has been categorised as an exceptional risk category A prisoner. Exceptional risk category A prisoners are held in special secure units and are subject to closed visits. This policy was introduced last year in the light of escapes by prisoners from Whitemoor and Parkhurst.

The humanitarian aspects of closed visits were recognised and taken into account. It was decided that, notwithstanding these humanitarian considerations, the interests of security had to be paramount. In exceptional circumstances, an open visit may be allowed, following an application to the Director of Dispersal prisons.

Probation Service (Mid Glamorgan)

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the reduction in the budget in 1997–98 for the probation service in Mid Glamorgan; and what estimate he has received from the service of reductions in the number of probation officers directly serving clients. [13933]

Mr. Sackville: The specific grant cash limit for the Mid Glamorgan probation service in 1997–98 is £2.8 million, 2.1 per cent. lower than for 1996–97. Part of this reduction is due to a transfer of responsibilities and resources from Mid Glamorgan to Gwent as a consequence of local authority boundary changes.

It is for the Mid Glamorgan probation committee to decide how these resources will be best used and to determine what specific changes within the service, including staff numbers and deployment, should be undertaken within the total level of expenditure implied by this level of grant support. The committee has not yet provided information about its staffing plans for 1997–98.

Mr. Rowlands : To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the effect on the Mid Glamorgan probation service of the alteration of that service's boundaries; and what transitional budget provision has been made for the service. [13952]

Mr. Sackville: Responsibility for the Rhymney Valley, which was transferred from the Mid Glamorgan probation area to the Gwent probation area on 1 April 1996, accounted for an estimated 19.1 per cent. of the Mid Glamorgan probation service's expenditure. As a transitional arrangement, 16.6 per cent. of the Mid Glamorgan allocation—as it would have been before the boundary changes—was transferred through the cash limits formula to Gwent in 1996–97 and 17.9 per cent. will be transferred in 1997–98. The full 19.1 per cent. will be transferred from 1998–99.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what estimate he has made of the number of prison visits by Mid Glamorgan probation officers made to advise prisoners before their release in 1996–97; and what assessment he has made of the impact of the proposed reduction in the budget for 1997–98 upon prison visiting by Mid Glamorgan probation officers; [13931]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of pre-sentence reports prepared by the Mid Glamorgan probation service in 1996–97 and what assessment he has made of the impact of the proposed reduction in staff in that service on providing pre-sentence reports in 1997–98. [13932]

Mr. Sackville: The Home Office does not estimate at this level of detail. It is for the Mid Glamorgan probation committee to use the resources available to it to meet its responsibilities, including the need for compliance with national standards for the preparation of pre-sentence reports and the pre-release and post-release supervision of offenders.

Oncomouse

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what Government funding was provided to develop the oncomouse. [13407]

Mr. Sackville: None.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the number of oncomice produced to date; how many have been experimented on; to whom royalties are paid for the use of oncomice; and if he will make a statement on the value of experiments on oncomice. [13406]

Mr. Sackville: Central records are insufficiently detailed to indicate the number of such procedures. Patents have been applied for, but not yet granted, in the European Union. I have no knowledge about royalties due or paid in the United Kingdom. I understand that research using oncomice has the aim of increasing scientific knowledge about the mechanisms of tumour production.

Dangerous Dogs Act

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many dogs, against whose owners no charges are pending or against whose owners charges have been dropped, are currently being held by the Metropolitan police under the terms of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991; [13768]

(2) what is the cost, to date, of kennelling dogs held by the Metropolitan police, under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 against whose owners no charges are pending or charges have been dropped; [13769]

(3) what is the total cost, to date, of the kennelling of dogs held by the Metropolitan police under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. [13767]

Mr. Sackville: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that seven dogs are currently being held under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 against whose owners no charges are pending or against whose owners charges have been dropped. The cost to date of kennelling dogs where charges against the owners have been dropped or are pending is £77,484. The total cost of kennelling dogs since the introduction of the Act in November 1991 is £3,175,542.

Drug Misuse

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what current research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the causes and consequences of illicit drug taking; and if he will make a statement. [13854]

Mr. Sackville: Research commissioned by the Home Office supports the role of the Department in delivering the strategy set out in the White Paper, "Tackling Drugs Together".

It includes projects to improve the information available on the nature and incidence of drug-related crime and public attitudes to it, as well as assessments of the general prevalence of drug misuse. Four projects are also in progress aimed at developing police strategies for tackling drug-related crime problems.

Independent evaluation projects have been commissioned in support of the Home Office drug prevention initiative's programme of work on effective drugs prevention action at community level.

Research has also been commissioned on the effects of the Prison Service mandatory drug testing programme on patterns of drug misuse in prisons.

Recently evaluated projects include drug prevalence findings from the 1994 British crime survey, lifestyles of crack and heroin addicts in Manchester, public attitudes to drug-related crime and the impact of methadone programmes on crime rates on Merseyside.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Departmental Publicity

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will provide *(a)* her Department's budgeted expenditure on (i) advertising, (ii) publicity and (iii) public information campaigns for the period January to March 1997 and *(b)* the actual expenditure on (1) advertising, (2) publicity and (3) public information campaigns in the period January to March in each of the past five years. [13467]

Mr. Sproat: My Department has not incurred expenditure on promotional or public information advertising or public information campaigns in any of the past five years.

Figures for publicity expenditure, 3 January to March, in each of the years since the Department's creation in 1992 are as follows:

1997 (Budgeted): £195,700
1996 (Actual): £199,300
1995 (Actual): £28,000
1994 (Actual): £21,600
1993 (Actual): £5,900

London Marathon

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what support her Department is providing towards the staging of the 1997 London marathon. [13921]

Mr. Sproat: My Department recognises the London marathon as a major international sporting event. The Royal Parks Agency is currently discussing with the organisers of the event the use of the royal parks to ensure the success of the 1997 race.

Royal Parks

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what financial support her Department has given to the Royal Parks in each of the last five financial years. [13927]

Mr. Sproat: The information is as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1992–93	20.1
1993–94	22.9
1994–95	23.9
1995–96	24.7
1996–97	'23.2

' planned.

Caravan Parks

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consultations have taken place to reach a common standard of classification and a common symbol throughout the United Kingdom for caravan parks; and if she will make a statement. [14012]

Mr. Sproat: The British graded holiday parks scheme currently provides a common standard of classification and a common symbol across Great Britain.

The scheme is operated by the English tourist board, the Scottish tourist board, the Wales tourist board, the British Holiday and Home Parks Association and the National Caravan Council. Last summer they jointly carried out consumer research with the aim of developing a scheme that reflects consumer needs more closely. The research was finalised at the end of last year and a committee comprising representatives of each of the organisations is looking at ways of achieving this and will then consult the industry.

Windsor Castle

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much has been raised for the restoration of Windsor castle by the admission charges to Buckingham palace. [14047]

Mr. Sproat: I understand from the royal collection department, which as a department of the royal household is responsible for these matters, that the latest audited figures for the three years to 31 March 1996 show that a total of £8,127,000 has been raised from the summer opening of the Buckingham palace state apartments.

British Academy of Sport

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she expects to announce the final shortlist of applications for the British academy of sport. [14045]

Mr. Sproat: A decision on the successful bidder will be announced in early spring.

Charities Act 1992

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she plans to implement part III of the Charities Act 1992. [13998]

Mr. Sproat: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave to the hon. and learned member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on 16 December, *Official Report*, columns *443–44*.

Sporting Activity

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will estimate the number of *(a)* adults, *(b)* women and *(c)* children aged under 16 years who regularly participate in sporting activity. [13926]

Mr. Sproat: The 1993 general household survey of a representative sample of 19,000 people over 16 years of age in Britain revealed that 63.7 per cent. of all adult respondents, and 57 per cent. of all female respondents, had participated in at least one sporting activity in the preceding four weeks. The 1994 young people and sport in England survey of a representative sample of 4,400 six to 16-year-olds revealed that in the preceding 12 months all respondents had undertaken some form of sporting activity during lessons, and 98 per cent. of respondents had undertaken some form of extra-curricular sporting activity.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

War Pensions Appeals

Mr. Trickett: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proportion of war pensions appeals were resolved in favour of the appellants at the war pensions appeals tribunals *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* in the last year for which figures are available; and what was the average value of such awards to successful appellants in each of the last three years. [14020]

Mr. Streeter: The question concerns a matter which has been assigned to the Court Service under the terms of its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Jon Trickett, dated 5 February 1997:

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about the proportion and cost of successful awards in favour of the appellant at the War Pensions Appeal Tribunal.

There are no statistics available to show the percentage of decisions given in favour of the appellant in 1979. The percentage of decisions given in favour of the appellant in 1982 was 31.8 per cent. and in 1996 the percentage was 30 per cent.

The information requested about the average value of such awards to successful appellants in each of the last three years is not held centrally, and could only be provided at a disproportionate cost.

Mr. Trickett: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many staff are currently employed by the war pensions appeals tribunals in Leeds. [14022]

Mr. Streeter: The question concerns a matter which has been assigned to the Court Service under the terms of its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Jon Trickett, dated 5 February 1997:

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about the number of staff currently employed by the War Pensions Appeal Tribunal in Leeds.

The Pensions Appeal Tribunal does not employ any staff in the Leeds area. All appeals are issued and processed at the London office of the Pensions Appeal Tribunal. If a hearing is required in Leeds, a clerk is sent to the Leeds office to assist in the running of the Tribunal. From time to time a clerk from the Immigration Authorities will also assist.

Mr. Trickett: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many staff are currently employed by the war pensions appeals tribunals; and how many there were in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1990. [14023]

Mr. Streeter: The question concerns a matter which has been assigned to the Court Service under the terms of its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Jon Trickett, dated 5 February 1997:

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about staffing levels at the War Pensions Appeal Tribunal.

The Pensions Appeal Tribunal presently employs 21 staff. In 1979 it employed 10 staff and in 1990 that number had increased to 16.

Mr. Trickett: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many cases are currently before war pensions appeals tribunals involving appellants over the age of 68 years; and what steps are taken to expedite hearings in these cases. [14024]

Mr. Streeter: The question concerns a matter which has been assigned to the Court Service under the terms of its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Jon Trickett, dated 5 February 1997:

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about the number of cases currently before the War Pensions Appeals Tribunal which involve appellants over the age of 68 years and how those cases are expedited.

The information requested is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

PRIME MINISTER

Travel Costs

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the total travel costs for himself and his staff during the present Parliament; and if he will list the equivalent figures for the 1983 to 1987 Parliament. [13427]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* The total costs of such travel in the United Kingdom and overseas during the current Parliament are as follows:

Year	£	
1992–93	[1]1,730	Actual
1993–94	1,490	Actual
1994–95	1,230	Actual
1995–96	1,650	Actual
1996–97	1,270	Budget

[1] All figures in £'000s rounded to the nearest £10,000. Comparable data for 1983–87 Parliament are not available.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Social Chapter

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade at what cost to public funds the booklet, "The Social Chapter, The British and European Approaches", has been produced by his Department; for what reasons his Department produced it; and to whom it has been circulated. [14233]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The total cost incurred to date for design, external translation, printing, storage and distribution of the booklet is around £27,000. It is not possible to quantify the staff costs arising from internal preparation of the text.

The purpose of the booklet was to explain the Government's policy on social affairs in the EU. Copies of the booklet were sent to business organisations, the largest UK-based companies, Members of Parliament, British Members of the European Parliament and the media. It has also been distributed to interested parties in other EU member states. Further copies have been supplied on request.

Exports (Iraq)

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consultations were carried out by the DTI-funded committee for middle east trade before deciding to encourage British firms to bid for the Iraqi contracts sanctioned under United Nations Security Council resolution 986. [14244]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 4 February 1997]:* The committee for middle east trade consulted my Department, which is in close touch with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on this issue. SCR 986 is a one-off humanitarian measure to help alleviate the suffering of the Iraqi people and it is proper that British firms should compete for business under it.

Business Links

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many small businesses in rural development areas are currently receiving assistance from business links. [13890]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* This information can be provided only at disproportionate cost. Business Links are not required to collect information on the number of small businesses in rural development areas receiving assistance. The information could be provided only by checking the records of each business link that includes a rural development area within its catchment area.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Publicity

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list *(a)* his Department's budgeted expenditure on (i) advertising, (ii) publicity and (iii) public information campaigns for the period January to March 1997 and *(b)* the actual expenditure on (1) advertising, (2) publicity and (3) public information campaigns in the period January to March in each of the past five years. [13461]

Mr. Hanley: Budgeted expenditure on (i) advertising, (ii) publicity and (iii) public information campaigns in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office diplomatic wing for the period January to March 1997 is as follows:

	£
Advertising	25,000
Publicity	22,638
Information campaigns	43,325

Actual expenditure on (i) advertising, (ii) publicity and (iii) public information campaigns in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Diplomatic wing for the period January to March in the past five years was as follows:

	1996 £	1995 £	1994 £	1993 £	1992 £
Advertising	6,032	3,196	15,780	33,064	1991–92
Publicity	159,414	305	36,487	130,176	breakdown
Information campaigns	91,000	67,442	255,979	112,058	not available

Overseas Development Administration aid wing can provide annual figures only for advertising. There is no annual budgeted figure as such, as the costs arise from each project. The expenditure in 1996–97 to date is £590,995.

Actual annual ODA expenditure for advertising in the past five years was as follows:

1996: £580,000
1995: £727,000
1994: £241,136
1993: £406,296
1992: £251,695

ODA cannot separate figures for publicity and public information campaigns. Budgeted expenditure for both for the period January to March 1997 is £350,000.

Actual ODA expenditure on publicity and public information campaigns for the period January to March in the past five years was as follows:

Publicity/information campaigns

1996: £318,794
1995: £518,737
1994: £683,115
1993: £456,491
1992: £94,664

Visas

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, columns 226–27, what is his estimate of the cost of informing the House of visa fees charged by other European countries since 1 April 1996, as compared with those charged for entry to the United Kingdom since that date. [14350]

Dr. Liam Fox: I understand that a number of European countries use a differentiated system of visa fees, whereas the UK levies flat rate fees worldwide for each category of visa. It would therefore be possible to provide the information sought only following detailed research in those countries to establish current levels of visa fee applied in various countries/regions, and any revisions which have taken place during the period in question. It is not possible to estimate in advance the costs of such research.

TREASURY

Profit Sharing and Share Option Schemes

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the cost to the Exchequer in 1995–96 and the estimates available of likely costs in 1996–97 of *(a)* profit sharing schemes, *(b)* save as you earn share option schemes and *(c)* company share option plans; and if, for each of the above, he will list (i) the number of schemes registered and (ii) the number of people covered by these schemes. [13386]

Mr. Jack: Available information is given in the tables.

Estimated cost of tax reliefs[1]

£ million

	1995–96	1996–97
Approved profit sharing schemes	90	110
Approved savings related share option schemes[2]	180	200

[1] Figures are particularly tentative and subject to a wide margin of error. Estimated costs are the effects on tax liabilities for each year, and not the receipts in each year.

[2] Excluding cost of tax-free bonus on interest received under SAYE contract.

	1995–96	
	Number of schemes approved in year	*Estimated number of live schemes at year-end*[1]
Approved profit sharing schemes	43	868
Approved savings related share option schemes	116	1,174
Approved discretionary share option schemes/company share option plans	347	4,339

[1] Excludes schemes where no further appropriations/grants of options were thought likely to occur.

	1994–95
	Number of employees receiving share allocations or to whom options were granted during the year (thousands)
Approved profit sharing schemes	640
Approved savings-related share option schemes	550

Company share option plans are not expected to have any costs until 1998–99.

The exact number of employees in each of these schemes cannot be precisely estimated because the available figures show only numbers of employees to whom shares were allocated or options granted in a particular year, and some employees may be allocated shares or granted options in successive years.

Estimates for take-up for 1995–96 are not yet available.

Taxable Incomes

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each county in England and for the relevant areas in Wales and Scotland the number and percentage of taxpayers with taxable incomes over *(a)* 50,000, *(b)* £60,000, *(c)* £70,000, *(d)* £100,000 and *(e)* £150,000. [13795]

Mr. Jack: Estimates of the number of taxpayers in each country and their average incomes are derived from the survey of personal incomes, and the latest available figures are in table 3.13 of "Inland Revenue Statistics 1996." It is not possible to provide estimates for numbers in these income bands because of limitations in the size of the sample used in the survey.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total *(a)* value added tax collected and *(b)* income tax recovered in each tax office in Wales in each year since 1990. [13868]

Mr. Jack: The table details the amounts of income tax recovered by each of the collection offices in Wales. Information relating to 1990 and 1991 are no longer available in the format requested.

Office	*Account 1992* £	*Account 1993* £	*Account 1994* £	*Account 1995* £	*Account 1996* £
Aberystwyth	9,005,460.89	11,445,083.72	14,610,060.80	14,111,903.11	13,649,345.56
Bangor	22,670,830.88	23,487,869.38	22,509,841.89	24,675,193.38	31,025,119.11
Cardiff	83,115,908.62	76,517,319.52	109,099,560.22	130,429,444.81	83,231,425.26
Haverfordwest	9,804,817.94	6,087,883.51	6,725,811.05	8,272,308.66	7,411,620.03
Merthyr Tydfil	11,564,843.61	37,105,739.71	15,576,610.66	24,416,896.29	25,976,216.50
Newport (Gwent)	41,643,865.57	44,133,490.22	47,092,833,43	62,901,887.02	63,414,502.67
Swansea	37,048,096.31	30,177,721.28	28,633,271.20	35,737,250.47	26,810,007.40
Wrexham	26,378,979.37	23,019,889.34	31,091,353.89	45,664,975.27	48,924,179.41

The figures quoted above are the amounts of tax collected by each of the offices included in the table in respect of cases referred to them by the Inland Revenue accounts office Shipley for local action because a sum remained unpaid after the issue of requests and reminders for payment.

Monetary Growth Rate (M4)

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what factors underlie his decision to set a target monitoring range of 3 to 9 per cent. for the monetary M4 growth rate. [14046]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Broad money is one of the indicators that is considered when taking monetary policy decisions.

The Government decided in the November 1996 Financial Statement and Budget Report to retain a medium-term monitoring range for M4 of 3 to 9 per cent. This was based on an assessment of likely movements in M4 velocity—the ratio of money gross domestic product to M4.

This medium-term monitoring range is not an operational target, but provides an indication of the growth of M4 that is likely to be consistent with permanently low inflation. Because of the potential effects on velocity from changes in the rate of financial innovation, the high level of merger and acquisition activity, and the introduction of a gilt repo market, the Government will continue to keep the monitoring ranges for the monetary aggregates under review.

"Social Trends 27"

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many copies of "Social Trends 27" were printed; on what day they will be distributed to the public with the correction slip referred to in the Office of National Statistics' p.ess release of 30 January headed "Social Trends Error"; what is the cost of printing and distributing the correction slip; and if copies of "Social Trends 27" will be withdrawn from circulation or destroyed as a result of the error. [14276]

Mrs. Angela Knight: A total of 7,500 copies of "Social Trends 27" were printed. Copies with the correction slip inside are being distributed today by The Stationery Office. The estimated maximum cost of printing and distributing the correction slip is £2,000. All sales copies of the original report were withdrawn from circulation by The Stationery Office pending the issue of the correction slip.

Pedal Cycles

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which local tax offices have agreed a rate for the taxation of mileage allowances for the business use of pedal cycles; and if he will list the rates. [14232]

Mr. Jack: Where an employer pays a mileage allowance for the business use of pedal cycles, tax offices will agree that there is no tax liability as long as the rate paid does no more than cover the tax-allowable expenditure.

Research and Development

Mr. Hain: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of gross domestic product for *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Germany, *(c)* France, *(d)* the European Union and *(e)* Japan was devoted to research and development in the latest year for which figures are available. [13453]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Peter Hain, dated 5 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on what percentage of gross domestic product was devoted to research and development (R&D).

The figures requested are shown in the table below:

Gross domestic expenditure on R and D (GERD) as a percentage of GDP, 1994

	Percentage
United Kingdom	2.19
Germany	2.33
France	2.38
European Union	1.90
Japan	2.84

Source:
OECD Main Science and Technology Indicators 1996/2.

WALES

Mixed-sex Wards

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to eliminate mixed-sex wards in hospitals. [13896]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office will be having discussions with health authorities and trusts to determine how standards can be further improved in providing patients with appropriate levels of privacy and dignity.

Head Injuries Rehabilitation

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to consider each of the health authorities' head injuries rehabilitation plans and strategies; and if he will make a statement. [13863]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Each health authority in Wales has given priority to head injuries rehabilitation. Their performance will be monitored by my Department through the annual accountability review process.

Lone Parents

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many lone parents there are in Wales, broken down by gender; how many are unemployed; and if he will make a statement. [13759]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The summer 1996 labour force survey estimated that, in Wales, there were 101,000 lone parents with dependent children. This estimate, however, is based on a relatively small sample and should be regarded only as a broad order of magnitude. While most of the lone parents identified in the survey were women, reliable estimates by gender and of the numbers unemployed are not available.

Teachers (Deeside)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to visit *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools on Deeside and in Buckly to discuss teacher supply; and if he will make a statement. [14050]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: During 1997 my right hon. Friend and I intend to visit a number of schools throughout Wales. I have no doubt that during these visits we shall discuss a range of issues concerning the education service, including teacher supply.

School Homework

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement concerning his policy on homework for school pupils. [14051]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I refer the hon. Member to "A Bright Future: Beating the Previous Best", which was published on 3 February. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Acid Rain

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent research his Department has commissioned on the effects of acidic rain on upland flora and animal life; and if he will make a statement. [13915]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Welsh Office has commissioned research to quantify current rates of acid deposition in Wales and to assess the impacts on the chemistry and biology of streams and lakes. Comparison with a study in 1984 by the former Welsh Water Authority will indicate how impacts have changed as emissions of acid gases have decreased. It is planned to publish the results of the research in summer 1997.

Planning Appeals

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidelines he has set in respect of the time scale within which planning appeals submitted to him should be resolved. [14005]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The planning inspectorate has been set the following targets for dealing with planning appeals:

Eighty per cent. of all planning appeals decided by written representations to be determined within 17 weeks;

Eighty per cent. of all planning appeals decided by hearings to be determined within 22 weeks;

Eighty per cent. of all planning appeals decided by inquiries to be determined within 30 weeks.

In addition, the inspectorate has the following internal targets for determining enforcement appeals:

Eighty per cent. of enforcement appeals decided by written representations to be determined within 35 weeks;

Eighty per cent. of enforcement appeals decided by inquiries to be determined within 46 weeks.

In cases where appeals are decided by the Secretary of State, the aim is to decide 80 per cent. within eight weeks of receiving the inspector's report.

Railtrack Depot (Cardiff)

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when Railtrack's planning appeal on the Maindy road depot in Cardiff was received by his Department; and when he expects a decision to be reached. [14006]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend received the Inspector's report into these appeals on 6 June 1996. He and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will issue the decisions jointly as soon as they are able to do so.

Pupil Referral Units

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the numbers of children in Wales currently attending pupil referral units; and what is the average cost of such a place. [14148]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Provisional details as at January 1996 indicate that there were 468 children attending pupil referral units in Wales. Details of the average cost of a place in a PRU are not available.

Cancelled Operations

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library figures *(a)* by district health authority and *(b)* in total for the number of operations cancelled on the day of, or the day after, admission to hospital and the number of those patients not readmitted within a month for the third quarter of 1996–97. [13858]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on the number of cancelled operations is not available centrally. Provisional information on the number of patients admitted and treated more than one month after a cancelled operation is collected by NHS trusts and is given in the following table. A patient treated in a NHS trust may not necessarily be a resident of the health authority in which the trust is situated.

Number of patients admitted and treated more than one month after a cancelled operation

NHS Trust:	*Quarter ending 31 December 1996*
Bridgend and District	—
Carmarthen and District	13
Ceredigion and Mid Wales	—
East Glamorgan	4
Glan Clwyd General Hospital	—
Glan Hafren	2
Glan-y-Mor	2
Gwynedd Hospitals	—
Llandough Hospital	1
Llanelli Dinefwr	6
Morriston Hospital	1
Nevill Hall and District	3
North Glamorgan	2
Pembrokeshire	1
Powys Health Care	—
Swansea	—
University Hospital of Wales Healthcare	12
Velindre	—
Wrexham Maelor Hospital	—
Wales	47

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Spiritual and Moral Training

Sir Timothy Sainsbury: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the extent to which the requirements relating to spiritual and moral training laid out in the Education Act 1944 and the Education Act 1988 are currently met in (i) initial teacher training and (ii) in-service teacher training; and if she will make a statement. [14229]

Mr. Forth: All maintained schools are required to provide a curriculum which promotes pupils' spiritual and moral development. Newly qualified teachers must have acquired the foundation to develop a readiness to promote such development. Schools in-service training budgets can be used to fund necessary training for serving teachers. Additionally, the Teacher Training Agency is currently consulting on standards, for subject leaders and head teachers, which require the ability to establish and gain commitment to a vision for successful learning, including pupils' moral and spiritual development. Standards for expert teachers will follow later this year.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 6 December, *Official Report*, columns *819–20*, what is the total budgeted spending by training and enterprise councils on out-of-school childcare in 1996–97 and planned spending for 1997–98 and 1998–99, indicating for each year the percentage change on the previous year. [13949]

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 4 February 1997]:* The information requested is contained in the table.

	1996–97 Expected spend	*1997–98 plans*	*1998–99 plans*
Expenditure (£ million)	9.63	4.10	4.10
Percentage change	—	–57	nil

The out of school childcare initiative was originally a fixed-term programme due to finish in 1996–97. In the light of its success, the Secretary of State decided that the programme should continue.

School Merger (Cheltenham)

Mr. Nigel Jones: to ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she expects to issue her decision regarding the merger of Westlands primary special school and Brookfield secondary special school in Cheltenham. [14345]

Mrs. Gillan: A decision will be reached on this proposal as soon as is compatible with the need to take into account all the relevant factors. My right hon. Friend aims to decide such proposals no later than seven months form the date the notice was served, in this case 7 October 1996. She fully appreciates that, given the proposed implementation date of 31 August 1997, an early decision will be in the best interests of all those involved.

Eltec Training and Enterprise Council

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress Eltec Training and Enterprise Council is making in meeting the criteria for the award of a licence. [14767]

Mr. Paice: I am pleased to announce the award of a licence to Eltec to start from April 1997. This means that all TECs have now met the rigorous licensing standards.

DEFENCE

Water Cannon

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library the results of research conducted at Porton Down research establishment into the medical effects of high-pressure water cannon jets. [14242]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mrs. Ann Clwyd, dated 5 February 1997:

I have been asked to reply to your question concerning research conducted by Porton Down into the medical effects of high pressure water cannon. The Chemical Biological Defence Sector (CBD) at Porton Down is now part of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) for which I am responsible as Chief Executive.

Porton Down carried out research involving the use of water projection devices during the 1970s. The work involved some animal studies to assess the effects of high pressure water on the eyes. Technical reports on the details of this work remain classified. I can, however, say that our scientists concluded that there appeared to be a low risk of damage to eyes from use of such equipment. In addition some field trials of devices were conducted involving human volunteers. Again this work did not indicate that any medical effects were experienced as a result of the use of the water delivery system.

I hope this information is helpful.

Aircraft

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 14 November 1996, *Official Report*, columns *290–91*, if he will list the causes of aircraft crashes which were previously under investigation. [14251]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is given in the table:

Date	*Aircraft type*	*Cause*
1994		
1 August	Tornado GR1	Aircrew error
1995		
21 June	Jaguar GR1A	Aircrew error
2 September	Nimrod MR2	Aircrew error
30 October	2 x Tornado F3	Aircrew error
1996		
11 January	Tornado GR1	Aircrew error
13 February	Sea Harrier FA2	Technical fault
13 May	Tucano T1	Technical fault

The remaining accidents are still under investigation. The total number of accidents in 1996 has increased from 13 to 14 reflecting the recategorisation of an aircraft incident at RAF Bruggen in February.

Nuclear Tests

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the referral by the European Commission on Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights of the three test cases brought by the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association against the British Government for redress for human radiation exposure. [14228]

Mr. Soames: Two cases have been referred to the European Court of Human Rights. In the case of McGinley and EE *v.* UK, the Government are disappointed that the European Commission of Human Rights concluded that there had been a violation of article 6(1) of the European convention on human rights. The Commission concluded that the applicants did not enjoy a right of effective access to the pensions appeal tribunal because of a lack of access to relevant records. The Government dispute this and will contest this case. In the other case, of LCB *v.* UK, which has been referred to the Court, the Government are pleased that the Commission found no violation of the convention. The Government recall that reports of an epidemiological study by the National Radiological Protection Board published in 1988 and 1993 concluded that participation in the nuclear weapon testing programmes has not had a detectable effect on the participants' expectation of life, or on their risk of developing cancer or other fatal diseases.

HMS Cromwell

Sir Julian Critchley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will consider naming a Royal Navy warship HMS Cromwell. [14319]

Mr. Soames: The naming of all Royal Navy ships and submarines is a matter for the Admiralty ships naming and badges committee which regularly considers suggestions for the naming of all craft. I am very grateful for my hon. Friend's suggestion and will ensure that it is forwarded to the committee for consideration.

United Arab Emirates (Visit)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the organisations which he visited in his visit to the United Arab Emirates during the Christmas recess in 1996–97. [14255]

Mr. Soames: My right hon. Friend last visited the United Arab Emirates on 28 November 1996. During that visit he met a number of senior UAE figures to discuss matters of mutual interest and signed a defence co-operation accord between the UK and the UAE.

Royal Flight

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many days in each of the past five years aircraft of the royal flight have been used by members of the royal family. [13679]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. As an illustrative example, however, 228 days in the year 1 January 1996 to 31 December 1996 saw at least one royal task.

Colchester Garrison

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what materials were contained in the drums unearthed on Abbey field in the Colchester garrison in November 1995; and what inquiries have been undertaken as to how they came to be buried there. [13796]

Mr. Soames: The containers excavated from Abbey field, Colchester, held residues of paint, varnish, creosote and grease which, following analysis, were not found to be toxic. Inquiries showed that the containers were between 40 and 50 years old. No records exist to explain how or why the containers were disposed of in this matter.

Hawk Jets

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which countries have outstanding contracts for the delivery of Hawk jets; and what are the numbers of aircraft involved. [14249]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Two contracts are currently outstanding with the Indonesian Government for 24 and 16 Hawk aircraft. There is a further outstanding contract, with another country, but information on this cannot be released as it would cause harm in terms of one or more of the defence, security, international relations and commercial confidence exemptions in the code of practice on access to Government information. These were the exemptions in the code referred to in my statement on defence exports on 23 July 1996, *Official Report*, columns *212–13*.

SCOTLAND

Private Care Homes

12. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to modify the rules and regulations governing the ownership and management of private *(a)* nursing and *(b)* residential homes for the elderly. [12892]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office is currently consulting publicly on the standards and practice in nursing homes and is considering the recommendations made by the working group on registration procedures in residential care homes.

Local Government Finance

13. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current level of local government spending per head in Scotland. [12893]

Mr. Kynoch: The current level of local government spending per head of population in Scotland is £1,279. This is 32 per cent. higher than the comparable figure for England.

European Regional Development Fund

14. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total value of the grants Scotland has received from the European regional development fund since the fund's inception. [12894]

Mr. Kynoch: From the Scottish Office budget we have allocated approximately £1.6 billion behalf of the European regional development fund.

Brain Injury

15. **Ms Rachel Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the mental illness specific grant with special reference to brain injury. [12895]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In the current year, more than £1 million of mental illness specific grant has been allocated to head injury projects. The effectiveness of the grant and alternative funding arrangements are currently being considered.

Ms Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what resources are available to support the care programme approach for adults with brain injury in each local authority area in Scotland. [12879]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is a matter for local authorities, health boards and housing agencies to determine how much of the considerable resources at their disposal is used to support the care programme approach for adults with brain injury.

European Council

16. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the status of the Scottish Office ministers attending meetings of the European Council of Ministers. [12898]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Scottish Office Ministers attend Council meetings as full members of the UK delegation. They are able to speak with the authority of the UK as member state.

Law and Order

17. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the impact of law and order reforms in Scotland. [12899]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: We expect the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill to have a significant impact in terms of both public protection and deterrence. The Bill will also improve the effectiveness and efficiency of criminal justice in Scotland.

Constitutional Reform

18. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received concerning constitutional reform in relation to Scotland. [12900]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In the last six months, the majority of representations that I received were in favour of the status quo.

Homelessness

19. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what additional resources he proposes to tackle the needs of homeless people in Scotland. [12901]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 9 December that £15 million will be made available over the next three years for a new initiative to help rough sleepers in Scotland.

Blind Workers

20. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he has taken following the meeting between the Minister with responsibility for industry and local government—the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch)—and the Scottish branch of the National League of the Blind in relation to section 2 workers. [12902]

Mr. Kynoch: Scottish Office officials have discussed with Glasgow city council the question of credit facilities for Blindcraft customers. The council agreed that the sensible way forward would be for Blindcraft to make arrangements with existing credit companies to provide services for its customers.

30. **Mr. Michael J. Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what support his Department currently gives to *(a)* blind and disabled workshops and *(b)* Blindcraft outlets. [12912]

Mr. Kynoch: Funding for supported workshops is provided by the Employment Service, an executive agency of the Department for Education and Employment, and paid to Scottish local authorities as a specific grant within the overall amount of aggregate external finance. The total level of grant for 1996–97 was set at £4.4 million. The amount actually paid will depend on numbers of qualifying employees, but it is estimated that about £4.1 million will be paid in the current year. Of that amount, it is estimated that about £1.0 million will relate to Blindcraft establishments.

Dundee City Council (Finance)

21. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received relating to the financial settlement for Dundee city council in 1997–98. [12903]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations about this matter.

Local Taxes

22. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he has taken to ensure that local authorities collect outstanding local taxes. [12904]

Mr. Kynoch: The responsibility for the administration of local taxes, including the recovery of arrears, rests solely with the local authority concerned. However, on 17 January my right hon. Friend announced that he was prepared to offer local authorities an additional £3 million to invest on improving council tax and community charges collection.

Road Construction

23. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which major road construction works will commence in 1997; and if he will make a statement. [12905]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In 1997, construction will begin, or has begun, on the upgrading of the final stretch of the A74 to motorway status, A828 Creagan Bridge, the M90 Halbeath interchange, the A9 at Logie Easter and the A96 bypasses at Blackburn and Kintore.

Automatic Life Sentences

24. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the effect of his proposals for automatic life sentences on levels of serious crime. [12906]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Figures for recent years suggest that 20 to 30 offenders a year would be liable to receive an automatic life sentence under our proposals in the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill. The public deserves an increased measure of protection from those offenders who have demonstrated by their repeated serious offending that they present a particular risk, and our proposals will provide it.

A96 Keith Bypass

25. **Mrs. Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will announce a commencement date for the construction of the A96 Keith bypass. [12907]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend made the necessary road orders for the proposed Keith bypass on 19 December 1996. The project's commencement date will depend on the availability of resources and its priority relative to other projects.

Scotland and Northern Ireland (Joint Projects)

26. **Mr. Eric Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on projects which will affect the economies of both Scotland and Northern Ireland. [12908]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland discuss issues of mutual concern from time to time.

Coronary Heart Disease

27. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made in reducing the incidence of coronary heart disease in Scotland in the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [12909]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is not available in the form requested. The number of deaths from the disease has decreased from 18,483 in 1981 to 14,874 in 1995. If present trends continue, Scotland is likely to meet its target of a 40 per cent. reduction between 1986 and the year 2000 in the number of deaths from coronary heart disease in those under 65.

Health Service Funding

28. **Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next expects to meet the chairmen of the health boards to discuss the financing of health services. [12910]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend and I meet chairmen of health boards regularly to discuss matters of current interest, including finance issues.

Glasgow (Economy)

29. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the effect of the 1997–98 budget allocations to publicly funded bodies on the economy of the city of Glasgow. [12911]

Mr. Kynoch: The performance of the local economy within the city of Glasgow is related to the performance of the Scottish and United Kingdom economies. The policy of restraint in public expenditure pursued by the Government and its success in combating inflation has delivered the strongest recovery since 1992 of any major European economy. The budget allocations to publicly funded bodies for 1997–98 will reflect that successful policy.

Fishing Industry

31. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the prospects for the fishing industry in Scotland. [12913]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The Government are committed to safeguarding the interests of the Scottish fishing industry. That is why we continue to press for a solution to the problem of "quota hopping" at the intergovernmental conference and that is why we argued successfully for more realistic quotas at the December Fisheries Council. The industry's own confidence is evident from the fact that more than 20 new boats, worth some £100 million, are currently on order from Scottish fishermen, with many of the orders placed in Scottish shipyards.

Local Government Finance

32. **Sir David Steel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the impact on local government services of next year's financial settlement to local authorities. [12914]

Mr. Kynoch: Provided councils maximise the benefits from reorganisation and efficiency savings, and budget in line with the priorities my right hon. Friend set in determining it, the settlement should lead to a continued improvement in front-line services.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to meet the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to discuss local authority finances. [12882]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I met the convention on 17 January and I look forward to meeting it on 4 July.

Food Poisoning (Report)

33. **Dr. Reid:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received from health boards in Scotland regarding the Pennington report; and if he will make a statement. [12915]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have received no representations from health boards specifically in response to publication of the interim report of Professor Pennington's group. Health boards' views will be taken into account in taking forward both the interim recommendations and any further recommendations which are made in the final report.

Export Prospects

34. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met Scottish Enterprise to discuss export prospects. [12916]

Mr. Kynoch: I last met the Scottish Enterprise Board on 15 November 1996, when a range of issues were discussed.

Activity Centres (Safety)

35. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the progress being made in implementing the Activity Centres (Young Persons' Safety) Act 1995 in Scotland. [12917]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: During the transitional period for inspecting and licensing existing providers, 106 Scottish operators have registered with Tourism Quality Services, the licensing authority. Tourism Quality Services has inspected 13 centres and the first licences will be issued during February. Tourism Quality Services is on course to complete its inspections and to grant or refuse licences by 1 October 1997, the date defined in the regulations by which registered operators must be licensed.

Health Service Finance

36. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chairmen of health boards to discuss finance in the national health service. [12918]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend and I meet chairmen of health boards regularly to discuss matters of current interest including finance.

Electricity Privatisation

37. **Mr. Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what analysis he has carried out of the effects on the Scottish economy of the privatisation of the Scottish electricity companies; and if he will make a statement. [12919]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend is confident that the increased competition in the electricity market resulting from the privatisation of ScottishPower and Scottish Hydro-Electric, and the freedom of these companies from state interference, has been beneficial to Scotland.

Operation Cancellations

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library figures *(a)* by district health board and *(b)* in total for the number of operations cancelled on the day of, or the day after, admission to hospital and the number of those patients not readmitted within a month for the third quarter of 1996–97. [13859]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to him on 23 January 1997, *Official Report,* columns *749–50.* Figures for cancellations of planned admissions for in-patient and day case treatment for the third quarter of 1996–97 are not yet available.

Peregrine Falcons

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has had from pigeon fanciers requesting a cull of peregrine hawks; and if he will make a statement. [14030]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The Government have received a number of calls from pigeon fanciers over the last two years for the licensed control of birds of prey.

A raptor forum and working group was established in 1995, under the joint chairmanship of the Department of the Environment and the Joint Nature Conversation Committee. The group is currently assessing the interaction between racing pigeons, raptors and game birds and will provide advice to Government on this complex issue as it becomes available.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the population of peregrine hawks in Scotland in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [14031]

Mr. Robertson: The numbers of peregrine falcons breeding in Scotland are not monitored annually on a countrywide basis. The last full survey, in 1991, recorded 625 pairs in Scotland. Local surveys of regularly occupied sites indicate expanding populations in some areas, balanced by some decline in other areas.

Cold Weather Protection

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to provide protection for people, with particular reference to senior citizens, from the effects of cold weather. [12896]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: A generous package of measures are in place to assist vulnerable people particularly older people to cope with the effects of cold weather. These include cold weather payments giving extra help towards additional heating costs; the home energy efficiency scheme providing loft insulation, draughtproofing and energy advice; and the "keep warm this winter" campaign providing a free telephone helpline.

General Practitioner Fundholders

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his policy in respect of fundholder status for general practitioners. [12897]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We continue to support GPs who chose to use fundholding to improve services for patients and we expect that around half the population will be covered by GP fundholders in the course of this year.

Departmental Publications

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the *(a)* White Papers, *(b)* Green Papers, *(c)* consultation papers, *(d)* draft regulations and *(e)* circulars, for which his Department has been responsible issued in 1996 which his Department assesses could give rise, (i) directly and (ii) indirectly to significant environmental effects. [12713]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* The Scottish Office pursues policies and programmes which are intended to support the implementation of the Government's White Paper on the environment "This Common Inheritance", 1992, Cm 1200, and "Sustainable Development: The UK Strategy", Cm 2426, published in 1994. A report on progress will be published shortly as "This Common Inheritance: Annual Report 1997."

No central record is kept of material in the way requested. The Scottish Office produces a great many circulars, regulations and consultation papers; many, to a greater or lesser extent, either may have some impact on the environment or are specifically intended to lead to environmental improvements.

The following are among the material published in 1996:

Green Papers

Protecting the Built Heritage: Cm 3267

Consultation papers:

Scotland's Coasts: a discussion paper

The Proposed Scottish Countryside Premium Scheme

The Farm Woodland Premium Scheme

New Contaminated Land Provisions

Flood Prevention: Review of Responsibilities and Legislation

Consultation on the Surface Waters (Abstraction for Drinking Water) (Classification) (Scotland) Regulations

Cost Effective Landscapes—Working with Nature—A Review for Discussion

Proposal for the Inshore Fishing (The Prohibition of the Carriage of Monofilament Gill Nets) (Scotland) Order 1996

Review of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) (Scotland) Order 1989.

The Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1972: Consolidation.

Permitted Development Rights For Underground Sewerage Works.

Draft National Planning Policy Guideline on Skiing Developments.

Draft National Planning Policy Guideline on Transport and Planning.

(e) Circulars

Statutory Guidance to SEPA on its contribution to sustainable development.

Guidance Notes on Urban Waste Water Treatment (Scotland) Regulations.

Circulars from The Scottish Office Development Department:

1/1996: Local Plan Inquiries: Local Plan Service Standards.

4/1996: Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) (Scotland) Amendment Order 1996: Consultation with Community Councils and Scottish Environment Protection Agency, etc.

10/1996: The Town and Country Planning (Development Contrary to Development Plans) (Scotland) Direction 1996.

12/1996: The Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1972 Planning Agreements.

16/1996: National Planning Policy Guideline (NPPG) 8: Retailing.

18/1996: Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Amendment Order 1996: Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) Cameras.

30/1996: Consultation with the Royal Fine Art Commission for Scotland.

32/1996: Town and Country Planning Code of Practice for Local Plan Inquiries.

34/1996: Commencement of Section 96 of the Environment Act 1995: Review of Old Minerals Permissions.

40/1996 The Home Energy Conservation Act 1995.

42/1996: Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 2 Order 1996: Water and Sewerage Authorities and Liquefied Petroleum Gas Tanks.

Other reports and publications

Natural Priorities: the aims and objectives of Scottish Natural Heritage.

Wild Geese and Agriculture in Scotland.

Cycling into the Future: The Scottish Office Policy on Cycling.

Drinking Water Quality in Scotland 1995.

Natural Heritage Designations Review.

Charter Standard Statement for Planning.

Joint (with COSLA) guidance for Councillors in relation to Local Agenda 21.

Public Water Supplies in Scotland 1994–95: Water Resources Survey.

National planning policy guidelines

Planning and Waste Management.

The Provision of Roadside Facilities on Motorways and Other Trunk Roads in Scotland.

Retailing.

Sport, Physical Recreation and Open Space.

Land for Housing (Revised).

Planning advice notes

Community Councils and Planning.

Planning Application Forms.

Local Planning.

Controlling the Environmental Effects of Surface Mineral Workings.

Structure Plans: Housing Land requirements (revised).

Structure Planning revised).

Statutory instruments

The Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) (Scotland) Amendment Order 1996 (SI 1996/467).

The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Amendment Order 1996 (SI 1996/1266).

The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 2) Order 1996 (SI 1996/3023).

Jointly with the Department of the Environment and the Welsh Office:

(c) Consultation papers

Draft United Kingdom National Air Quality Strategy.

Consultation Paper: Local Air Quality Management, Review of Local Authority Powers.

Consultation Paper: Local Authority Circular on Air Quality and Traffic Management.

Draft National Sulphur Strategy.

Consultation Paper on the Implications of the Nitrogen Dioxide Report from the Expert Panel on Air Quality Standards.

(d) Draft regulations

Draft Air Quality Regulations.

Development Corporations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the reception proposed by the Scottish Office to mark the completion of the wind-up of Scotland's development corporations; which Ministers will be attending the reception; when and where the reception will be held; who has been invited to attend; how many are expected to attend the reception; what entertainment will be provided; if commemorative items will be dispensed at the reception; and how much will be spent on the event. [12875]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* I invited representatives of Livingston, Cumbernauld and Irvine new town development corporations to a reception in the great hall, Edinburgh castle on Friday 31 January 1997. The purpose of the reception was to acknowledge the splendid work done by the corporations since they were set up. Each of the corporations was represented by board members, former board members and senior staff past and present. Sixty-five guests attended the reception and the total cost was £803.

The Scottish Office arranged only a reception: dinner was not provided, there was no entertainment and no commemorative items were dispensed. A similar reception was held in December 1995 to mark the wind-up of the East Kilbride and Glenrothes new town development corporations.

Newcastle Disease

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of *(a)* chickens and *(b)* turkeys on farms in Scotland are currently vaccinated against Newcastle disease; and if he will make a statement. [13602]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* The information requested is not collected by the Department.

Student Grants

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much was spent on student grants in Scotland in each year from 1990–91 to 1996–97 at current 1996–97 prices. [13902]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* The information requested is set out in the table.

The figures represent expenditure on maintenance grants, travel and tuition fees for award-holding Scottish domiciled students undertaking full-time courses of higher education; and on tuition fees for eligible European Union students undertaking similar courses in Scotland. They are not strictly comparable year on year because, since academic year 1990–91, a growing proportion of the maintenance provision for these students has been met by loans rather than grants.

£000s

Financial year	*Actual expenditure*	*Expenditure at 1996–97 prices*
1990–91[1]	176,813	215,769
1991–92	279,734	320,817
1992–93	337,647	371,799
1993–94	370,195	395,945
1994–95	324,646	341,190
1995–96	289,060	296,287
1996–97[2]	289,728	289,728

[1] Excluding grants for full-time higher national certificate courses which were covered by the education authorities up to and including 1990–91.

[2] Estimated.

Cattle Slaughter Scheme

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements are in place to ensure the separation of cattle in the over-30-months scheme from those outside the scheme in abattoirs; how these arrangements differ from those in the rest of the United kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [13538]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 29 January 1997]:* The arrangements in place aim to assist the restoration of consumer confidence in beef.

Regulation (EC No. 716/96 requires separation in time and space of cattle being processed under the scheme from those intended for human consumption.

In Scotland this is ensured by abattoirs contracting with the Government to slaughter over-30-month cattle only. There are interim arrangements for Orkney given the special circumstances there. The contractual arrangements reflect representations from the Scottish meat industry, retail, consumer and food safety representative bodies.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Cattle Slaughter Scheme

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what weight of meat and bonemeal from animals slaughtered under the over-30-months scheme is currently being stored in cold storage depots in Grimsby; how long it has been stored there; and for how long it is planned to be kept there. [14025]

Mr. Baldry: There are currently no dry warehouses holding meat and bonemeal or cold stores holding carcase material from animals slaughtered under the over-30-months scheme in Grimsby.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Private Finance Projects

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will make a list of the estimated savings arising from each *(a)* outsourcing and *(b)* private finance project within his Department for each of the next three years; [12197]

(2) if he will list the timetable for each *(a)* current and *(b)* planned (i) outsourcing and (ii) private finance project within his Department indicating the date for the signing of contracts. [12196]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested.

The business involvement of the private sector in the Department of Social Security is part of a wider programme of change to transform our business by delivering improved services at a significantly reduced cost.

The information relating to estimated savings is as follows.

The outsourcing to the Royal Mail of Child Support Agency post opening is estimated to save £20,000 in 1996–97 and £35,000 in both 1997–98 and 1998–99.

The Benefits Agency-Post Office Counters Ltd. project is cost neutral but, over the life of the project, we expect programme savings in the order of £1,200 million.

Savings of 60 per cent. will be achieved over the life of the national insurance recording system 2 (NIRS2) contract—up to 2004—compared with what it was estimated the cost would have been had NIRS2 been procured conventionally. No breakdown between years is possible.

Savings estimates are not available for those projects that have not reached the award of contract stage. Individual estimates might prejudice commercial negotiations. From previous departmental experience, areas that have been subject to private finance initiative, outsourcing and market testing have achieved long-term savings.

Information relating to current and planned projects is in the table. The projects listed have been established to test use of the private sector where it can contribute investment and new ideas to help achieve efficiency in our business. Timetables are subject to the procurement meeting our business needs.

Department of social security—private sector projects

Project	*Timetable*
Benefits Agency—current projects	
ADAPT 98	
A competition to select private sector companies to work in partnership in three area directorates	[1] OJEC advert—14 September 1996 Shortlist of suppliers—early 1997 [2]SSR—early 1997 Contract sign—spring 1997
PROSPECT 98	
Outsourcing Child Benefit operations	[1] OJEC advert—early 1997 Shortlist of suppliers—spring 1997 [2]SSR—Summer 1997 Contract sign—spring 1998
IMPACT 97	
Outsourcing Benefits Agency medical services	[1] OJEC advert—17 June 1996 Shortlist of suppliers—20 August 1996 [2]SSR—20 November 1996 Contract sign—spring 1997
BA POCL	
Private finance initiative to automate payment of DSS benefits through post office counters and introduce plastic benefit card. Initial trial in 10 post offices.	[1] OJEC advert—30 August 1994 Shortlist of suppliers—9 December 1994 [2]SSR—13 April 1995 Contract sign—15 May 1996 Trial start 21 October 1996
Contributions Agency—current projects	
NIRS2	
Private finance initiative to replace national insurance recording system (NIRS1)	[1] OJEC advert—13 August 1994 Contract sign—24 May 1995 Phased roll out from 10 February 1997—6 April 1999
Newcastle estates redevelopment	[1] OJEC advert—4 January 1995
Private finance initiative to rationalise and improve accommodation of DSS agencies in Newcastle	[1] ITT—24 January 1996 Contract sign—spring 1997
Planned projects	
Enquiry centre	
Proposals for an Enquiry Centre to deal with telephone calls and some written correspondence are developed. A firm timetable has not yet been agreed.	
Information Technology Services Agency—current projects	
ACCORD (Access to corporate data)	[1] OJEC advert—7 August 1996
Private finance initiative to award a contract for delivery of a range of IS/IT services.	SSR—spring 1997
Three private sector organisations have been shortlisted to work as a joint team with	[1] ITT—Summer 1997
DSS staff to identify requirements.	Contract sign—autumn 1997
SASA (StandAlone Support Applications)	[1] OJEC advert—15 April 1996
	SSR—25 June 1996
Outsourcing the development and support of those small, non-strategic computer applications	[1] ITT—early 1997 Contract sign—spring 1997
Child Support Agency—current projects	
Royal Mail	Contract sign—22 May 1996
Outsourcing post opening in 6 CSA Centres	Phased roll out 2 September 1996–17 February 1997
Planned projects	
Facilities Management	
Support services outsourced in 5 of 6 CSA Centres. Position of sixth centre to be considered at contract renewal during 1997	
Departmental—current projects	
PRIME (Private sector Resource Initiative for Management of the Estate)	[1] OJEC advert—28 June 1996
Private Finance Initiative to transfer ownership and management of DSS premises to the private sector	Shortlist of suppliers—1 November 1996 Contract sign—autumn 1997
PARENT PLUS	
Outsourcing four of the twelve pilot areas running a new service to help lone parents into work	Advert—25 November 1996 [1] ITT-early 1997 Contract sign—spring 1997

1. There are no planned projects for the departmental headquarters, Benefits Agency and ITSA.
2. Future timetable dates are provisional and subject to ministerial approval.

[1] *Official Journal of the European Community.*
[2] Statement of service requirements.
[3] Invitation to tender.

War Pensions

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what further medical evidence has been received since the decision to change the policy on noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss; what assessment he has made of whether the additional medical evidence is consistent with the reasons for changing his policy on war disablement pensions for deafness; and if he will make a statement. [14343]

Mr. Heald: Since the change in approach regarding noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss was announced, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, has met representatives of the Royal British Legion, and a paper

written for the Royal National Institute for the Deaf by Dr. Coles has been received. In addition, my noble Friend, Lord Mackay of Ardbrecknish, has received an open letter from four hearing loss experts, Professor Mark Lutman, Professor Adrian Davis, Dr. Jonathan Hazell and Dr. Ross Coles. All the experts agree with the fundamental point in the advice presented to the Central Advisory Committee on war pensions on 5 December 1996, namely that noise-induced loss and age-related hearing loss are broadly additive. It is the scientific fact that led to the new approach.

Mr. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish in the *Official Report* the open letter sent to the Minister of State, the noble Lord Mackay of Ardbrecknish, on 23 January by Professor Mark E. Lutman and others about the Minister's statement that medical opinion on noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss has changed; what action he is taking to revise the Government's change of policy on war disablement pensions for deafness; and if he will make a statement. [14339]

Mr. Heald: A copy has been placed in the Library.

The letter confirms that noise-induced hearing loss and hearing loss due to aging are broadly additive. It is that medical opinion which is now being applied in the assessment of claims for war disablement pension. No action to revise policy on war disablement pensions on hearing loss is therefore being taken.

Mr. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of ex-service men and women who *(a)* will qualify for a war disablement pension for deafness under the revised regulations governing entitlement that became effective in March 1996, and *(b)* would have qualified had the Government not approved their change of policy. [14341]

Mr. Heald: No revised regulation or change of policy governing entitlement to war pensions became effective in March 1996. That was the date on which departmental medical advisors initially advised that there was no longer any reasonable doubt that the effects of noise and age-related hearing loss were broadly additive. In the light of subsequent statements by medical experts that this had been known for 30 years, the matter has been looked at again and we now accept that the position should have been corrected at an earlier date.

We estimate that, in 1997–98, 800 new claimants will qualify for a war disablement pension for noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss.

Mr. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consultation he had with the Royal National Institute for Deaf People on the Government's interpretation of the medical evidence on noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss; and when they were consulted. [14342]

Mr. Heald: Departmental officials met the Royal National Institute for the Deaf and its medical advisor on 9 January.

The current approach to cases involving service-related noise induced, sensorineural hearing loss and later age-related hearing loss is that the two are not more than additive. All the experts, including those advising the Royal National Institute for the Deaf, agree on this . The medical facts are not, therefore, in doubt.

Benefit Claimants

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the current numbers and proportions of recipients of *(a)* income support, *(b)* housing benefit and *(c)* council tax benefit with earnings set against the earnings disregard of (i) £5, (ii) £10, (iii) £15 and (iv) £25, giving figures separately for (1) couples, (2) single people and (3) lone parents. [13049]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the tables.

Income support/housing benefit/council tax benefit couples with disregarded earnings: May 1995

Disregard £	Income Support		Housing benefit		Council tax benefit	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
5	35,000	3.7	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
10	1,000	0.1	132,000	25.6	162,000	20.5
15	23,000	2.4	19,000	3.7	31,000	3.9
25	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Income support/housing benefit/council tax benefit single people without dependants with disregarded earnings: May 1995

Disregard £	Income Support		Housing benefit		Council tax benefit	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
5	35,000	1.0	96,000	9.9	78,000	6.5
10	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
15	5,000	0.2	3,000	0.4	3,000	0.3
25	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Income support/housing benefit/council tax benefit single people with dependants with disregarded earnings: May 1995

Disregard £	Income support		Housing benefit		Council tax benefit	
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
5	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
10	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Income support/housing benefit/council tax benefit single people with dependants with disregarded earnings: May 1995

Disregard £	Income support Number	Per cent.	Housing benefit Number	Per cent.	Council tax benefit Number	Per cent.
15	70,000	6.2	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
25	n/a	n/a	104,000	78.6	94,000	76.6

Notes:
1. Numbers are rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. It has not been possible correctly to identify the appropriate disregard in every case.
3. For housing benefit and council tax benefit, earners have been identified as those with earnings from employment and self-employment including those with part-time earnings. For income support earnings refer to income from part-time employment or self-employment.
4. N/A denotes not applicable.
5. Proportions expressed are recipients with earnings as a proportion of the relevant group type (ie. all couples/single/lone parents).
6. Figures for council tax benefit do not include second adult rebate cases.
7. Housing benefit/council tax benefit cases also in receipt of income support have been excluded as earnings have not been disregarded in terms of the housing benefit/council tax benefit assessment as they have already been taken into account in the income support assessment.

Sources:
1. Income support statistics quarterly inquiry May 1995.
2. Housing benefit management information system annual 1 per cent. sample enquiry, without income support, taken at the end of May 1995.

Income Support (St. Helens)

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many income support claimants in (i) WN4, (ii) WN5, (iii) L34 and (iv) L35 postcodes his Department allocated to St. Helens metropolitan district council for the purpose of calculating the authority's standard spending assessment for 1997–98. [12949]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table:

Estimated number of income support claimants for St. Helens

Postcode	Percentage of St. Helens
WN4	2
WN5	2
L34	1
L35	5
Other Postcodes	90
Adjustment for unallocated cases	1
Estimated number of claimants	22,392

Notes:

1. Exact figures cannot be provided as a small adjustment is made to the overall caseload estimate to allow for claims which could not be allocated to local authority areas by post code.

2. The other main postcodes contributing to the St. Helens estimate were WA8—WA12.

Source:

100 per cent. count of claims registered on the income support computer system in August 1995.

Pensioner Incomes

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the value of the basic state pension for *(c)* single pensioners and *(b)* pensioner couples for each year between November 1979 and April 1997; and what it would have been if it had been uprated in line with whichever was the higher of average earnings or prices. [14306]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table.

£ per week

Uprating date	Single pensioner Actual rate	Single pensioner Higher of average earnings or prices	Pensioner couples Actual rate	Pensioner couples Higher of average earnings or prices
November 1979	23.30	23.30	37.30	37.30
November 1980	27.15	27.60	43.45	44.20
November 1981	29.60	30.90	47.35	49.50
November 1982	32.85	33.50	52.55	53.65
November 1983	34.05	36.40	54.50	58.30
November 1984	35.80	38.25	57.30	61.25
November 1985	38.30	41.60	61.30	66.60
July 1986	38.70	43.45	61.95	69.55
April 1987	39.50	45.90	63.25	73.45
April 1988	41.15	49.50	65.90	79.20
April 1989	43.60	53.90	69.80	86.25
April 1990	46.90	59.15	75.10	94.65
April 1991	52.00	65.60	83.25	104.95
April 1992	54.15	70.80	86.70	113.25
April 1993	56.10	74.25	89.80	118.80
April 1994	57.60	76.40	92.10	122.25
April 1995	58.85	79.45	94.10	127.15
April 1996	61.15	82.55	97.75	132.10
April 1997	62.45	86.00	99.85	137.65

1. All calculations are rounded to the nearest 5p at each uprating date.
2. The alternative uprating has been calculated using either the average earnings index (whole economy unadjusted) as published by the Office for National Statistics or the retail prices index (all items), whichever was the higher.

Benefits Agency Medical Services

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, if he will list the number of doctors working at each Benefit Agency medical services centre in Scotland who are *(a)* full time BAMS staff, *(b)* current medical practitioners, *(c)* retired medical practitioners and *(d)* in other categories. [1348]

Mr. Burt *[pursuant to his reply, 5 November 1996, c. 553]:* I am advised that Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, will be writing again to clarify his reply.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. George Foulkes, dated 5 February 1997:

I am writing to clarify the information provided to you in my letter of 5 November 1996 in response to your Parliamentary Question. You asked the Secretary of State for Social Security if he

would list the number of doctors working at each Benefit Agency Medical Services centre in Scotland who were *(a)* full time BAMS staff, *(b)* current medical practitioners, *(c)* retired medical practitioners and *(d)* in other categories.

I regret that the figures I quoted for the number of sessional fee paid doctors for Edinburgh and Aberdeen were incorrect. The figures should have been 33 and 13 respectively. The figures are provisional and subject to change.

The additional information concerning fee-paid sessional doctors is now available. Full details are contained in the attached table.

I apologise for any inconvenience this may have caused you.

Doctors working in Scotland at each centre

Centre	*Full time BAMS (employed)*	*Sessional (fee paid)*	
		Current	*Retired*
Glasgow/Shettlestone/Cumbernauld	22	62	9
Ayr/Kilmarnock	0	6	2
Greenock	0	4	0
Motherwell/Hamilton	0	5	1
Edinburgh	20	20	13
Aberdeen	2	6	7
Inverness	2	1	4
Dundee	4	6	4

Figures are provisional and subject to change.

Glasgow full time doctors cover a variety of areas.

All full time and fee paid doctors are current medical practitioners.

Retired doctors may have taken early retirement from general practice before the age of 60.

HEALTH

Dentistry (Children)

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the level of dental caries of five-year-old children in each region in each year since 1989. [13635]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) on 16 February 1996 at column *25*.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dental fillings per child were made in each region in each month in 1996. [13636]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is not centrally available. Before 1 September 1996 the majority of children's fillings were covered under capitation payments and the item of treatment was not individually recorded.

General Practitioners

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of full-time GPs by region in each year between 1992 and 1995. [13638]

Mr Malone: The information requested is contained in General Medical Services Statistics England and Wales, copies of which are available in the Library.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioner fundholders went over budget in the last year banded according to the amount of overspend. [13642]

Mr. Malone: Information for 1995–96 is not yet available. Tables 1 and 2 give figures for 1994–95, classifying overspends, respectively, in cash terms and as a percentage of total budget. The average awarded to a fund during 1994–95 was £1.7 million.

Table 1: Fundholders over budget 1994–95 by size of overspend (cash)

Amount (£000s) over budget	*Number of funds*[1]
Up to 50	220
50 up to 100	104
100 up to 150	38
150 or more	24

[1] A fund is the organisational unit to which the budget is awarded.

Table 2: Fundholders over budget 1994–95 by size of overspend (parentage of budget)

Proportion (percentage over budget)	*Number of funds*[1]
Up to 2.5	189
2.5 up to 5	105
5 up to 10	77
10 or more	15

[1] A fund is the organisational unit to which the budget is awarded.

St. Bartholomew's Hospital

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the members of the Grierson committee examining the future of St. Bartholomew's hospital, indicating their background. [13874]

Mr. Malone: Sir Ronald Grierson's task force to examine practical options for future use of the St. Bartholomew's hospital site comprises the following members:

	Position
Sir Ronald Grierson	Former Chairman, GEC International
Professor Sir Colin Dollery	Former Dean Royal Postgraduate Medical School; Pro Vice-Chancellor for Medicine and Dentistry, University of London
Mr. S. T. Gray	Chairman, Smith and Williamson Securities, and Chairman of the Special Trustees for St. Bartholomew's Hospital
Mr. C. J. Perrin	Deputy Chairman, Hambros Bank UK
Sir. Tim Bell	Chairman, Lowe Bell Communications
Mrs. Tessa Keswick	Director, The Centre for Policy Studies
Sir Evelyn de Rothschild	Chairman, N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd.
Lord Sheppard of Didgemere	Chairman, Grand Metropolitan plc; Chairman, London First
Right hon. Peter Brooke MP	Member of Parliament, City of London and Westminster South
Mr. M. Cassidy	Chairman, Policy and Resources Committee, The Corporation of London
Sir Derek Boorman	Chairman, Royal Hospitals NHS Trust
Mr. G. Green	Chief Executive, Royal Hospitals NHS Trust (Secretary to the Task Force).

Butane Gas Lighters

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each year since 1990 the number and age range of individuals who have died as a result of the abuse of butane gas lighters and refills. [13644]

Mr. Burns: St. George's hospital medical school collects data on deaths in the United Kingdom and the Channel Islands associated with the deliberate inhalation of volatile substances. The information requested on butane gas lighters and refills by age range for the years 1990–94 is set out in the table.

Age	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
11–14	5	2	3	0	4
15–19	39	29	20	21	14
20–24	9	4	5	10	4
25 and over	0	2	11	5	6
Total	53	37	39	36	28

Numbers of substances reported here are based on primary, secondary and tertiary substances abused, so they cannot be interpreted as percentages of total deaths because more than one substance may be involved in a single death.

Doctors

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors who qualified in *(a)* 1974, *(b)* 1977, *(c)* 1980 and *(d)* 1983 left the profession within five years of qualification. [13652]

Mr. Malone: Figures from the medical careers research group, on doctors known to have left the profession within five years of qualification are shown in the table:

Year of qualification	*Number who had left the profession five years after qualification*
1974	208
1977	186
1980	228
1983	202

Source:
Medical Careers Research Group, Unit of Health-Care Epidemiology, University of Oxford.

Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was the number of price reductions of drugs under the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme in each of the last two years. [14043]

(2) what was the total amount repaid to his Department under the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme in each of the two most recent years for which figures are available. [14044]

Mr. Malone: Under the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme, if a company's profits are regarded as above target, a company has the option of either reducing its prices to bring the return back in line with its target or making a repayment of the excess to the department. Almost all companies choose to make repayments.

There have been no examples of price reductions arising from profits above permitted targets under the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme in the last two years. Information on price reductions will be included in the Department of Health's future reports to Parliament on the PPRS.

Information on repayments of profits above target, or of excess sales promotion, for the 1992 round of annual financial returns was published in the first report to Parliament on the PPRS in May 1996. The figure given there of £25.4 million has now become £25.9 million, following further negotiations with companies. Information on repayments for the 1993 round of annual financial returns will be published in the spring in the Department of Health's second report to Parliament on the PPRS. Negotiations with a number of pharmaceutical companies are continuing and the overall position for 1993 is not finalised.

Heart Disease

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total Government research expenditure on heart disease in 1996–97; and how many people were treated for heart disease in 1996–97. [14008]

Mr. Horam: The table shows the total Government expenditure on research into heart disease for the year 1995–96, the most recent year for which figures are available. Information about the number of people treated for heart disease is not available in the form requested.

Government expenditure on research into heart disease year 1995–96

	£ million
Department of Health and Scottish Office Home and Health Department	0.73
NHS Regional Research and Development	3.43
Medical research council	[1]11.40
Total Government expenditure	15.56

[1] Figure for 1994–95.

Cancer

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total amount of Government research expenditure on cancer in 1996–97; and how many people received treatment for cancer in 1996–97. [14000]

Mr. Horam: Total Government expenditure on cancer research for the year 1995–96 is contained in the table and is the most recent year for which figures are available. Information about the number of people treated for cancer is not available in the form requested.

Government expenditure on cancer research 1995–96

	£ million
Department of Health/Health Departments	[1]9.8
NHS regional research and development	0.4
Medical Research Council	[2]14.8
Total Government expenditure	25.0

[1] Department of Health—Health Departments are broken down as follows: Health and personal social services policy research programme: 1.6
Other Department of Health (radiation protection budget): 1.9
National Radiological Protection Board: 5.5
Scottish Office Home and Health Department: 0.8
[2] Figure for 1994–95.

Dentists

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last discussed with the General Dental Council the issue of extensive unnecessary dental treatment. [14235]

Mr. Malone: Ministers keep in regular contact with the General Dental Council and discuss a wide range of issues, including amendments to the Dentists Act which would allow the GDC to deal differently with dentists guilty of professional misconduct including providing excessive unnecessary treatment.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 23 January, *Official Report* column *708*, how many dentists have been struck off since 1979 by broad heading. [14234]

Mr. Malone: The General Dental Council has erased the names of 75 dentists from the dentists register since 1979. Of these 26 were erased as a result of criminal convictions, 43 for breaches of professional conduct and the remaining six for a combination of criminal conviction and breaches of professional conduct.

Voluntary Groups

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list each voluntary group part or wholly funded by his Department in the last two years for which the information is available and the amount of money received by each group in that period. [14146]

Mr. Burns: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Prescriptions

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the payments made *(a)* to dispensing doctors for prescriptions dispensed and items personally administered and *(b)* to non-dispensing doctors for items personally administered by the Prescription Pricing Authority, broken down by (i) net ingredient cost, (ii) discounted cost, (iii) VAT, (iv) oxygen etc., (v) container allowance, (vi) dispensing fees and (vii) on cost, and in total in each year since 1990–91. [14141]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is shown in the tables.

Payments made for prescriptions dispensed by doctors, 1990–91 to 1995–96

England — *£ million*

	Basic price (NIC)	*Discount*	*On cost allowance*	*Percentage addition to basic price*	*Fees*	*Container allowance*	*Total payment oxygen*	*VAT*	*Total cost*
1990–91	144.1	9.7	15.1	0.0	23.5	1.0	0.0	20.1	194.2
1991–92	163.1	11.2	17.1	—	25.5	1.1	0.1	26.0	221.5
1992–93	186.0	13.0	19.5	0.0	25.9	1.1	0.1	30.2	249.8
1993–94	209.6	14.8	22.0	—	27.3	1.2	0.1	33.9	279.2
1994–95	228.7	16.3	24.0	—	28.4	1.2	0.1	36.9	303.0
1995–96	245.8	22.7	25.9	—	28.9	1.3	0.1	36.0	315.3

1. Information obtained from the Prescription Pricing Authority form PD1(A)DD.
2. The information relates to prescriptions dispensed in the periods February to January, most of which are paid in the periods April to March.
3. The information includes items personally administered by dispensing doctors.
4. An "0.0" indicates less than £50,000, an "—" indicates zero.

Payments made for prescriptions submitted by prescribing doctors for items personally administered, 1990–91 to 1995–96

England — *£ million*

	Basic price (NIC)	*Discount*	*On cost allowance*	*Percentage addition to basic price*	*Fees*	*Container allowance*	*Total payment oxygen*	*VAT*	*Total cost*
1990–91	20.9	0.1	2.2	0.0	7.4	0.3	—	3.2	33.9
1991–92	25.3	0.1	2.7	0.0	8.2	0.3	—	4.4	40.8
1992–93	35.0	0.2	3.7	0.0	9.1	0.4	—	6.2	54.1
1993–94	48.7	0.3	5.1	0.0	9.6	0.4	—	8.3	71.7
1994–95	63.2	0.6	6.6	0.0	10.2	0.4	—	10.3	90.1
1995–96	75.0	1.9	7.9	0.0	10.2	0.4	—	12.4	104.0

1. Information obtained from the Prescription Pricing Authority form PD1(A)PA.
2. The information relates to prescriptions dispensed in the periods February to January, most of which are paid in the periods April to March.
3. An "0.0" indicates less than £50,000, an "—" indicates zero.

Doctors and Dentists Pay Review Body

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the evidence submitted to the Doctors and Dentists Pay Review Body regarding disbursements to doctors in England and Wales. [14142]

Mr. Malone: Copies are available in the Library.

GP Principals

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many full-time GP principals there were in 1994, 1995 and 1996 by region and nationally. [14332]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is contained in "General Medical Services Statistics England and Wales", copies of which are available in the Library.

Operation Cancellations

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library figures by *(a)* district health authority, *(b)* regional health authority and *(c)* overall of the number of operations cancelled on the day of, or the day after, admission to hospital and the number of those patients not readmitted within a month for the third quarter of 1996–97. [13857]

Mr. Horam: Information on cancelled operations for quarter three of 1996–97 will be available in March and will be placed in the Library at that time.

TRANSPORT

M6

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he had made of the cost of completing the M6 motorway between Carlisle and the Scottish border; what is the distance involved; and out of which Department's budget the cost will be met. [11861]

Mr. Watts: Improvements to the A74 between Carlisle and the border is currently an option in the recently awarded design, build, finance and operate contract and covers the upgrade of the 5.5 miles of the A74 in England to a three-lane motorway, at an estimated cost of £55.9 million. The merits of DBFO procurement for the section of A74 in England are being assessed by the Department of Transport and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland. No decision has been reached.

Motorway Accidents

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for each stretch of the motorway network in each of the last two years, how many *(a)* fatalities and *(b)* injuries have been reported; how many accidents have been reported; and if he will collate centrally data on the causes of road accidents. [14134]

Mr. Bowis: The following numbers of personal injury road accidents and resulting casualties were recorded on motorways in Great Britain during 1994 and 1995. These are the most recent two years for which statistics are available. The police do not currently collate accident causation data for the Department, but a review this year will decide whether such information should be collected in the future.

	1994			*1995*		
	Accidents	*Fatalities*	*Injuries*	*Accidents*	*Fatalities*	*Injuries*
M1/M10	942	20	1,533	980	23	1,635
M45	5	0	8	3	0	7
M2	61	0	99	59	0	87
M3	189	4	260	229	1	352
M4	584	14	880	603	23	913
M5	348	11	632	373	11	580
M6	987	27	1,769	940	26	1,633
M11	151	5	226	143	3	206
M18	40	0	72	50	3	82
M20	92	1	151	98	4	182
M23	128	0	277	85	1	145
M25	926	8	1,394	1,028	17	1,606
M26	8	0	17	12	0	24
M27/M271/M275	159	3	234	206	6	293
M40	284	6	477	273	7	447
M42	121	3	201	112	1	173
M50	13	0	16	11	0	14
M53	69	1	101	76	0	120
M54	20	0	31	29	2	37
M55	29	1	52	19	0	40
M56	120	2	189	108	1	170
M57	34	1	57	26	2	48
M58	17	0	26	24	0	30
M61	88	5	170	72	2	114
M62	500	11	810	483	15	738
M63	120	3	156	132	1	191
M65	35	0	58	30	0	45
M66	34	1	50	39	0	53
M69	21	0	30	27	0	36
M180/M181	34	0	47	19	1	19
Other motorways	137	2	194	112	3	145
Motorways	6,296	129	10,217	6,401	153	10,165
A(M) roads	420	6	615	450	13	660
Total (including A(M) roads)	6,716	135	10,832	6,851	166	10,825
Wales (including A(M) roads)	179	6	265	209	4	319
Scotland (including A(M) roads)	330	16	496	332	10	527

	1994			1995		
	Accidents	*Fatalities*	*Injuries*	*Accidents*	*Fatalities*	*Injuries*
Great Britain						
Motorways	6,801	151	10,974	6,940	167	11,009
A(M) roads	424	6	619	452	13	662
Total (including A(M) roads)	7,225	157	11,593	7,392	180	11,671

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what evaluation he has made of the adequacy of services on the west coast main line; what plans there are for improvements; and over what time scale. [14221]

Mr. Watts: I expect that InterCity west coast rail services will be franchised in the near future. The franchising director and the chairman of Railtrack signed an infrastructure investment agreement which will give the successful bidder for the franchise the opportunity to run tilting trains and increase maximum speed to 125 mph on all principal InterCity west coast routes by 2002.

Proposals to build on the existing franchises are being made by prospective franchisees and as the competition for the franchise is in progress, I cannot comment on these. I expect the franchisee to achieve sustained improvements in services soon after taking over, as has happened elsewhere.

Consultation on service levels has been carried out by the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising and the finalised passenger service requirement for these services will also be published this week.

Cargo (Gibraltar)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what regional or international treaties and conventions on environmental protection against pollution of the Mediterranean sea apply to cargoes *(a)* delivered to and from Gibraltar and *(b)* shipped through the straits of Gibraltar; and if he will make a statement on their application. [13852]

Mr. Bowis: Sea-going vessels are subject to international or regional treaties and conventions to which the vessel's flag state is party and also to generally accepted international rules and standards. Morocco, Spain, and the UK, in respect of Gibraltar, enforce the international convention for the prevention of pollution from ships 1973–78, which is the principal international convention on the protection of the marine environment from ships, including those carrying potentially polluting cargoes.

Royal Train

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what has been the cost of upkeep, maintenance and operation of the royal train in each of the last three years; [13689]

(2) what, in each of the past five years, has been the annual public subsidy for the royal train. [13692]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* The total cost to the Exchequer of royal travel by train, including train maintenance, preparation, operational and British Transport police security, was the following:

1991–92: £2.6 million
1992–93: £2.5 million
1993–94: £2.8 million
1994–95: £2.5 million
1995–96: £1.9 million

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many times in each of the past five years the royal train has been used on *(a)* official and *(b)* private journeys. [13688]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* The royal train is used only on official business. It has been used on the following numbers of occasions in the last five years:

1991–92: 43
1992–93: 35
1993–94: 47
1994–95: 27
1995–96: 31

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those members of the royal family who have made *(a)* public use and *(b)* private use of the royal train in each of the past five years. [13670]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 31 January 1997:]:* I understand that the following members of the royal family have made public use of the royal train, as listed, and that members of the royal family have not made private use of the train:

1991–92
HM The Queen
The Duke of Edinburgh
The Prince of Wales
The Princess Royal
The Duke of York
The Duke of Kent
1992–93
HM The Queen
The Duke of Edinburgh
The Prince of Wales
The Princess Royal
The Duke of York
The Duke of Kent
1993–94
HM The Queen
The Duke of Edinburgh
The Prince of Wales
The Princess Royal
The Prince Edward

The Duke of Kent
The Duchess of Kent
1994–95
HM The Queen
The Duke of Edinburgh
The Prince of Wales
The Princess Royal
The Duchess of Kent
1995–96
HM The Queen
The Duke of Edinburgh
The Prince of Wales
The Princess Royal
The Duchess of Kent.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the cost per passenger mile of the royal train and how this compares with commercial charges for equivalent journeys. [13690]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* No figures are readily available for the cost per passenger mile of the royal train because the numbers travelling on the train vary. If an estimate were made, the cost would not be comparable with commercial charges for equivalent journeys.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff are employed *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time to support, staff and operate the royal train. [13691]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* This is a matter for the companies which own and operate the royal train—Railtrack and English, Welsh and Scottish Railway Ltd.

Driving Examiners

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the new contracts of employment the Driving Standards Agency is introducing for driving examiners; and what involvement Ministers have had in the decision to introduce the new contracts of employment. [14155]

Mr. Bowis: The Driving Standards Agency is introducing new conditions of service in the contract of permanent employment for the 40 driving examiners whom the agency proposes to recruit to fill current vacancies. The revised conditions will provide the agency with more flexibility concerning the location of examiners and their working hours to help meet fluctuations in patterns of demand for driving tests. There are currently no plans to apply these new conditions to existing permanent staff. While I approve overall DSA staffing levels in the context of the agency's business plan, it is for the chief executive to set appropriate conditions of employment.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many driving examiners are employed by the Driving Standards Agency; how many have been asked to accept new contracts of employment; how many have been restricted to contracts offering them one day's work a month; and how many driving examiners have been dismissed for refusing to accept new contracts of employment. [14156]

Mr. Bowis: The Driving Standards Agency currently employs 1,153 driving examiners grade staff, 831 of whom are permanent civil servants and 322 of whom have three–year contracts. The DSA is recruiting 40 new permanent driving examiners with revised conditions of service. Examiners on fixed-period contracts have been given six months notice of a contract variation to allow the DSA to terminate on one month's notice in the future. All 322 staff on fixed-period contracts are guaranteed at least one day's work a month once they have completed their probationary period; 307 of these staff are guaranteed of a minimum of 120 days per year for the duration of their contracts. No examiners have been dismissed.

Freight Aircraft

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many operating freight aircraft Channel Express has registered in the United Kingdom; and how many of those aircraft have type approval; [14351]

(2) how many operating freight aircraft Hunting Aviation have registered in the United Kingdom; and how many of those aircraft have type approval; [14352]

(3) how many operating freight aircraft Heavylift have registered in the United Kingdom; and if he will list those aircraft that have type approval; [14353]

(4) how many operating freight aircraft Air Foyle have registered in the United Kingdom; and if he will list those aircraft that have type approval. [14354]

Mr. Bowis: The number of British-registered freight aircraft which each of these airlines operates under its air operator's certificate is shown in the table. All these aircraft have type approval.

	Number/aircraft
Channel Express	6 Handley Page Herald 5 Fokker F27 3 Lockheed Electra
Hunting Cargo Airlines	3 Lockheed Electra
Heavylift Cargo Airlines	2 Shorts Belfast
Air Foyle	8 BAe 146

Channel Express is also in the process of registering an A300 freighter in the UK.

In addition, Channel Express and Hunting Cargo currently have permission to use one leased foreign registered cargo aircraft each, and Heavylift has permission to use eight leased foreign registered aircraft.

Hammersmith Bridge

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if his Department will assist in the funding of repairs to Hammersmith bridge; and if he will make a statement. [13708]

Mr. Bowis: The Government are providing funding for bridge assessment and strengthening in London for allocation on a prioritisation basis by the London boroughs bridge engineering group. In due course, this

group will determine what proportion of the allocated funds should be used for works at Hammersmith bridge based on data provided by the borough.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Disturbances

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide a breakdown of the costs of public disturbances in summer 1996 in Northern Ireland. [10977]

Sir John Wheeler: It is not possible to provide a comprehensive breakdown of the costs of public disturbances over the summer of 1996 in Northern Ireland. Clearly the widespread unrest and the many instances of rioting and other violence have had a profound effect on all communities in Northern Ireland both politically and emotionally as well as financially.

However, it is possible to estimate the financial costs in some areas of public expenditure where the public order situation led to additional expenditure over what might normally have been expected. In particular, it is a matter of public record that the additional costs arising from policing parades and other demonstrations in July and August amounted to approximately £13 million. In addition, the Compensation Agency has calculated the cost of potential criminal damage claims to be approximately £20 million. Not all of these claims have been settled and the figure given is an estimate as to the possible final cost of compensating the public and industry vehicles, assessed from claims received by the agency.

These figures do not take into account other areas of unquantifiable costs such as personal injury claims, the cost of repairing damage to roads, etc., nor the loss of potential investment or tourism during this period.

Anglo-Irish Conference (Public Bodies)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what *(a)* views and *(b)* proposals the Irish Government have put forward through the Anglo-Irish conference since 1 January 1994 on the role of public bodies; and which public bodies were specified. [11200]

Mr. Ancram: Under the terms of article 6 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Irish Government may put forward views and proposals on the role and composition of public bodies in Northern Ireland. Under that article, the views of the Irish Government on the general pattern of public appointments were discussed at meetings of the conference held on 30 June 1995 and 22 May 1996. Details of exchanges between the two Governments are confidential.

Anglo-Irish Secretariat

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the costs of receptions at the Anglo-Irish secretariat at Maryfield in 1995 and 1996 indicating the date and purpose of each event; and if he will indicate those events not proceeded with for which preparations were made. [12452]

Mr. Ancram: The British side of the secretariat did not host and made no financial contribution towards receptions in 1995.

In 1996 the British side jointly hosted two receptions at Maryfield:

Occasion	*Date*	*British side contribution(£)*
St. Patrick's day	14 March	1,501
Christmas	9 December	2,147

No preparations were made for other receptions.

Beef Export Ban

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimates he has made of the impact on *(a)* farmers' incomes and *(b)* the economy of Northern Ireland of the European ban on beef exports. [12922]

Mr. Ancram: The effect of the EU ban on beef exports, together with the fall in consumption on the UK market, was to reduce the value of cattle sales to commercial markets and into intervention by almost £120 million but this was offset entirely by compensation and support measures and the value of cattle output, including the over-30-months scheme, in 1996 was virtually the same as in 1995. The income of the agricultural industry fell by 6 per cent. in 1996, but this was mainly because of higher input costs.

The export ban had an immediate impact on the beef processing sector, with many short-term lay-offs, but the effects have since largely been mitigated by the operation of the over-30-months scheme. Related sectors such as animal food compounding, transportation and agricultural machinery have been adversely affected.

Polling Stations

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the draft polling station scheme for the next four years will be published for Northern Ireland. [13862]

Mr. Ancram: The draft polling station scheme for the next four years for Northern Ireland will be published not later than 10 days after publication of the 1997 electoral register, which is due to be published on 14 February 1997.

Water Service (Donaghadee)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action is proposed by the Water Service to cure the problem of dirty water at East street, Donaghadee; and when he expects this action to be taken. [14072]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Water Service under its chief executive, Mr. H. R. F. Plester. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from H. R. F. Plester to Mr. John D. Taylor, dated 5 February 1997:

Mr Moss has asked me to reply to your parliamentary question about dirty water at East Street, Donaghadee.

On 4 March 1996, in response to complaints about discoloured water, the Water Service provided an additional hydrant on the watermain at East Street, Donaghadee, and established a schedule for routine flushing of the main to remove any build up of natural sediment, which can be a cause of discolouration. There have been no complaints about discoloured water in the area since mid-1996.

The Water Service is satisfied that its programme of routine mains flushing will maintain the quality of water to a satisfactory standard and it will monitor the situation at East Street, Donaghadee. If any complaint about discoloured water has been brought to your attention I will be pleased to have it investigated.

Waste Disposal Strategy

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) pursuant to his answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, columns *53–54*, if he will investigate the circumstances whereby a consultant on short-term contract to the Northern Ireland Department of Environment, described in the answer as not involved in water quality issues within DoE NI, answered a telephone call to the water quality unit, DoE NI, on 10 January; [14086]

(2) if the consultant on short-term contract and working on the preparation of a waste strategy for Northern Ireland is on loan from Haul Waste; [14087]

(3) if he will list the consultants and companies employed to date by the Northern Ireland Department of the Environment *(a)* in the preparation of the waste strategy for Northern Ireland and *(b)* in assessing the merits of applications for landfill sites in Northern Ireland on behalf of DoE NI. [14140]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Environment and Heritage Service under its chief executive, Mr. Robert C. Martin. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Robert C. Martin to Mr. Ron Beggs, dated 4 February 1997:

You recently put down three parliamentary questions about Environment and Heritage Service operational matters which have been passed to me for reply as Chief Executive. I will answer each in turn in this letter according to the number order in which they were tabled.

No. 176

I have investigated the matter and the consultant simply answered the phone in his office and referred the caller to the Water Quality Unit. The caller had used a direct line number for the former occupant of the office (an Environmental Health Officer) with whom the caller had had regular contact.

No. 180

The consultant was appointed under the terms of a contract between his company the Environment and Heritage Service to provide recommendations for the specification for waste strategy and landfill audit contracts. He is not on loan.

No. 193

Two companies were contracted to prepare specifications for a strategic study and an assessment of training needs, Haul Waste Ltd. and Hyder Environmental.

Following this groundwork two companies—Environmental Resources Management and Kirk McClure Morton—were contracted to prepare a Draft Waste Strategy for Northern Ireland.

No companies are employed to assess the merits of landfill site applications on behalf of the Department. However, two companies—Environment Assessment Group Limited and M J Carter Associates—are engaged in the environmental audit of existing facilities.

School Examination Candidates

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which schools in Northern Ireland have candidates for *(a)* A-levels and *(b)* international baccalaureate; and which of these schools are (i) controlled, (ii) maintained and (iii) other schools. [13928]

Mr. Ancram: Schools which have pupils enrolled in the final year of an A-level course in October 1995 are shown in the booklet "School Performance Information 1995–96" published by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland. I have arranged for a copy to be placed in the Library. The number of schools in each category is as follows:

Controlled: 37

Maintained: 23

Voluntary grammer: 52

Grant-maintained integrated: 1.

One grant-maintained integrated school had pupils enrolled, in October 1995, in the final year of a course leading to the international baccalaureate.

Roads (Development)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what plans he has to visit Killaney corner on the Saintfield road, Ravara, Ballygowan, to assess the road safety situation at this site; [14071]

(2) what plans the Department of Environment has to widen Ballyrogan road, Newtownards; and if he will make a statement. [14073]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Roads Service under its chief executive, Mr W. J. McCoubrey. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from W. J. McCoubrey to Mr. John D. Taylor, dated 4 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to respond to your Parliamentary Questions about road safety at Killaney Corner, Saintfield Road, Ravara and the need to widen Ballyrogan Road, Newtownards.

While there is not recent history of recorded accidents at Killaney Corner it was decided, following a site visit in September 1996, to increase the size of the hazard warning lines on the approaches to the bend. This work was carried out on 9 January 1997. No further work is planned.

Ballyrogan Road is an unclassified road which carries very little traffic. There are no proposals to widen it.

I am sorry I cannot be more helpful on this occasion.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the current status of application X96/0176 for retrospective approval for livery accommodation and a new access road to Ballyrogan road, Newtownards. [14074]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Housing Service under its chief executive, Mr. T. W. Stewart. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from T. W. Stewart to Mr. John D. Taylor, dated 5 February 1997:

Mr. Moss has asked me to reply to your Question about the current status of planning application X/96/0176 for retrospective approval for livery accommodation and a new access road to Ballyrogan Road, Newtownards.

This application was first presented to Ards Borough Council on 28 October 1996 with an opinion to approve planning permission, at which time it was deferred at the Council's request. The Council have now requested to meet with the Divisional Roads Manager (DRM) and Divisional Planning Manager (DPM) to discuss the case. The meeting with the DRM was held on 14 January 1997. The meeting with the DPM is scheduled to take place on 11 February 1997. It is hoped that the application can be progressed following consideration of the issues raised at these meetings.

Angling

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to review the need for rod licences on privately owned waters following the remarks of resident magistrate of Mr. John Fyffe at Down magistrates court on 2 January. [14070]

Mr. Ancram: None.

Farms (Negative Equity)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many full-time farm businesses had a negative equity in each year since 1985; and if he will make a statement. [12754]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 28 January 1997]:* The results of the annual farm business survey for each of the years 1985 to 1996 show that none of the farms in the survey had a negative equity.

Suckler Cow Premium

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of suckler cow premium payments in Northern Ireland for the current year had been paid by 1 January 1997. [13941]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 3 February 1997]:* In Northern Ireland 50.7 per cent. of the 1996 suckler cow applications were cleared for payment by 1 January 1997.

Within the 50.7 per cent, the Department met its citizens charter target of paying, by 31 December, all valid claims received by 30 September. Valid applications received between 31 October and 31 December will be paid within four months of receipt.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 6 February 1997

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Football Matches

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the total aggregate attendances for all competitive fixtures played by each Premier and Nationwide League club in the 1993–94, 1994–95, 1995–96 seasons together with the total number of *(a)* arrests, *(b)* ejections and *(c)* arrests plus ejections as a percentage of total attendance. [13152]

Mr. Sproat: The table shows the total attendances for the Premier and football leagues and domestic cup competitions, the number of arrests, and arrests as a percentage of total attendance for the same period. The table shows that the number of arrests as a proportion of attendances has fallen by 20 per cent. from the 1993–94 season, which was the last season before clubs in the top two divisions went all-seater. A breakdown of arrests at club level could be done only at a disproportionate cost, and club attendance figures are not held centrally. Ejection figures are not available as most ejections are now undertaken by club stewards and it is not possible for the police to record this information.

Summary of statistics for all competitions for the 1993–94, 1994–95 and 1995–96 seasons

	Attendance			*Arrests*			
	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1993–94 total*	*1994–95 total*	*1995–96 total*	*Percentage of total attendance*
League competition	21,683,381	21,856,020	21,844,416	4,227	3,840	3,437	1993–94—0.019 1994–95—0.017 1995–96—0.015
Cup competitions	3,984,975	3,843,152	4,046,669	1,296	1,265	897	1993–94—0.032 1994–95—0.032 1995–96—0.022
Total	25,668,356	25,699,172	25,891,085	5,523	5,105	4,334	1993–94—0.021 1994–95—0.019 1995–96—0.016

Source:
Home Office.

D'Oyly Carte Opera Company

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations she has received from the Newcastle upon Tyne area in respect of the future of the D'Oyly Carte opera company. [14053]

Mr. Sproat: In addition to the letters I have received from my hon. Friend himself, and the three extremely helpful meetings I have recently had with him, I have received many representations from the Tyneside area about the future of the D'Oyly Carte opera company. Decisions about its future are a matter for the company itself, in the light of the available options. I informed the House on 28 January, *Official Report*, columns *148–50*, that the Arts Council of England had decided to offer the D'Oyly Carte company a grant of £100,000 to enable it to review its operation and to build on relationships with venues and funding partners. Such relationships play an important part for any company in considering its future.

Voluntary Groups

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list each voluntary group part or wholly funded by her Department in the last two years for which the information is available and the amount of money received by each group in that year period. [14145]

Mr. Sproat: The total of grants made by the Department of National Heritage direct to voluntary organisations during 1994–95 was £18,056,840, and during 1995–96 was £18,034,500. This excludes grants to non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Department, where the grant is largely used to make grants to voluntary organisations; and grants made through the voluntary and community division, which joined the Department in May 1996. Details of each of the voluntary groups funded by the Department during 1994–95 and 1995–96 and the amount of money received have been placed in the Library of the House.

Computer Crime

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage on how many occasions in each of the last five years computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers in her Department. [14542]

Mr. Sproat: The Department of National Heritage, since it was established on 13 April 1992, has no evidence that any computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers in the Department.

Mr. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many cases of computer hacking, fraud and theft, including theft of computer chips, her Department has recorded in the last five years. [14543]

Mr. Sproat: The Department of National Heritage, since it was established on 13 April 1992, has had one case of theft and recorded no cases of computer fraud or hacking.

Lottery Awards (Yorkshire)

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list each national lottery award made to each constituency in Yorkshire since the awards were first made. [13838]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 3 February 1997]:* As at 31 January 1997, there have been 747 awards totalling more than £173 million made to projects in Yorkshire. I have arranged for a full list to be placed in the Library of the House.

Millennium Exhibition

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she proposes to announce proposals relating to the millennium exhibition regional celebration. [12227]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 3 February 1997]:* On 30 December, I announced that the Millennium Commission would be consulting on ideas for the millennium festival events throughout the UK. The deadline for responses is 21 February. The commission aims to seek applications for schemes for the millennium festival in the summer. In addition, the millennium exhibition operating company will make an announcement later this year about its national programme, which will take place throughout the UK during 1998 and 1999 in the lead-up to the opening of the exhibition at Greenwich.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

No. 1 Carlton Gardens

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *425–26*, if he will provide a breakdown of the £3.5 million spent on the refurbishment of 1, Carlton Gardens. [14648]

Mr. Rifkind: In my answer of 31 January to the hon. Member's question about 1 Carlton Gardens, the figure of £3.5 million was inadvertently given as the cost of refurbishment. The actual cost was about £1.5 million. I apologise for this error.

Major costs comprised:

	£
Building works	841,024
Mechanical and electrical work	240,672
Security works	54,306
Resource costs	111,755
VAT	218,358
	1,466,115

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will provide a breakdown of the spending by his Department on external advice in relation to the Scott inquiry, indicating how much has been spent on legal advice and from whom it was obtained. [14537]

Mr. Hanley: The amount spent by this Department on legal advice in relation to giving evidence to the Scott inquiry and the preparation of the Government's response to it was £414,567.03. This figure includes £228,446.03, representing the value of legal services charged by the Treasury Solicitor's Department. External legal advice was obtained from Messrs Smith Bernal Reporting Ltd., Messrs Barlow Lyde and Gilbert, and Messrs Allen and Overy.

Former Prisoners of War (Japan)

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) will meet a group of hon. Members to discuss compensation for former POWs of the Japanese. [14394]

Mr. Hanley: Yes. As I have made clear to colleagues in the House, I would be happy to meet a group of hon. Members to discuss this general issue, and intend to do so on 13 February.

Mrs. Yasmin Akhtar Sarfraz

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects a decision will be taken on the application to the post in Islamabad by Mrs. Yasmin Akhtar Sarfraz (Ref. Imm/D5213) to join her husband in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [14636]

Dr. Liam Fox: It is policy, on grounds of confidentiality, for Ministers not to comment publicly on individual applications for entry clearance. I will therefore write separately to the hon. Member.

Chevening

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, columns *425–26*, if he will list the members of the management board of the Chevening Trust; and if he will make a statement. [14650]

Mr. Rifkind: The board of trustees of the Chevening Trust is as follows:

The Lord Privy Seal: Chairman

The right hon. Lord Cornwallis: Appointed by the Prime Minister; Deputy Chairman

The right hon. Lord Kingsdown: Appointed by the Prime Minister

Mr. W. L. Banks: Appointed by the Secretary of State for the Environment

Mr. Alan Borg: Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum

Mr. D. A. Innes: Local Farmer co-opted in 1983, renewed 1994

Mr. W. W. A. Wells: Curator of Leeds Castle co-opted in 1992

Mr. J. Warde: Local Farmer co-opted in 1994.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *425–26*, which organisations have held meetings and conferences at Chevening in each of the last two years; and if he will make a statement. [14649]

Mr. Rifkind: A list of meetings follows. This does not include the trustees' meetings or garden openings. I visit Chevening for about one weekend a month.

CHEVENING HOUSE

Visits/Conferences

1995

January

Department of Transport

HM Customs and Excise

FCO: Permanent Under-Secretary

February

MOD Chief of Defence Staff

March

HM Customs and Excise

Department of Social Security

HM Customs and Excise (London)

April

May

HM Customs and Excise (London)

Cabinet Office

June

FCO Secretary of State

FCO Anglo-German Economic Summit

FCO Permanent Secretary ODA

Minister of Defence

July

FCO Cultural Relations—Chevening Scholarships

HM Treasury

August

September

FCO Secretary of State/Permanent Under-Secretary

Home Office

October

Cabinet Office

FCO Anglo-Spanish Parliamentary

November

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

Ministry of Defence

December

1996

January

FCO: Permanent Under-Secretary

Department of Trade and Industry

HM Treasury—Top Management

February

Home Office

March

Department of Social Security

April

Cabinet Office—Efficiency Unit

MOD Secretary of State

May

June

FCO-ODA Permanent Under-Secretary

July

FCO

HM Treasury—Chancellor of the Exchequer

ODA

August

September

FCO

October

Cabinet Office

DOE

FCO Far Eastern Department

November

FCO Working Group for Hong Kong

FCO

FCO Anglo German Discussion

FCO Ambassadors Lunch.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, columns *425–26*, if he will list the tax exemptions applicable to the Chevening Trust. [14651]

Mr. Rifkind: The Chevening Estate Act 1959 gives the full details of the tax exemptions applicable to the Chevening Trust. In brief, exemption is given from income tax, capital gains tax, capital transfer tax and development land tax.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to what use Chevening has been put in the days he has not been in residence; and if he will make a statement. [14647]

Mr. Rifkind: Chevening house and the pleasure gardens are the only parts of the estate used by the nominated person. The estate remains under the ownership of the trustees, and is managed by them. I have agreed with the trustees that the house may be used by them, when I am not in residence, for meetings of senior Government officials. All meetings are co-ordinated through the protocol department of the Foreign Office. The trustees allow the gardens to be opened for charitable purposes three or four times a year. In addition, the trustees hold some of their meetings in the house.

Computer Crime

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions in each of the last five years computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers in his Department. [14558]

Mr. Hanley: None as far as we are aware.

Mr. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many cases of computer hacking, fraud and theft, including theft of computer chips, his Department has recorded in the last five years. [14559]

Mr. Hanley: We believe there have been no instances of computer hacking or fraud but 10 cases of theft of computer equipment.

Mr. Ghafoor Ahmed

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Mr. Ghafoor Ahmed who has applied to join his wife in the United Kingdom (Ref: IMM/B/6851) will be interviewed by the post in Islamabad; when a decision wil be taken on his application; and if he will make a statement. [14637]

Dr. Liam Fox: It is policy, on grounds of confidentiality, for Ministers not to comment publicly on individual applications for entry clearance. I will therefore write separately to the hon. Member.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth affairs what was the total cost of salaries since 1992 paid to persons in his Department employed on a part-time or full-time basis in any capacity relating to the Scott inquiry. [14536]

Mr. Hanley: The direct salary cost of officials within this Department wholly employed on matters relating to the Scott inquiry since 1992 is approximately £241,500. Other officials were inevitably involved from time to time; their direct salary costs are unquantifiable.

WALES

Fuel Consumption

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the level of consumption of primary fuels and equivalents for energy use in Wales for each year since 1990. [13318]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on energy consumption in Wales was published in table 5.18 of the "Digest of Welsh Statistics 1996" and tables 8.9 to 8.13 of Welsh Economic Trends, No. 16 1995. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

Councils (Increased Functions)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the extra duties given to councils since 1979. [13877]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Over the period involved, local government has assumed additional responsibilities in areas such as community care and children's services and relinquished them in others, for example, further education. Also, and at their own initiative, local authorities have developed existing services and promoted new ones, particularly in areas such as leisure and recreation.

Hearing-impaired People (Employment)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he plans to take to assist hearing-impaired people into work; and if he will make a statement. [14048]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Employment Service, through its network of placing, assessment and counselling teams, provides a wide range of specialist services for people with health problems and disabilities, including those with impaired hearing. This includes supported employment programmes and the access to work scheme, which are aimed at helping people with disabilities into jobs or training. In addition, disabled persons have priority in accessing employment and training programmes for which they are eligible and suitable.

Computer Crime

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on how many occasions in each of the last five years computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hacker in his Department. [14548]

Mr. Hague: On no occasions to my knowledge.

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of computer hacking, fraud and theft, including theft of computer chips, his Department has recorded in the last five years. [14549]

Mr. Hague: There have been no incidents of computer hacking, fraud or theft of computer chips to my knowledge. In separate incidents over the past five years, the Department has recorded the loss of a printer, a PC and three laptop systems, one of which was later recovered by the police.

Education Revenue Budget

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to meet the members of the councils of Wales to discuss the education revenue budget; and if he will make a statement. [14491]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: My right hon. Friend met Welsh local authority representatives, in the forum of the Welsh consultative council on local government finance, on 16 December to hear their views on his proposals for the 1997–98 Welsh local government revenue settlement.

My right hon. Friend's final decisions on the settlement were debated and approved by Parliament on 4 February. It will be for each local authority to decide how much of its total resources to allocate to individual services, including education, taking account of its statutory responsibilities and its perception of local needs and priorities.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Departmental Publicity

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list *(a)* his Department's budgeted expenditure on (i) advertising, (ii) publicity and (iii) public information campaigns for the period January to March 1997 and *(b)* the actual expenditure on (1) advertising, (2) publicity and (3) public information campaigns in the period January to March in each of the past five years. [13457]

Mr. Howard: My Department's budgeted expenditure on publicity for the period January to March 1997 is £3,316,860. Of this total, £1,301,920 is budgeted for the advertising element of public information campaigns and the remaining £2,014,940 is for publications, posters, exhibitions and videos which give the public further

information and advice. The total 1996–97 budgeted expenditure for advertising and other public information and advice is £8,854,000.

The figures for each of the past five years are as follows:

	Advertising (fourth quarter) £	*Other public information and material (fourth quarter)* £	*Annual total including advertising and "other"* £
1995–96	7,457,645	1,143,581	11,360,220
1994–95	9,563,443	1,128,175	14,102,358
1993–94	6,235,231	2,285,069	14,142,549
1992–93	2,089,191	2,031,929	12,983,617
1991–92	3,592,545	2,214,962	10,876,228

Police Expenditure

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answers of 13 January, *Official Report*, columns *48–52*, and 15 January, *Official Report*, columns *265–68*, if he will re-calculate the figures based on the final local government finance and final police grant settlements for 1997–98. [13901]

Mr. Maclean: The figures given in my reply to the hon. Member of 13 January, *Official Report*, columns *48–52*, have not changed. Revised figures, previously given in my reply to the hon. Member on 15 January, *Official Report*, columns *265–68*, are set out in the table. The figures provided earlier were based on the provisional settlement which has now been finalised following consultation with police and local authorities.

	Increase in capped expenditure limit and rule 2 and 3 grants over 1996–97 £ million (1)	*Increase in total external support[1] including all grants over 1996–97* £ million (2)	*Increase in capped expenditure limit including rule 3 grant over 1996–97* £ million (3)	*Increase in total external support except rule 2 grant over 1996–97* £ million (4)	*Difference between columns (1) and (2) and between columns (3) and (4)* £ million (5)	*Difference between columns (1) and (2) and between columns (3) and (4) as a percentage of 1996–97 cash precept* Percentage (6)
Police authorities:						
Avon and Somerset	6.0	2.6	4.9	1.5	3.4	15.1
Bedfordshire	2.2	1.0	1.8	0.6	1.2	14.3
Cambridgeshire	2.6	1.0	2.1	0.5	1.6	15.5
Cheshire	3.9	1.6	3.1	0.9	2.2	14.9
Cleveland	2.8	1.4	2.3	1.0	1.3	18.6
Cumbria	2.2	1.0	1.9	0.7	1.2	14.7
Derbyshire	3.8	1.9	3.1	1.2	1.9	14.6
Devon and Cornwall	6.1	3.7	4.9	2.5	2.4	10.0
Dorset	2.7	1.0	2.2	0.5	1.7	11.3
Durham	2.7	1.3	2.3	0.9	1.4	18.2
Essex	6.0	2.5	4.8	1.3	3.5	13.5
Gloucestershire	2.3	0.9	1.9	0.5	1.3	15.2
Hampshire	6.9	2.9	5.6	1.6	4.0	14.2
Hertfordshire	3.6	1.4	2.9	0.7	2.2	13.8
Humberside	3.9	2.0	3.2	1.3	2.0	16.9
Kent	6.4	3.0	5.2	1.8	3.4	13.5
Lancashire	6.3	2.9	5.2	1.9	3.3	17.0
Leicestershire	3.7	1.7	3.0	1.0	2.0	15.8
Lincolnshire	2.5	1.9	2.0	1.5	0.6	4.3
Norfolk	3.0	1.3	2.4	0.7	1.7	14.6
Northamptonshire	2.4	1.0	2.0	0.6	1.4	11.5
North Yorkshire	2.8	1.5	2.2	0.9	1.3	11.1
Nottinghamshire	4.4	3.3	3.7	2.5	1.2	8.5
Staffordshire	4.3	1.9	3.5	1.2	2.3	15.0
Suffolk	2.5	1.0	2.0	0.5	1.4	14.5
Surrey	3.4	2.8	2.8	2.2	0.6	4.2
Sussex	5.9	2.4	4.8	1.3	3.5	13.6
Thames Valley	8.1	3.1	6.5	1.5	5.0	13.8
Warwickshire	1.9	0.8	1.6	0.4	1.2	14.3
West Mercia	4.1	1.5	3.3	0.7	2.6	14.7
Wiltshire	2.4	0.9	1.9	0.5	1.5	14.0
Total English shire authorities	122	57	99	35	64	13.4
Greater Manchester	12.8	6.6	10.9	4.6	6.3	18.5
Merseyside	8.3	4.2	7.2	3.2	4.0	17.3
Northumbria	7.1	4.1	6.0	3.0	3.0	16.0
South Yorkshire	5.9	3.1	4.9	2.1	2.8	17.2
West Midlands	13.0	7.3	11.0	5.4	5.6	16.5
West Yorkshire	9.9	4.9	8.0	3.3	5.0	18.1
Total metropolitan authorities	57	30	48	22	27	17.4
Metropolitan Police[2]	55.4	29.2	48.7	22.5	26.2	16.4
City of London Police[4]						
Dyfed Powys	1.9	1.6	1.6	1.2	0.3	3.8
Gwent	2.4	1.9	2.0	1.5	0.5	6.1

	Increase in capped expenditure limit and rule 2 and 3 grants over 1996–97	Increase in total external support[1] including all grants over 1996–97	Increase in capped expenditure limit including rule 3 grant over 1996–97	Increase in total external support except rule 2 grant over 1996–97	Difference between columns (1) and (2) and between columns (3) and (4)	Difference between columns (1) and (2) and between columns (3) and (4) as a percentage of 1996–97 cash precept
	£ million (1)	£ million (2)	£ million (3)	£ million (4)	£ million (5)	Percentage (6)
North Wales	2.7	2.2	2.2	1.7	0.5	4.7
South Wales	5.7	4.6	4.8	3.7	1.1	6.0
Total Welsh authorities	13	10	11	8	2	5.3
Total (All authorities)	247	127	207	87	120	14.2

[1] Includes principal police grant, additional rules 1, 2 and 3, police damping grant, revenue support grant and income from national non-domestic rates.
[2] Total external support includes provision for services other than police functions.
[3] Includes Other Service Block element of 1996–97 cash precept.
[4] No separately identifiable figures exist for the City of London police.
1. All figures have been rounded from the original calculations. Figures for total external support were provided by the Department of the Environment.

Police (Wales)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the levels of revenue and capital settlements for Welsh police forces for 1997–98 and the levels requested by those police forces. [14133]

Mr. Maclean: The settlement for police revenue expenditure means that Welsh police authorities can increase their budgets by 3.8 per cent. in 1997–98. The four Welsh police authorities asked for a 6 per cent. increase in resources in 1997–98.

Provision for major capital building projects in 1997–98 has been maintained at current price levels. In addition, the four Welsh police authorities received a total of £5.119 million for general capital needs against a total bid of £20.29 million.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the application of additional rule 1 to each Welsh police force for the revenue and capital settlements for *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* future years. [14137]

Mr. Maclean: We introduced additional rule 1 to ensure that each police authority and the receiver for the Metropolitan police could benefit in 1997–98 from revenue funding which represents an increase of 2 per cent. or more on the equivalent figure for 1996–97. Funding for the purposes of this comparison comprises police grant, excluding the funding under additional rule 2 for new officers in 1997–98, standard spending assessment, and any SSA reduction grant—damping grant—payable.

The sums received by Welsh forces under this rule will be as follows:

	£
Dyfed Powys	1,176,462
Gwent	1,124,792
North Wales	774,225
South Wales	2,556,399

No decision has been taken on the future of this rule. We will look at the need for additional rules in the light of circumstances at the time.

This rule does not apply to capital allocations.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each police force area in England and Wales *(a)* the total police revenue grant from his Department, *(b)* the total capital grant from his Department, *(c)* the total revenue grant from the Department of the Environment-Welsh Office, *(d)* other grants to police authorities from central funds and *(e)* the total of all capital and revenue grants from central funds for each of the years 1995–96, 1996–97 and 1997–98. [13948]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 3 February 1997]:* The information requested is set out in the tables.

Grants paid to police authorities in 1995–96

Police authority	Police grant (Home Office)[1]	Capital grant (Home Office)	Revenue support grant and SSA reduction grant (DOE–Welsh Office)	Other grants (Home Office–DOE Welsh Office)[2]	Total
Avon and Somerset	73,080,634	5,373,000	25,649,177	48,875	104,151,686
Bedfordshire	27,538,879	1,237,000	9,727,865	110,627	38,614,371
Cambridgeshire	31,136,129	812,000	8,878,200	221,704	41,048,033
Cheshire	46,286,157	1,154,000	14,036,380	704,088	62,180,625
City of London[3]	26,753,210	505,000	0	160,029	27,418,239
Cleveland	35,134,959	888,000	18,148,135	840,792	55,011,886
Cumbria	26,869,743	702,000	11,212,865	367,772	39,152,380

Grants paid to police authorities in 1995–96

Police authority	Police grant (Home Office)[1]	Capital grant (Home Office)	Revenue support grant and SSA reduction grant (DOE–Welsh Office)	Other grants (Home Office–DOE Welsh Office)[2]	Total
Derbyshire	43,763,201	1,998,000	13,707,329	153,246	59,621,776
Devon and Cornwall	72,710,706	2,262,000	21,645,854	49,175	96,667,735
Dorset	30,950,898	797,000	7,687,176	345,290	39,780,364
Durham	33,683,229	853,000	15,391,733	57,668	49,985,630
Dyfed Powys	22,839,951	606,000	6,999,042	250,953	30,695,946
Essex	72,744,989	3,895,000	22,235,736	271,660	99,147,385
Gloucestershire	27,919,401	1,136,000	9,589,381	262,057	38,906,839
Greater Manchester	162,401,953	5,312,000	83,171,947	1,242,264	252,128,164
Gwent	24,476,607	1,736,000	10,412,816	277,283	36,902,706
Hampshire	83,989,820	2,524,000	25,705,785	504,261	112,723,866
Hertfordshire	43,244,815	1,079,000	12,987,569	154,762	57,466,146
Humberside	48,701,807	1,350,000	21,486,696	48,875	71,587,378
Kent	78,591,413	3,481,000	26,076,259	240,592	108,389,264
Lancashire	77,102,214	2,557,000	32,642,435	785,497	113,087,146
Leicestershire	44,419,616	2,837,000	16,029,301	492,127	63,778,044
Lincolnshire	27,459,730	1,589,000	9,935,864	96,715	39,081,309
Merseyside	106,672,413	3,787,000	63,284,420	541,354	174,285,187
Metropolitan Police	827,595,814	33,723,000	534,157,543	2,892,812	1,398,369,169
Norfolk	35,376,168	988,000	10,116,366	274,732	46,755,266
North Wales	32,701,794	1,235,000	10,745,908	303,959	44,986,661
North Yorkshire	33,100,745	1,180,000	8,464,029	552,745	43,297,519
Northamptonshire	27,592,869	890,000	8,762,352	435,617	37,680,838
Northumbria	88,858,912	6,016,000	45,409,494	1,049,031	141,333,437
Nottinghamshire	54,493,281	2,681,000	22,981,647	657,161	80,813,089
South Wales	75,959,258	4,289,000	34,062,749	472,205	114,783,212
South Yorkshire	73,046,395	2,840,000	33,725,079	1,194,855	110,806,329
Staffordshire	50,200,542	1,821,000	17,069,992	507,988	69,599,522
Suffolk	29,042,990	732,000	7,700,528	71,370	37,546,888
Surrey	40,052,299	2,546,000	15,765,901	0	58,364,200
Sussex	72,343,209	3,886,000	21,550,494	57,500	97,837,203
Thames Valley	95,749,532	3,425,000	26,019,169	1,688,106	126,881,807
Warwickshire	23,595,032	971,000	7,152,767	581,686	32,300,485
West Mercia	48,154,173	1,893,000	12,196,758	101,749	62,345,680
West Midlands	163,211,148	6,118,000	83,166,173	794,248	253,289,569
West Yorkshire	123,524,528	4,449,000	59,932,243	1,279,725	189,185,496
Wiltshire	29,074,837	1,441,000	9,494,769	33,423	40,044,029
Grant not allocated	0	0	0	0	0
Total	3,192,146,000	129,594,000	1,455,115,926	21,176,578	4,798,032,504

[1] Excludes balances paid in respect of 1994–95 accounts.
[2] Includes (i) loan charges grant paid on pre-1990 debt, (ii) grant paid under section 48 of the Police Act 1996, (iii) grant for special constabulary.
[3] No separately identifiable figures for RSG and SSA reduction grant are available for the City of London police.

Grants paid to police authorities in 1996–97

Police authority	Police grant (Home Office)[1]	Capital grant (Home Office)	Revenue support grant and SSA reduction grant (DOE–Welsh Office)	Other grants (Home Office–DOE Welsh Office)[2]	Total
Avon and Somerset	77,278,260	2,351,000	24,825,420	21,350	104,476,030
Bedfordshire	28,811,092	1,167,000	9,086,447	27,728	39,092,267
Cambridgeshire	33,348,537	629,000	8,653,688	91,208	42,722,433
Cheshire	49,500,131	961,000	13,817,656	129,035	64,407,822
City of London[3]	27,831,884	421,000	0	208,440	28,461,324
Cleveland	36,816,273	740,000	17,802,789	774,115	56,133,177
Cumbria	28,688,560	585,000	11,101,369	162,883	40,537,812
Derbyshire	46,355,758	1,122,000	13,6107,808	19,752	60,605,318
Devon and Cornwall	77,025,454	1,907,000	20,634,598	78,942	99,645,994
Dorset	32,474,611	933,000	6,737,539	1,709,696	41,854,846
Durham	35,827,979	870,000	15,381,561	21,500	52,101,040
Dyfed Powys	24,241,009	477,000	7,429,778	307,793	32,455,580
Essex	76,160,629	4,187,000	20,135,998	55,122	100,538,749
Gloucestershire	29,317,079	1,015,000	9,003,748	109,417	39,445,244
Greater Manchester	171,880,949	4,286,000	83,606,058	1,353,565	261,126,572
Gwent	31,333,758	680,000	12,964,159	147,404	45,125,321
Hampshire	88,068,573	2,911,000	23,657,178	53,667	114,690,418
Hertfordshire	45,304,535	1,375,000	11,715,382	11,200	58,406,117
Humberside	51,746,268	2,067,000	21,349,589	23,540	75,186,397

Grants paid to police authorities in 1996–97

Police authority	Police grant (Home Office)[1]	Capital grant (Home Office)	Revenue support grant and SSA reduction grant (DOE–Welsh Office)	Other grants (Home Office–DOE Welsh Office)[2]	Total
Kent	82,321,694	4,083,000	24,496,724	40,033	110,941,451
Lancashire	81,970,295	1,699,000	32,556,986	536,209	116,762,490
Leicestershire	47,395,525	1,982,000	15,848,093	298,503	65,524,121
Lincolnshire	29,232,699	1,465,000	8,587,576	85,197	39,370,472
Merseyside	112,588,958	3,474,000	61,194,380	485,062	177,742,400
Metropolitan Police	846,761,947	27,749,000	518,184,177	6,654,277	1,399,349,401
Norfolk	38,205,064	1,283,000	10,277,139	143,060	49,908,263
North Wales	34,681,073	1,079,000	11,587,532	179,646	47,527,251
North Yorkshire	34,961,340	1,418,000	7,812,964	118,520	44,310,824
Northamptonshire	29,320,943	876,000	8,171,630	339,109	38,707,682
Northumbria	94,046,011	5,110,000	45,764,716	975,777	145,896,504
Nottinghamshire	57,583,603	3,501,000	22,601,592	515,037	84,201,232
South Wales	75,246,910	3,644,000	34,636,449	484,489	114,011,848
South Yorkshire	77,594,905	3,530,000	33,853,144	1,243,927	116,221,976
Staffordshire	54,610,654	1,788,000	17,846,761	358,147	74,603,562
Suffolk	31,033,584	609,000	7,427,617	326,029	39,396,230
Surrey	42,090,281	3,021,000	14,779,111	183,595	60,073,987
Sussex	75,763,690	3,746,000	19,890,251	100,296	99,500,237
Thames Valley	101,658,543	3,485,000	24,654,331	1,972,718	131,770,592
Warwickshire	24,725,312	521,000	6,425,722	218,746	31,890,780
West Mercia	51,605,192	2,036,000	11,721,475	93,074	65,455,741
West Midlands	172,342,961	4,799,000	83,232,731	2,481,626	262,856,318
West Yorkshire	130,447,666	3,918,000	59,421,867	1,393,728	195,181,261
Wiltshire	30,427,811	747,000	8,611,093	19,975	39,805,879
Grant not allocated	0	1,321,000	0	8,693,916	10,014,916
Total	3,348,628,000	115,568,000	1,420,594,826	33,247,053	4,918,037,879

[1] Excludes balances paid in respect of 1994–95 accounts.
[2] Includes (i) loan charges grant paid on pre-1990 debt, (ii) grant paid under section 48 of the Police Act 1996, (iii) grant for special constabulary, (iv) special grant for policing costs, (v) party conferences grant, (vi) funding for PFI projects.
[3] No separately identifiable figures for RSG and SSA reduction grant are available for the City of London police.

Grants paid to police authorities in 1997–98

Police authority	Police grant (Home Office)[1]	Capital grant (Home Office)	Revenue support grant and SSA reduction grant (DOE–Welsh Office)	Other grants (Home Office–DOE Welsh Office)	[2]Total
Avon and Somerset	79,564,084	1,794,000	26,381,122	0	107,739,206
Bedfordshire	29,969,661	1,355,000	9,415,697	0	40,740,358
Cambridgeshire	34,517,288	774,000	9,032,494	0	44,323,782
Cheshire	51,102,862	778,000	14,689,247	0	66,570,109
City of London[3]	27,475,936	341,000	0	170,136	27,987,072
Cleveland	37,523,242	599,000	19,041,952	598,954	57,763,148
Cumbria	30,037,318	473,000	11,231,879	228,990	41,971,187
Derbyshire	48,089,785	1,406,000	14,088,883	5,112	63,589,780
Devon and Cornwall	79,046,941	1,718,000	23,529,124	0	104,294,065
Dorset	33,804,583	543,000	6,901,623	153,663	41,402,869
Durham	36,512,965	558,000	16,567,064	0	53,638,029
Dyfed Powys	25,198,643	386,000	5,508,023	210,706	31,303,372
Essex	79,693,871	1,239,000	20,314,739	0	101,247,610
Gloucestershire	30,371,173	541,000	9,321,971	93,330	40,327,474
Greater Manchester	176,078,065	4,757,000	88,356,401	1,096,301	270,287,767
Gwent	32,424,045	494,000	10,982,551	137,804	44,038,400
Hampshire	90,616,243	1,565,000	25,421,217	0	117,602,460
Hertfordshire	47,465,812	1,044,000	11,625,462	0	60,135,274
Humberside	53,034,050	2,131,000	22,864,464	0	78,029,514
Kent	84,673,351	4,476,000	26,457,523	0	115,606,874
Lancashire	83,767,796	1,305,000	34,976,517	1,315,227	121,364,540
Leicestershire	49,336,277	853,000	16,342,418	309,664	66,841,359
Lincolnshire	30,788,473	847,000	9,380,484	63,646	41,079,603
Merseyside	113,660,328	3,941,000	65,837,494	435,363	183,874,185
Metropolitan Police	900,344,546	24,774,000	499,893,847	6,721,767	1,431,734,160
Norfolk	39,052,823	1,912,000	11,367,572	118,111	52,450,506
North Wales	35,695,797	614,000	9,273,362	157,757	45,740,916
North Yorkshire	35,797,195	1,803,000	9,024,354	168,425	46,792,974
Northamptonshire	30,218,410	1,236,000	8,736,405	354,858	40,545,673
Northumbria	95,656,644	4,851,000	49,645,025	978,563	151,131,232
Nottinghamshire	59,069,950	2,633,000	25,314,182	460,259	87,477,391

Grants paid to police authorities in 1997–98

Police authority	*Police grant (Home Office)*[1]	*Capital grant (Home Office)*	*Revenue support grant and SSA reduction grant (DOE–Welsh Office)*	*Other grants (Home Office–DOE Welsh Office)*	*[2]Total*
South Wales	77,732,137	3,110,000	30,387,732	430,156	111,660,025
South Yorkshire	79,345,830	2,840,000	36,413,286	1,175,550	119,774,666
Staffordshire	57,200,041	2,372,000	18,117,561	342,775	78,032,377
Suffolk	31,859,276	493,000	8,077,778	355,763	40,785,817
Surrey	44,807,788	2,054,000	15,509,294	15,076	62,386,158
Sussex	78,415,319	2,696,000	20,743,211	750,000	102,604,530
Thames Valley	104,631,315	3,175,000	26,153,355	260,933	134,220,603
Warwickshire	25,725,130	408,000	6,623,835	425,926	33,182,891
West Mercia	53,417,326	2,274,000	12,358,675	68,850	68,118,851
West Midlands	175,339,329	4,049,000	90,002,510	1,473,900	270,864,739
West Yorkshire	132,526,320	3,080,000	64,158,479	1,671,270	201,436,069
Wiltshire	31,042,893	883,000	9,390,340	0	41,316,233
Grant not allocated	0	5,508,000	0	4,052,000	9,560,000
Total	3,472,630,861	104,683,000	1,449,459,152	24,800,835	5,051,573,848

[1] Excludes balances paid in respect of 1994–95 accounts.
[2] Includes (i) loan charges grant paid on pre-1900 debt, (ii) grant paid under section 48 of the Police Act 1996, (iii) special grant for policing costs, (iv) party conferences grant, (v) payments to police authorities in respect of implications of the Firearms (Amendment) Bill.
[3] No separately identifiable figures for RSG and SSA reduction grant are available for the City of London police.

Police Pension Scheme

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what account his Department took of the police pension scheme in the revenue and capital settlements for Welsh police forces in 1997–98; and if he will make a statement. [14136]

Mr. Maclean: For 1997–98, on the basis of advice from the Government Actuary's Department, we have increased the allowance made for police pensions needs in the police funding formula. The pensions indicator will account for 12.9 per cent. of total formula funding in England and Wales. The total pensions indicator for Welsh forces will amount to around £43 million, before the application of additional rule 1.

Asylum Seekers (Rochester Prison)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will name the asylum seekers who are currently on hunger strike at Her Majesty's prison Rochester and their countries of origin. [14231]

Mr. Kirkhope: The Government's normal practice is not to disclose the details of individual detainees.

Computer Crime

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions in each of the last five years computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers in his Department. [14564]

Mr. Howard: Over the past five years, there have been 16 recorded cases of hacking.

Mr. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of computer hacking, fraud and theft, including theft of computer chips, his Department has recorded in the past five years. [14565]

Mr. Howard: A total of 78 cases have been recorded over the past five years.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what arrangements have been made to provide hon. Members with information about the amendments contained in the resolution tabled on Friday 31 January updating schedule 1 to the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975. [15117]

Mr. Bates: A detailed explanatory note on the resolution tabled on Friday 31 January is available from the Vote Office.

Public Appointments Unit

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the current annual budget of the public appointments unit. [14512]

Mr. Freeman: The public appointments unit's budget for 1996–97 is £215,000.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many names are currently held on the public appointments unit register; and what were the figures *(a)* one year, *(b)* two years and *(c)* five years ago. [14511]

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is as follows:

Year (as at 1 February)	*Number of names on the public appointments unit's register*
1997	5,285
1996	5,166
1995	5,245
1992	5,790

Computer Crime

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on how many occasions in each of the last five years computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers in his Department. [14568]

Mr. Bates: None.

Mr. Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many cases of computer hacking, fraud and theft, including theft of computer chips, his department has recorded in the last five years. [14569]

Mr. Bates: Over the last five years, there have been no cases of computer hacking or fraud in the Office of Public Service and its agencies. there have been 31 thefts of computers or computer chips as follows:

1992–93: 6

1993–94: 1

1994–95: 5

1995–96: 13

1996–97: 6.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will provide a breakdown of the spending by the Deputy Prime Minister's Office on external advice in relation to the Scott inquiry, indicating how much has been spent on legal advice and from whom it was obtained. [14535]

The Deputy Prime Minister: No payments have been made in relation to my private office or the Office of Public Service, for external advice, including legal advice, in relation to the Scott inquiry.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what was the total cost of salaries since 1992 paid to persons in the Deputy Prime Minister's Office and the Office of Public Service employed on a part-time or full-time basis in any capacity relating to the Scott inquiry. [14534]

The Deputy Prime Minister: No full-time or part-time officials in my private office or the Office of Public Service were wholly employed on matters relating to the Scott inquiry. Some officials have inevitably been involved from time to time as part of their normal duties but the direct salary cost is unquantifiable.

ENVIRONMENT

Mine Water

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research has been sponsored by his Department into the use of reed beds for the biological treatment and decontamination of contaminated mine water. [13849]

Mr. Gummer: My Department has not sponsored any such projects. However, the Environment Agency, which is responsible for the monitoring and regulation of mine water discharges, is involved in two projects. First, it has set up a pilot project for the biological treatment, including reed beds, of mine water at the former Wheal Jane tin mine in Cornwall; secondly, it is collaborating with other parties on a wetland system to treat discharges into the River Pelenna, which is being partially funded by the EC LIFE programme. The data and experience obtained from these two projects will be valuable in the determination of treatment options for other sites.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list *(a)* the total external support including revenue support and non-domestic rates and *(b)* the allowable budget requirement for the London borough of Hounslow in (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1996–97 and (iii) 1995–96; and if he will indicate for each the changes between 1995–96 and 1996–97; and the changes between 1996–97 and 1997–98, in cash and percentage terms allowing for proper year-on-year, like-for-like comparisons, and allowing for the transfer of responsibility for care in the community from central Government to local authorities. [14271]

Sir Paul Beresford: The available information is as follows:

	Maximum budget allowed under capping criteria £ million	*Increase on adjusted budget for previous year*[1] £ million	*Per cent.*	*External support*[2] £ million
1995–96	182.511			140.421
1996–97	190.948	5.406	2.91	146.096
1997–98	194.294[3]	3.914	2.06	147.188

[1] For comparisons with the following year, the 1995–96 budget has been adjusted for community care special grant. The 1996–97 budget has been adjusted for the introduction of nursery vouchers, for community care special grant and for capital limits for residential accommodation charges grant.

[2] External support comprises revenue support grant and the redistributed amount from the non-domestic rates pool. No estimates of external support are available on a year-on-year, like-for-like basis for comparing 1995–96 with 1996–97. Adjusted figures for external support for 1996–97 were placed in the Library in my reply to the hon. Member for North-West Durham (Mrs. Armstrong) on 13 January 1997. The adjusted external support for 1996–97 for the London borough of Hounslow was shown as £145.5 million. This figure did not take into account any changes in the estimated aggregates of SSA reduction grant or police grants that would need to be made in order to bring the figure for 1996–97 on to a fully consistent basis.

[3] Provisional.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people employed by his Department to provide advice on the application of equal opportunities; and at what cost in the last year for which figures are available. [14474]

Sir Paul Beresford: The number of staff is 5.35, at a cost of about £150,000.

Departmental Decisions (Judicial Review)

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many decisions by his Department were challenged through judicial review in Session 1995–96; and in how many cases *(a)* the Department's decision was upheld by the court, *(b)* the court found the applicant, *(c)* the Department submitted to the judgment and *(d)* the Department appealed successfully against the judicial review decision. [14371]

Sir Paul Beresford: Information is not held centrally in a form which would enable the Secretary of State to answer this question without incurring disproportionate cost.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on how many occasions his Department has used headhunting consultants for public appointment purposes in the last two years. [14515]

Sir Paul Beresford: No central record is maintained of the use of headhunting consultants for public appointments made by my Department. I regret that the information cannot be provided in the form requested.

Computer Crime

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) on how many occasions in each of the last five years computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers in his Department; [14554]

(2) how many cases of computer hacking, fraud and theft, including theft of computer chips his Department has recorded in the last five years. [14555]

Sir Paul Beresford: There have been 16 cases of suspected or attempted computer hacking—none of which were proven to have resulted in illegal access—no cases of computer fraud, but 150 cases of computer theft, including thefts of computer chips, reported by my Department, including its agencies and non-departmental public bodies, over the last five years.

Radioactive Waste Storage

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what evaluation his Department has made of the (i) short, (ii) medium and (iii) long-term safety of the storage of *(a)* liquid and *(b)* vitrified high-activity long-lived radio active waste at Sellafield. [14088]

Mr. Page: I have been asked to reply.

The safety of stored liquid high-activity waste at Sellafield has been fully evaluated by the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate. In 1995, HSE published a report entitled "The Safety of the Storage of Liquid High-Level Waste at BNFL Sellafield" setting out HSE's assessment of the safety issues involved. This report concludes that:

> current programmes should lead to the backlog of liquid high-activity waste currently stored at Sellafield's high-level waste storage facility being converted to vitrified waste by around 2015; and that
>
> safety provisions for the storage of high-activity liquid up until then are acceptable,

A copy of that report is held in the Library of the House.

Arrangement for the storage of vitrified high-activity waste at Sellafield have also been fully evaluated. HSE has concluded that adequate safety provisions have been made for the operational life of the vitrified store which is expected to be at least 50 years. HSE will continue to monitor the safety of the storage of high-activity waste at Sellafield.

TREASURY

Tax Allowances

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many income tax allowances are available to reduce the tax paid by an individual; and what would be the total additional tax paid in each case if the allowances were to be withdrawn. [14042]

Mr. Jack: The latest information about the costs of income tax allowances and reliefs has been published in table 1.6 and appendix B.1 of "Inland Revenue Statistics 1996". A copy can be found in the Library.

Oil and Gas Revenues

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what factors underlay the figures for the cumulative total for Government revenues from oil and gas production contained in his answer of 10 July 1996, *Official Report,* column *228* and 13 January, *Official Report,* column *23.* [14270]

Mr. Jack: Government revenues from oil and gas production include corporation tax paid by North sea oil and gas production companies, before setting off their advance corporation tax payments; petroleum revenue tax; oil royalties; and, in 1981–82 and 1982–83, receipts from supplementary petroleum duty—SPD. Receipts from the latter were not included in the answer of 13 January. Including SPD receipts, and using the Budget forecasts of North sea tax revenues and the GDP deflator in 1996–97, the cumulative total for Government revenues from oil and gas production 1979–80 to 1996–97 expressed in 1996–97 prices is over £133 billion.

Unit Trusts

Mr. French: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the unit trust industry about the proposals in clause 105 of the Finance Bill. [15201]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Clause 105 of the Finance Bill contains proposals to replace the present stamp duty regime for repurchases of units by unit trust managers by a new stamp duty reserve tax regime. At present, a repurchase of units by the managers is liable to stamp duty at 0.5 per cent., but the duty may be repaid if the unit are cancelled within two months and the underlying investments are sold. The unit trust industry has criticised this regime because of the record-keeping required to check whether units are cancelled within two months, and because it is not certain, at the time of a repurchase, whether or not duty will ultimately be repayable.

Clause 105 seeks to deal with these problems by introducing a new stamp duty reserve tax regime which would remove the right to a repayment when units are cancelled, but would balance that by reducing the rate of tax on a repurchase to 0.2 per cent. This was intended to meet the criticisms which have been made of the present rules, and to raise broadly the same revenue as now but more simply and certainly. The industry has, however, now made representations that this particular approach would cause problems for some investors, and that it would prefer the present regime to continue for the time being while it considers possible alternatives. We are prepared to accommodate their request, and we will

expect the industry to come forward with proposals which are capable of dealing with the criticisms made of the present regime while continuing to raise the same revenue as now.

We therefore intend to withdraw the proposals in clause 105, and leave the present stamp duty regime to continue for the time being. The regulations we will be making for the stamp duty and stamp duty reserve tax treatment of open-ended investment companies will adopt a similar approach.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 10 December 1996, *Official Report*, columns 125–26, if he will update the column relating to 1997–98 of the table headed "Private finance initiative: estimated capital spending arising from signed deals". [13893]

Mr. Jack: Table 5.5 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1997–98", and my answer of 10 December were derived from returns made by Departments as part of the pre-Budget expenditure round. Arrangements have been put in place for the collection and reporting of information on the private finance initiative to the Treasury on a quarterly basis, but the ultimate responsibility for individual figures lies with each department. Collecting information centrally on more than a quarterly basis could be achieved only at disproportionate cost and would distract officials from the important task of securing value for money deals.

Self-Assessment

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the compliance cost assessment published on 29 November 1994 remains his current estimate of how much the introduction of self-assessment in April will cost; and what plans he has to publish a more up to date figure of how much the new system has cost to set up. [14308]

Mr. Jack: I can confirm that the Inland Revenue's compliance cost assessment in November 1994 remains the Government's current estimate of the impact of self-assessment on business compliance costs. The Inland Revenue plans to review its compliance cost assessment after the new system has bedded down and business and the Inland Revenue have gained practical experience of its operation.

Tax Evasion

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cases of evasion of payments of taxes administered by the Inland Revenue have been discovered in each year since 1990; and what has been the yield. [14508]

Mr. Jack: I refer the hon. Member to the written answers which I gave him on 26 October 1995, *Official Report*, columns 727–28 and 11 December 1996, *Official Report*, columns *207–08*.

Taxation

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of *(a)* the additional tax revenues which would accrue to the Exchequer and *(b)* the reduction in Government spending, in each of the next five years if the annual rate of growth of gross domestic product in the United Kingdom were 0.25 per cent. per annum higher than assumed in the forecasts contained in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1997–98"; and if he will make a statement. [12768]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 28 January 1997]:* The table shows estimates of the effect on government receipts and spending if the annual rate of growth of GDP were $\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. per annum higher than forecast in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1997–98". These are based upon the estimates set out in HM Treasury occasional paper No.4 "Public Finances and the Cycle". All such estimates are inevitably uncertain.

	Per cent. of GDP				
	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–00*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
General Government receipts	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	$\frac{1}{4}$	$\frac{1}{4}$
General Government expenditure	[1]—	$-\frac{1}{4}$	$-\frac{1}{4}$	$-\frac{1}{4}$	$-\frac{1}{4}$

[1] Negligible.

In both cases, the budget balance continues to improve, and is in surplus by the end of the projection period.

Rudolf Hess (Death Certificate)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what account was taken of the authority provided by the four power protocol dated 6 April 1954 in the decision *(a)* to cancel the death certificate of Rudolf Hess on 2 August 1995 and *(b)* to refuse to reinstate the death certificate either (i) in its original form or (ii) in the amended form requested by his next of kin; [13488]

(2) if he considered proposals to cancel the death certificate of Rudolf Hess before the application by Rudolf Hess's next of kin on 24 April 1995 to amend the details of the death certificate; [13486]

(3) what factors underlay the decision to cancel the death certificate of Rudolf Hess dated 19 August 1987. [13487]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* The Registrar General of England and Wales decided to cancel the death registration of Rudolph Hess on the basis that the entry had not been made in accordance with statute. Once it was known that the entry had been made in error, there was no basis on which to reinstate the entry or amend its content. The relevant legislation provides only for the registration outside England and Wales of the births and deaths of members of the armed forces, service civilians and families.

The application of Rudolph Hess's next of kin to amend his death entry drew attention to the fact that the registration had not been made within the legal provisions. The status of the registration had not been questioned previously.

Dorneywood

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *421*, if he will list the dates *(a)* he and *(b)* his predecessor have been in residence at Dorneywood since 1993. [14652]

Mr. Rifkind: *(a)* Never. *(b)* Never.

Revenue and Expenditure Balance (Scotland)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 13 January, *Official Report*, columns *25–26*, if he will estimate the total surplus or deficit of Government expenditure and revenue in Scotland for each year from 1997–98 to 2001–02 assuming a constant relationship between the Scottish deficit, as published in "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland 1994–95" and the United Kingdom general Government borrowing requirement excluding privatisation proceeds and North sea revenues for 1994–95 and including in the Scottish total for each year a 90 per cent. share of North sea revenue and an 8.8 per cent. share of privatisation proceeds using the projections for *(a)* the United Kingdom Government borrowing requirement *(b)* projections for privatisation proceeds and other financial transactions published in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1997–98" and *(c)* the projections for North sea revenues published in that report and produced by the Inland Revenue for later years. [13908]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* The table provides the information necessary to make the calculations requested by the hon. Member. However, as the hon. Member should be fully aware, his proposed methodology is a ridiculous way of either projecting the Scottish deficit, or estimating the Scottish deficit in past years.

The Scottish contribution to the borrowing requirement depends on the proportion of total Government expenditure incurred, and the proportion of total Government revenues raised, in Scotland. Even if each of these proportions were to remain stable over time at their 1994–95 levels, there is no reason why the ratio of borrowing in Scotland to that in the UK should also be stable. This is a straightforward arithmetical truism. In practice, the ratio changes markedly between years. Moreover, in some recent years, Scotland has had a deficit when the UK has had a budget surplus.

It follows that estimates of the cumulative Scottish deficit since 1978–79 and-or projections of it, based on the assumption of a stable ratio between the Scottish and UK deficits, are rendered totally meaningless.

My answer of 13 January incorporated the same assumption, at the hon. Member's request. I am pleased to set the answer in its proper context by emphasising how far that assumption is from the reality of Scotland's expenditure and revenue flows.

Budget forecasts and projections of the General Government borrowing requirement (GGBR), North Sea tax revenues and privatisation proceeds

£ billion

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
GGBR	19.6	12	4	–7	–18
Privatisation proceeds (PPs)	2.0	1.5	1	1	1
North sea tax revenues	4.1	3.9	3.6	3.6	3.4
GGBR excluding PPs and North sea tax revenues	25.8	18	8	–3	–13

Note:

The Scottish GGBR excluding North sea tax revenues and privatisation proceeds was £8.2 billion in 1994–95 (source: "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland", table 12). The comparable figure for the UK was £45.8 billion.

Sources:

Tables 4.1 and 4.6, "Financial Statement and Budget Report, 1996", and Inland Revenue.Figures for 1997–98 are forecasts, figures for later years are projections. Figures for the GGBR in 1998–99 and beyond are rounded to the nearest £1 billion. Constituent items may not sum to totals because of rounding.

DEFENCE

Chemical Weapons (Iraq)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when United Nations inspectors were informed by the Iraqi authorities that the ammunition dump at Kamisiyah in southern Iraq blown up by US troops had contained chemical war weapons; what consideration his Department gave at that time to any possible connection between the destruction of the ammunition dump and undiagnosed illnesses among service personnel who served in the Gulf war; what more recent consideration has been given to a possible connection; and if he will make a statement. [14075]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Queen's Flight (Helicopters)

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what *(a)* type and *(b)* number of helicopters are currently operated by the Queen's Flight; when they were transferred to the flight; and when they are due for replacement. [14639]

Mr. Soames: No 32 (the Royal) Squadron currently operates two Wessex HC4 helicopters which entered service with the Queen's Flight in 1969, and two Twin Squirrel helicopters which entered service on 1 April 1996. No decisions have yet been taken on the replacement of the Wessex. The Twin Squirrels are operated by the RAF under a lease arrangement.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions in each of the last 10 years the Wessex helicopters of the Queen's flight were used by members of the royal family. [14641]

Mr. Soames: The Wessex helicopters of No. 32 (the Royal) Squadron and, prior to 1 April 1995, the Queen's Flight were used by members of the royal family on the following number of occasions:

1987: 420
1988: 423
1989: 496
1990: 369
1991: 534
1992: 449
1993: 367
1994: 381
1995: 393
1996: 305.

Guard Duty, Plymouth

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* the average number of hours worked per week, *(b)* the average number of hours worked per day and *(c)* the number of guards working 12-hour shifts in respect of the service personnel on guard duty at Stanchane barracks and royal naval base, Plymouth. [14392]

Mr. Soames: Service guards in the naval base and Stonehouse barracks work a mixture of rostered shifts and time on other duties. Twelve-hour shifts, including an element of stand-by time, are worked in the naval base and over the year guards average a 42-hour working week. Royal Marines generally undertake security duties on a more rotational basis. When employed on guard in Stonehouse barracks they generally work 24-hour shifts, including time on stand-by with sleeping facilities, followed by 24 hours off.

RAF Valley (Helicopters)

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Wessex search and rescue helicopters based at RAF Valley were replaced by Sea Kings. [14640]

Mr. Soames: The timing of the replacement of Wessex helicopters based at RAF Valley with Sea King Mk3s is linked to the introduction into operational RAF service elsewhere of the Sea King Mk3A. This has been delayed by unforeseen technical difficulties. Remedial work is, however, progressing well and we currently estimate that the Sea King Mk3A will enter operational service in mid-summer. This will permit the redeployment of Sea King Mk3s to RAF Valley soon afterwards.

Army Regiments

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Army regiments there were in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1997. [14488]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is given in the following table:

Number of major army units at 1 April 1979 and 1 April [1]1997

Corps	*1 April 1979*	*1 April 1997*
Royal armoured corps	[2]19	[3]11
Royal artillery	[3]22	[2]16
Royal engineers	[4]9	10
Infantry [5]	56	40
Special air service	1	1
Army air corps	6	5
Royal corps of signals	[2]12	[2]11
Total	125	94

[1] The table covers regular Army units of battalion size or equivalent in the major combat arms.
[2] Includes training regiments.
[3] Excludes the Household Cavalry mounted regiment.
[4] Includes the Queen's Gurkha engineers.
[5] Including Gurkha battalions.

Airborne Stand-off Radar Procurement

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list his Department's independent advisers on the ASTOR procurement project. [14489]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Defence Evaluation and Research Agency provides my Department's team with specialist technical advice on the airborne stand-off radar programme.

Food Supply Tenders

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the values of the tenders from *(a)* the Navy, Army and Air Force Institute and *(b)* Booker Foodservice in the recent competition for the supply of food for the armed forces. [14521]

Mr. Soames: The tender values are commercially confidential and are not published under exemption 7 of the code of practice on access to Government information. I can, however, assure my hon. Friend that the tenders were scrutinised in detail to establish which provided best value for money and there was a clear margin in favour of Booker Foodservice. The estimated value of the contract will be in excess of £400 million over five years.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide a breakdown of the spending by his Department on external advice in relation to the Scott inquiry, indicating how much has been spent on legal advice and from whom it was obtained. [14529]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The amount spent by my Department on external advice, including legal advice, in relation to individuals giving evidence to the Scott inquiry and the preparation of the Government's response to it is £216,117; this consists entirely of legal advice. This figure includes £196,555 representing the value of legal services charged by the Treasury Solicitor's department. External legal advice was obtained by individual MOD witnesses from Lovell, White, Durrant and Peter Carter-Ruck and Partners.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total cost of salaries since 1992 paid to persons in his Department employed on a part-time or full-time basis in any capacity relating to the Scott inquiry. [14528]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The direct salary cost of officials within my Department wholly employed on matters relating to the Scott inquiry since 1992 was approximately £255,000. Other officials were inevitably involved from time to time; their direct salary cost is unquantifiable.

Royal Yacht

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the advantages and disadvantages of travel by the royal yacht in relation to travel by other modes of transport; and if he will make a statement. [14634]

Mr. Soames: The royal yacht is a national asset which projects the image of Britain, provides a dignified platform for state and official occasions, assists in promoting British economic interests and provides a suitable royal residence overseas. It is not a primary means of royal transport.

Publicity

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department has spent on advertising in each of the last 12 months. [14250]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 5 February]:* Information relating to expenditure incurred on advertising in individual months is not available. An annual breakdown of expenditure on publicity and advertising is contained in the 1995–96 "Ministry of Defence Performance Report" (Cm 3055) (Table 9–1), a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

SCOTLAND

Greater Glasgow Health Board

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many redundancies will result at Greater Glasgow health board from the restructuring being undertaken; what is the range of jobs affected; and what assessment he has made of the impact of the restructuring on patient care. [14034]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Greater Glasgow health board's restructuring is consistent with the role of health boards set out in Professor Shields's report on the roles and responsibilities of health boards. A total of 60 posts will be saved by Greater Glasgow health board, nearly half of which comprise senior and middle management posts. The restructuring and associated savings in non-staff costs will release £3 million from management costs to be reinvested in patient care.

East Ayrshire Health Services

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions have been held with the private finance bidder for the East Ayrshire community hospital; what was the subject of these discussions; and if he will make a statement. [14609]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Officials from the Scottish Office Department of Health have only once met the bidder. The discussion took place last summer and was about the private finance initiative in general and not the East Ayrshire community hospital project.

Discussion with bidders on specific projects is normally a matter for the trust or health board concerned, not the officials within the Department.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what alternative provision has been made in east Ayrshire to take account of the closure of facilities at Ballochmyle hospital together with the delay in the provision of services at East Ayrshire community hospital. [14610]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Ballochmyle hospital would not close until alternative facilities were available.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions officers of his Department have had with *(a)* Ayrshire and Arran health board and *(b)* Ayrshire and Arran Community NHS trust about the East Ayrshire community trust; and what further discussions are planned with each body. [14608]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Scottish Office officials are in frequent contact with Ayrshire and Arran health board and the Ayrshire and Arran Community NHS trust to discuss East Ayrshire hospital and other topics. Further discussions will take place as required.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received about the delay in approving one of the options for funding the East Ayrshire community hospital; when he expects that decision to be made; and if he will make a statement. [14611]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The only representations received have been from the hon. Member. The trust and its preferred bidder are currently engaged in detailed negotiations over proposals under the private finance initiative which will come to a conclusion shortly.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what provision is made in his Department's budget for the current and future years for the funding of the East Ayrshire community hospital by the public funding method outside the private finance initiative. [14612]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Public capital funds are held in a capital pool until a business case is approved for a publicly funded scheme. No specific provision is made for any scheme until approval is given. Each business case submission is assessed on its own merits and in terms of its national priority.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the facilities to be provided in the proposed new East Ayrshire community hospital; what changes have occurred since the original specifications were approved by Ayrshire and Arran health board; and if he will make a statement. [14613]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The base specification of facilities is shown in the table:

	Facilities to be provided
GP medium acute rehabilitation unit	24 beds
Out-patient services for	15,000 consultant attendances 13,000 paramedical attendances
Day hospital	12 frail elderly places 6 mental health places 6 young physically disabled places

	Facilities to be provided
Continuing respite care	25 frail elderly places 25 mental health places

An option to include 15 further frail elderly continuing/respite care places was also specified. No changes to the original specification have been made.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the PFI projects in NHS provisions which *(a)* have been completed, *(b)* are currently under construction *(c)* have been approved by his Department and *(d)* have been submitted to his Department and are a awaiting approval. [14614]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The PFI projects which fall into these categories and on which information is held by the Department are listed. In addition there are other smaller projects developed on the same principles which fall within trust and health board delegated limits and for which information is not held centrally.

Projects completed

Health board/NHS trust	*Project description*
Law Hospital NHS trust	Provision and operation of a hospital information system
Edinburgh Healthcare NHS trust	Provision of 60 bed nursing home (Ferryfield house)
Ayrshire and Arran health board (Irvine)	Provision of 90 elderly care beds
Ayrshire and Arran health board (Irvine)	Provision of 90 elderly care beds
Lanarkshire health board (Bellshill)	Provision of 90 elderly care beds
Dundee Teaching Hospitals NHS trust	SMAC analysis
Grampian health board	Provision of 25 beds for mentally ill at Spynie hospital
Greater Glasgow health board (Darnley)	Provision of 120 elderly care beds
Greater Glasgow health board (Ruchill)	Provision of 120 elderly care beds
Greater Glasgow health board (Rutherglen)	Provision of 180 elderly care beds
Greater Glasgow health board (Shettleston)	Provision of 120 elderly care beds
Lanarkshire health board (Cumbernauld)	Provision of 40 elderly care beds
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh NHS trust	CT and MRI scanners
Lothian and Forth Valley health boards	Clinical waste disposal
Northern NHS trusts and health boards	Clinical waste disposal

Projects currently under construction or implementation

Health board/NHS trust	*Project description*
Perth and Kinross Healthcare NHS trust	Provision and operation of an integrated healthcare information system
Grampian health board	Provision and operation of a community hospital in Kincardineshire (Stonehaven)

Projects approved

Health Board/NHS trust	*Project description*
Greater Glasgow Community and Mental Health Services NHS trust	In-patient mental health services at Stobhill hospital
Yorkhill NHS trust	Provision and operation of a hospital information support system

Projects Awaiting Approval

None have been formally submitted for final approval but several have been submitted in draft and are under discussion with the NHS trust or health board involved.

Speech and Language Disorders

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what specialised training is provided in Scotland to teachers of children with specific speech and language disorders. [13454]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* The nature and provision of training in Scotland for teachers of children with specific speech and language disorders are matters for education authorities to decide. Education authorities have access to funding from the Scottish Office towards the cost of in-service training of teachers and other staff whose job entails working with children with special educational needs. In 1997–98, the specific grant for special educational needs training is £1.58 million.

Sheep Dips

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will ensure that farmers and landowners in Scotland are made aware of the dangers to the environment involved in the use of sheep dips based on synthetic pyrethroids. [13771]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: I have nothing further to add to the reply I offered my hon. Friend on 25 November 1996. The Scottish code of good practice for the prevention of environmental pollution from agricultural activity is currently being revised by the Scottish agricultural pollution group. We have drawn my hon. Friend's concern to the attention of that group.

Non-domestic Rates

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Secretary of state for scotland what is his current estimate of the revenue from non-domestic rate income in Scotland in 1997–98, broken down by the *(a)* industrial, *(b)* commercial and *(c)* other sectors. [14110]

Mr. Kynoch: Non-domestic rate income in Scotland for 1997–98 is provisionally estimated at £1,335 million. No estimates are available of this income broken down in the form requested. The table shows the percentage of total rateable value in Scotland accounted for by non-domestic subjects in the *(a)* industrial, *(b)* commercial and *(c)* other categories in April 1996, the latest date for which the information is available. Shares of rateable value do not give a precise estimate of shares of rates paid, as reliefs and exemptions may differ between different categories of subject.

Percentage of rateable value by type of subject, Scotland: April 1996

Type of subject	*Percentage of total rateable value*
Industrial	16.8
Commercial	54.0
Other	29.2

Source:
Statistical return RVASS, submitted by assessors.

Suckler Cow Premium

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of suckler cow premium payments in Scotland for the current year had been paid by 1 January 1997. [13939]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 3 February 1997]:* By 1 January 1997, the Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department had made 3 per cent. of the advance payments under the suckler cow premium scheme. By the end of January, 79 per cent. had been made. This is approximately the same percentage as this time last year.

Drinking Offences

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many arrests and prosecutions in connection with the drink ban byelaws there have been in each police division in Strathclyde since their introduction. [14029]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 5 February 1997]:* Separate statistical information on criminal proceedings in connection with byelaws banning the consumption of alcohol in designated public places was collected from the beginning of 1992. The table presents the available information for 1992, 1993 and 1994, the latest year for which statistics are available. During this period, byelaws were in force in Motherwell from April 1991 and East Kilbride from November 1994.

Number of persons proceeded against where the main charge was under byelaws banning the consumption of alcohol in designated public places, Strathclyde, 1992 to 1994.

Name of court	*1992*[1]	*1993*[1]	*1994*[1]
Motherwell district court	51	64	105
Hamilton sheriff court	—	2	1

[1] Date of final disposal.

Electoral Registers

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received relating to the availability of the electoral register on computer disk; and what instructions he has issued to electoral registration officers to make computerised copies of the register available. [14153]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 5 February 1997]:* My right hon. Friend has not received any representations on this matter. Any such representations, would, however, normally be addressed to the local electoral registration officers, who have responsibility for the electoral register. A circular letter issued by the Scottish Office Home Department on 16 December 1996 reminded electoral registration officers of the provisions in regulation 53(5) of the Representation of the People (Scotland) Regulations 1986 about the availability of data, on payment of the fee, to persons entitled to receive free copies of the register in manual form. Regulation 53(4) of the 1986 regulations covers the form in which the electoral registration officer is obliged to make these data available.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* electors and *(b)* overseas electors were registered on the electorial registers (i) in force since February 1996, (ii) compiled in October 1996 and (iii) in force in April 1992 for each parliamentary constituency in Scotland. [14154]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 5 February 1997]:* The information available is set out in the table. Figures compiled in October 1996 are provisional and based on the draft register. Specific statistics, such as figures for overseas electors, will not be collected until after the final register is published later this month.

Electoral statistics collected from the 1996 electoral registers are primarily based upon the new parliamentary constituencies which take effect at the next general election. No statistics for the existing constituencies other than the total electorate are held centrally for the electoral register in force since 1996. No figures based on the current constituencies are available for the draft register compiled in October 1996.

New parliamentary constituency	*February 1996*		*Provisional figures for October 1996*	
	Electors	*Overseas electors*	*Electors*	*Overseas electors*
Aberdeen, Central	56,162	16	54,657	n/a
Aberdeen, North	54,580	4	55,139	
Aberdeen, South	60,877	42	61,451	
Airdire and Shotts	58,549	5	58,268	
Angus	60,255	12	60,435	
Argyll and Bute	49,869	10	50,064	
Ayr	56,199	17	56,334	
Banff and Buchan	59,128	9	59,119	
Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross	41,813	15	45,521	
Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley	66,690	18	66,264	
Central Fife	58,889	2	58,302	
Clydebank and Milngavie	52,057	11	52,563	
Clydesdale	63,338	7	63,637	
Coatbridge and Chryston	52,663	5	52,447	
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	48,112	12	48,466	
Cunninghame, North	56,137	15	56,125	
Cunninghame, South	49,961	3	50,155	
Dumbarton	56,858	16	56,887	
Dumfries	63,259	12	63,437	
Dundee, East	58,659	17	58,881	
Dundee, West	57,131	6	57,923	
Dunfermline, East	51,630	19	51,408	
Dunfermline, West	53,399	11	52,236	
East Kilbride	65,455	7	65,612	
East Lothian	57,516	11	57,463	
Eastwood	66,884	25	67,546	
Edinburgh, Central	62,521	43	62,838	
Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh	59,535	20	59,255	

New parliamentary constituency	February 1996 Electors	February 1996 Overseas electors	Provisional figures for October 1996 Electors	Provisional figures for October 1996 Overseas electors
Edinburgh, North and Leith	61,527	40	60,146	
Edinburgh, Pentlands	60,089	39	59,585	
Edinburgh, South	62,832	74	62,484	
Edinburgh, West	61,590	30	61,300	
Falkirk, East	57,104	13	57,295	
Falkirk, West	53,440	5	53,274	
Galloway and Upper Nithsdale	53,380	23	53,302	
Glasgow, Anniesland	52,815	9	53,029	
Glasgow, Baillieston	51,159	1	51,442	
Glasgow, Cathcart	49,667	11	49,770	
Glasgow, Govan	49,600	13	50,361	
Glasgow, Kelvin	56,181	32	57,196	
Glasgow, Maryhill	51,589	10	52,215	
Glasgow, Pollok	49,403	5	49,349	
Glasgow, Rutherglen	51,127	7	50,782	
Glasgow, Shettleston	48,374	1	48,730	
Glasgow, Springburn	52,830	2	53,525	
Gordon	59,033	11	59,526	
Greenock and Inverclyde	49,964	8	49,518	
Hamiton North and Bellshill	54,039	1	54,159	
Hamilton, South	47,019	1	46,819	
Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber	65,424	27	67,029	
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	62,359	8	62,050	
Kirkcaldy	52,174	10	51,541	
Linlithgow	53,948	11	53,910	
Livingston	59,666	3	60,510	
Midlothian	47,893	7	47,870	
Moray	58,983	11	58,976	
Motherwell and Wishaw	52,513	4	52,728	
North-East Fife	58,493	40	58,150	
North Tayside	61,661	23	62,172	
Ochil	57,141	14	57,478	
Orkney and Shetland	32,635	7	32,636	
Paisley, North	49,905	5	50,268	
Paisley, South	53,909	9	54,649	
Perth	60,217	18	61,126	
Ross, Syke and Inverness, West	55,653	15	56,733	
Roxburgh and Berwickshire	47,520	6	47,950	
Stirling	52,634	33	53,148	
Strathkelvin and Bearsden	63,386	6	62,379	
Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale	50,999	25	51,499	
West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine	58,797	29	59,995	
West Renfrewshire	53,066	16	53,192	
Western Isles	23,208	2	23,779	

Current parliamentary constituency	February 1996 Electors	February 1996 Overseas electors	April 1992 Electors	April 1992 Overseas electors
Aberdeen, North	58,667	n/a	60,623	18
Aberdeen, South	60,829		59,230	53
Angus, East	64,826		63,637	28
Argyll and Bute	49,869		48,436	14
Ayr	67,485		66,284	35
Banff and Buchan	67,105		65,631	11
Caithness and Sutherland	31,346		31,173	9
Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley	55,404		56,024	15
Central Fife	57,674		56,495	6
Clackmannan	50,405		49,427	5
Clydebank and Milngavie	48,581		47,773	14
Clydesdale	63,338		62,684	11
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	48,112		47,155	15
Cunninghame, North	56,137		55,490	29
Cunninghame, South	49,961		49,745	12
Dumbarton	56,858		57,894	39
Dumfries	61,697		61,773	17
Dundee, East	57,550		59,328	31
Dundee, West	56,629		60,386	13
Dunfermline, East	52,147		50,452	13
Dunfermline, West	52,764		51,310	19
East Kilbride	66,796		64,824	25
East Lothian	69,171		67,588	22
Eastwood	65,508		64,560	46
Edinburgh, Central	59,826		56,839	95
Edinburgh, East	46,137		46,157	30
Edinburgh, Leith	57,679		57,073	38
Edinburgh, Pentlands	56,476		56,433	69
Edinburgh, South	63,286		61,999	102
Edinburgh, West	59,394		59,702	64
Falkirk, East	52,364		52,381	23
Falkirk, West	49,628		50,623	18
Galloway and Upper Nithsdale	54,942		54,977	29
Glasgow, Cathcart	43,418		45,149	18
Glasgow, Central	48,975		48,383	14
Glasgow, Garscadden	40,726		41,675	8
Glasgow, Govan	43,873		46,199	22
Glasgow, Hillhead	59,784		57,586	58
Glasgow, Maryhill	48,491		48,791	16
Glasgow, Pollok	44,433		46,655	17
Glasgow, Provan	34,501		36,986	5
Glasgow, Rutherglen	51,764		53,325	17
Glasgow, Shettleston	51,680		52,381	4
Glasgow, Springburn	45,098		46,216	5
Gordon	85,435		81,097	40
Greenock and Port Glasgow	50,377		52,661	3
Hamilton	62,846		62,347	9
Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber	72,918		70,164	34
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	62,359		62,777	13
Kincardine and Deeside	70,308		67,216	57
Kirkcaldy	53,507		52,191	15
Linlithgow	63,299		61,979	13
Livingston	64,204		62,122	15
Midlothian	60,978		61,178	23
Monklands, East	48,849		49,059	3
Monklands, West	49,881		49,935	8
Moray	65,216		63,944	14
Motherwell, North	58,129		58,106	3
Motherwell, South	49,904		50,674	5
North-East Fife	58,495		54,196	44
North Tayside	58,447		56,353	27
Orkney and Shetland	32,635		31,837	9
Paisley, North	47,105		46,867	13
Paisley, South	48,402		48,385	5
Perth and Kinross	68,317		65,826	38
Renfrew West and Inverclyde	60,995		58,897	34
Ross, Cromarty and Skye	58,626		56,112	25
Roxburgh and Berwickshire	44,371		44,001	12

Current parliamentary constituency	February 1996 Electors	Overseas electors	April 1992 Electors	Overseas electors
Stirling	59,979		58,774	60
Strathkelvin and Bearsden	62,038		61,924	41
Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale	40,910		39,907	30
Western Isles	23,208		23,015	5

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Coal Miners (Public Safety)

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what investigations have been undertaken by the Coal Authority in respect of the 18 ft hole reported to have opened up in Wednesbury on 15 January; and if he will make a statement. [14322]

Mr. Page: The Coal Authority is aware of what has been described as a mineshaft collapse on the site of a construction project on the Holyhead road, Wednesbury. It has not been asked to investigate the collapse, which they understand has been dealt with by a contractor acting on behalf of the black country development agency.

I have asked the Coal Authority to write to the hon. Member about this in greater detail.

Regional Assistance

Mr. Pearson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list for each region the number and value of outline bids submitted for *(a)* sector challenge funds and *(b)* the local competitiveness challenge funds; and if he will list each region's budget allocation. [14227]

Mr. Page: The following tables show the number of bids received and funding sought at outline stage for both the local and sector challenge. While regional allocations have been drawn up for local challenge these are only indicative, as it is Ministers who take decisions on funding on challenge projects. No such indicative allocations apply under sector challenge as bids are expected to benefit the UK as a whole.

Local challenge

Government Office	Number of bids	Total funding sought £
East Midlands	53	8,558,648
Eastern Region	114	22,092,267
London	37	10,840,784
Merseyside	22	3,719,516
North East	41	10,468,490
North West	59	14,494,633
South East	61	10,737,867
South West	70	12,269,953
West Midlands	48	9,420,175
Yorkshire and Humberside	40	11,870,825

Sector challenge

Region	Number of bids	Award sought £
East Midlands	36	6447,030
Eastern	45	6,761,218
London	209	42,041,930
Merseyside	1	100,000
North East	9	1,393,724
North West	22	3,644,330
Northern Ireland	7	1,623,230
Scotland	18	2,673,651
South East	87	13,988,461
South West	38	10,560,648
Wales	17	6,560,911
West Midlands	83	16,463,997
Yorkshire and Humberside	34	5,595,575

Fireworks

Mr. Pike: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what further consultation he proposes to conduct in relation to the use and control of fireworks; what is his timetable; and if he will make a statement. [14415]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I expect to make an announcement shortly of the conclusions arising from my review of the voluntary and statutory controls on fireworks. If it is considered appropriate to tighten the existing statutory controls, a public consultation on specific proposals will be undertaken.

Non-fossil Fuel Obligation

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress has been made in the competition for contracts to supply electricity generated by renewable sources of energy under the fourth renewables non-fossil fuel obligation order, NFFO4; and if he will make a statement. [15118]

Mr. Page: I have today laid before Parliament an order requiring the regional electricity companies in England and Wales to make arrangements to secure 843 MW of new electricity generating capacity from a range of renewable energy sources. This is the fourth and largest renewables order under the non-fossil fuel obligation arrangements and covers the period 1 May 1997 to 30 December 2016.

Responses by bidders to the tender invitation were very impressive. The industry has achieved an average price for these projects of 3.46p per kilowatt hour, almost one penny better than the 4.35p achieved in NFFO3. Real convergence with market prices is clearly now within reach and our strategy of stimulating a competitive renewables market is working well. This has allowed me to do more and set an order which is larger than I envisaged when announcing NFFO4 in November 1995.

I now expect the RECs to meet their obligations arising from this NFFO4 order by signing contracts, through their agent the Non-Fossil Purchasing Agency Ltd., for 195 projects, details of which are tabulated.

Summary of fourth renewables order (NFFO4)

Technology	*Contracted capacity for NFFO4 MW DNC*	*Number of projects*	*Lowest contracted price p/kWh*	*Capacity weighted average price p/kWh*	*Highest contracted price p/kWh*
Landfill Gas	173.7	70	2.8	3.01	3.2
Waste-Fired Combined Heat and Power	115.3	10	2.79	3.23	3.4
Waste-Fired Fluidised Bed Combustion	126.0	6	2.66	2.75	2.8
Small Scale Hydro Electricity	13.3	31	3.8	4.25	4.4
Wind Energy larger than 0.768 MW DNC	330.4	48	3.11	3.53	3.8
Wind Energy 0.768 MW DNC or less	10.4	17	4.09	4.57	4.95
Anaerobic Digestion of Agricultural Wastes	6.6	6	5.1	5.17	5.2
Biomass Gasification of Pyrolysis	67.4	7	5.49	5.51	5.79
Total	843.1	195	—	3.46	—

Note:
DNC is declared net capacity, the maximum power available, and takes into account the intermittent nature of wind energy.

Successful generators will need to obtain planning permission for their projects if they have not already done so. Award of a NFFO contract does not confer any special privilege in the planning approval process which must be carried out in the normal way. I expect generators to develop their projects with care and sensitivity and so ensure the long-term prosperity of their industry.

NFFO has a very high international reputation as a process that works well in stimulating the renewables market for the most promising renewables and encouraging manufacturing industry. Over 428 MW of capacity is already operational under NFFO1, NFFO2 and NFFO3.

Our aim is to work towards 1,500 MW of new renewables-based generation capacity by 2000. This objective requires steady convergence under successive orders between the price paid under the NFFO and the market price, which is being achieved through effective competition in the allocation of NFFO contracts.

The Government took this into account in determining the size of the bands. In particular, they took into account the cost and quality of proposals received, and the assessment of the implications for the policy objective of helping the different renewable technologies to enter the commercial electricity generating market.

By having separate bands, we have ensured that the technologies involved have the opportunity of contributing to the capacity required under the order, to the extent that is appropriate to each particular technology.

Policy will be reviewed prior to the fifth order, NFFO5, in 1998 and will take into account progress under NFFO3 and this larger order, NFFO4. Over the next few years, I expect increasing numbers of renewable projects to be developed and be able to generate in the liberalised electricity market without needing support under the NFFO arrangements.

This will illustrate the success of our strategy to develop renewables-based technologies which bring with them environmental benefits from using sustainable energy sources; help to secure diversity of energy supplies; and develop an internationally competitive industry.

I have made the order after consultation with the RECs and the Director General of Electricity Supply. His advice has been deposited in the Library of the House and was published by the Office of Electricity Regulation on 31 January 1997.

Directors' Emoluments

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to amend the statutory disclosure requirements on directors' emoluments. [15119]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Following extensive consultation, I have today laid draft regulations before Parliament to amend the statutory disclosure requirements on directors' emoluments.

The main Greenbury recommendations, which were implemented in December 1995 when they were incorporated in the stock exchange listing rules, have done much to improve disclosure of directors' pay and to increase the accountability of directors to their shareholders. These draft regulations will bring the Companies Act into line with the Greenbury recommendations and will ensure that listed companies will not have to make two sets of disclosures to comply with the listing rules and Companies Act respectively.

In the case of unlisted companies, the new provisions will streamline present disclosure requirements.

Computer Crime

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many cases of computer hacking, fraud and theft, including theft of computer chips, his Department has recorded in the last five years. [14561]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Central records of IT security incidents reported within my Department for the period in question show:

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Hacking incidents (excluding minor instances of computer misuse)	0	2	1	0	0
Fraud	0	0	0	0	0
Theft (including theft of computer chips and components)	10	13	31	44	15

None of the hacking incidents resulted in a successful attack. The figures include next step agencies only for years where they were covered by central records.

Mr. Foster: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on how many occasions in each of the past five years computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers in his Department. [14560]

Mr. Taylor: Over the past five years, there have been no reported incidents where my Department's computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers. There were three recorded unsuccessful hacking attempts, two of which were by attackers external to the Department. These figures include next steps agencies only for the years where they were covered by central records.

Department-funded Schemes

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will list each of the schemes currently funded by his Department to provide support to industry and the science base, indicating the commencement date, the annual funding to date, the termination date and future budget commitments; [14376]

(2) if he will list the schemes to support industry and the science base funded by his Department which have been cancelled in each of the last 10 years indicating the reasons for the cancellation. [14377]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Details of my Department's funding to support industry and the science base are given in the annual expenditure plans reports—Office of Public Service and Science; Cabinet Office Reports for Office of Science and Technology activities prior to 1996–97—copies of which are available in the Library of the House. The additional information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Offshore Drilling Platforms

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment his Department has made of the preliminary guidelines prepared by the International Exploration and Production Forum covering the re-injection of oil-based muds from offshore drilling platforms. [14844]

Mr. Page: My Department has reviewed these guidelines and found them to be useful. They give detailed advice on planning, monitoring, reporting and operating re-injection systems and recognise the conditions under which re-injection may not be advisable.

Defence Equipment Exports (United Arab Emirates)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what licences for defence equipment exports to the United Arab Emirates have been issued since October 1995. [14248]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 5 February 1997]:* The details of export licences issued to the United Arab Emirates between 1 October 1995 and 31 January 1997 are in the tables, which show the number of licences issued under each category of part III, group 1 of schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994.

Table 1: Permanent licences

Heading	*Number of licences issued*
ML1	56
ML2	8
ML3	8
ML4	10
ML5	7
ML6	7
ML8	2
ML9	6
ML10	63
ML11	14
ML14	4
ML15	9
PL5001	1
PL5018	8
PL5021	11
PL5030	1
PL5031	2

There was a further licence issued which contained a variety of equipment. The total number of permanent licences issued in the period was 218.

Table 2: Temporary licences for (exhibitions and demonstrations, including licences where the United Arab Emirates was one of several destinations)

Heading	*Number of licences issued*
ML1	3
ML2	3
ML4	6
ML5	9
ML6	10
ML7	3
ML9	1
ML10	3
ML11	13
ML14	1
ML15	15
PL5002	3
PL5006	8
PL5017	2
PL5018	1
Total	81

PRIME MINISTER

Ministerial Visit (Salcombe)

10. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will make an official visit to Salcombe in South Hams. [13141]

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Pay Review Bodies

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the reports and recommendations of the pay review bodies. [15116]

The Prime Minister: The 1997 reports of the five pay review bodies have been published today. Copies are available in the Vote Office and the Library of the House. The reports are substantial documents representing the considerable commitment of the chairmen and members

of the review bodies, and the Government are grateful to them for their contribution and for the time they have devoted to this work.

Pay settlements for these groups have to be consistent with the Government's approach to public sector pay. Specifically, under this approach, the cost of pay settlements should be met from existing spending plans, without recourse to the reserve. This position was re-affirmed in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's statement on public sector pay on 17 September 1996 and in the Government's evidence to the pay review bodies.

Last year, the Government accepted the recommendations of the pay review bodies, but introduced staging because they represented a significant step up in the level of public sector pay settlements and because the staging helped to accommodate the costs within spending plans.

In evidence to the pay review bodies, the Government proposed that recommendations this year should be lower than last year to drop back from those high levels and to reflect lower inflation and the absence of other pay pressures in the economy generally. Our continuing determination to control costs in the public sector means that spending plans have again been tightly drawn. The recommendations this year have to be considered in that context.

The main pay recommendations are as follows:

The Armed Forces pay review body has recommended a range of increases in daily rates of between 3 and 3.4 per cent. Taking all aspects of pay, including new bonus arrangements, the average increase is 3.3 per cent.

The Doctors and Dentists review body has recommended general increases of 3.4 per cent.

The review body for Nursing Staff, Midwives, Health Visitors and Professions Allied to Medicine has recommended an increase of 3.3 per cent. in national pay scales.

The School Teachers review body has recommended a 3.3 per cent. increase in teachers' pay.

The Senior Salaries review body has recommended:

(a) increases of 2.75 per cent. in the minimum and maximum values of each of the pay ranges for the senior civil service. Within the ranges, Departments will determine individual salaries on the basis of performance. The Government expect the cost of the settlement to be absorbed by the final savings arising from staff reductions following senior management reviews;

(b) increases for senior military officers in the range 2.75 to 6 per cent. averaging 3.7 per cent., including changes in pay structures;

(c) restructuring of judicial pay, following a two-year review, with pay increases in the range 3 to 7 per cent., averaging 6 per cent.

Separately, for armed forces personnel within the AFPRB's remit, there is a pay addition of 1 per cent. carried forward from last year's report to reflect the outcome of the quinquennial review of the value of armed forces pensions in comparison with the private sector. Similarly, the DDRB has recommended a pay addition of 0.35 per cent. to reflect narrower pension differentials with the private sector, with a further 0.35 per cent. next year.

The basic pay increases average some 3.3 per cent. This is lower than the corresponding average of 4 per cent. last year. This is a move in the right direction, but the recommendations are still high considering the general level of public sector pay settlements in the past year, and higher than the retail prices index. It would be difficult to meet the costs from existing spending plans without squeezing services.

The Government have always said that they will accept recommendations of the pay review bodies unless there are compelling reasons not to. We intend to accept the recommendations this year but, as last year, we intend to stage their introduction. Staging the recommendations for the coming year will make it possible to accommodate the costs within spending plans without prejudicing the planned level of service delivery. In addition, staging reflects our view that settlements should be lower this year both generally throughout the public sector and specifically for the pay review body groups.

We shall implement a first staged payment of 2 per cent. on 1 April, with the balance of the recommended increases to be paid from 1 December. This meets the requirements on affordability and the approach to public sector pay, while implementing the increases recommended by the review bodies in full by the end of this year.

The staging arrangements will apply to all groups. They will extend to the recommended increases in the minima and maxima of the senior civil service pay ranges and the awards Departments will determine for the senior civil service within the framework set by the SSRB recommendations.

We welcome the NPRB's continuing support for the principles of local pay determination, and we will consider further the NPRB recommendations on the future structure and coverage of the local pay arrangements.

We note the AFPRB recommendations for changes in certain allowances which are related to the proposals of the independent review of the armed forces manpower, career and remuneration structures. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence is considering the Government's response to the review.

The separate pensions-related adjustments in this year's recommendations by the DDRB and those in last year's recommendations by the AFPRB will be paid as recommended from 1 April.

The pay of Members of Parliament is linked to the pay ranges for the senior civil service. It follows that Members of Parliament and Ministers should be treated on the same basis as other groups, with an increase of 2 per cent. from 1 April and the balance on 1 December.

The SSRB report includes the outcome of its two-year review of judicial pay. We are grateful to it for this work. The recommendations give some members of the judiciary significant pay increases, but this is supported by the findings of the review. We intend to accept the recommendations as proposed, subject to the same staging as other groups.

The table summarises the main pay recommendations of the review bodies

	Main pay recommendations	Paybill costs	
	Per cent.	£ million	Per cent.
AFPRB: Armed forces	[1]3–3.4	181	3.3
DDRB: Doctors and dentists	[2]3.4	230	3.4
NPRB: Nursing staff, midwives, health visitors and professions allied to medicine	[1]3.3	271	3.3
STRB: School teachers	3.3	376	3.3
SSRB: Senior salaries/Senior civil service	[4]2.75	—	—
Senior military	2.75–6.0	—	3.7
Judiciary	3.0–7.0	10	6.0

[1] There is also an additional 1 per cent. on pay as part of the staged pensions-related adjustment agreed last year.

[2] DDRB has also recommended an additional 0.35 per cent. this year and next, as a staged pensions-related adjustment.

[3] Recommended increase in national pay rates.

[4] Increases in pay band minima and maxima. Recommendations for the senior civil service affect the pay framework within which Departments will set individual pay rates.

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 February. [13437]

The Prime Minister: This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Attorney-General if he will provide a breakdown of the spending by his Department on external advice in relation to the Scott inquiry, indicating how much has been spent on legal advice and from whom it was obtained. [14525]

The Attorney-General: The amount spent by my departments on external advice—all of it legal advice—in relation to giving evidence to the Scott inquiry and the preparation of the Government's response to the report is £56,526. Advice was obtained from Messrs Mishcon de Reya, solicitors, and from Jonathan Sumption QC, William Charles, Stephen Richards and Mark Howard of counsel.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Attorney-General what was the total cost of salaries since 1992 paid to persons in his Department employed on a part-time or full-time basis in any capacity relating to the Scott inquiry. [14524]

The Attorney-General: Several officials in my departments have been involved in matters relating to the Scott inquiry from time to time as part of their normal duties, but with the following exception the direct salary cost is unquantifiable. Two press officers were seconded to my office for short periods in 1996, the salary cost of about £2,300 being met by their home department.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Funding (Multilateral Agencies)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will list for each of the past five years the funding through discretionary spending to multilateral agencies provided by his Department; [14325]

(2) if he will list for each of the last five years the agencies which have received moneys from his Department's discretionary spending. [14326]

Dr. Liam Fox: The details are in the table. Full details of ODA expenditure over the past five years are contained in "British Aid Statistics", copies of which were sent to the Libraries of both Houses in January.

£ million

Agency	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97[1]
UN Development Programme	30.10	31.24	28.21	26.03	26.00
UNICEF	9.54	9.51	12.77	13.60	8.50
UNIFEM	0.15	0.15	0.15	0.15	0.18
UN Population Fund	9.42	10.78	11.25	6.75	10.00
World Health Organisation	11.97	16.60	12.77	5.97	12.60
UN Agency for Palestinian Refugees	6.00	9.00	6.00	6.67	5.50
International Timber Trade Organisation	0.05	0.11	0.06	0.06	0.06
UN High Commissioner for Refugees	5.50	18.85	15.06	16.05	0.00
International research organisations	8.62	8.64	8.49	8.98	7.59
World Bank Energy Sector Management Assistance Programme	0.35	0.40	0.40	0.40	0.40
Total	81.71	105.27	95.16	84.65	70.83

[1] Estimated.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what the forecast level of discretionary expenditure to multilateral agencies was for 1997–98 before the Chancellor's financial statement of November 1996; [14329]

(2) what is the current forecast level of discretionary expenditure to multilateral agencies from his Department for 1997–98. [14335]

Dr. Fox: The planned level of discretionary expenditure for multilateral organisations in 1997–98 was £58.63 million. The current forecast for 1997–98 is £58.63 million.

TRANSPORT

Great Eastern Rail Services

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what level of performance bond will be required of First Bus for the franchise for Great Eastern rail services. [14626]

Mr. Watts: The value of the performance bond which could be called in by the franchising director in the event of the need to terminate the Great Eastern franchise is £9.5 million.

Road Safety

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the reports received from the European Federal Road Safety Agency in respect of the prevention of accidents involving drivers under the influence of medicinal drugs; and if he will make a statement. [14484]

Mr. Bowis: I am aware of a report by a group chaired by Dr. De Gier which was published by the European Road Safety Federation on behalf of the European Commission. Many of its recommendations on medicinal drugs would require action at Community level or could not be implemented without extensive investigation or research.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action his Department has taken to dissuade drivers from driving under the influence of *(a)* psychoactive and *(b)* other drugs; and if he will make a statement. [14516]

Mr. Bowis: A driver who drives while impaired by a drug is liable to conviction for the offence of "driving when under the influence of drink or drugs".

In addition, the "Highway Code" states:
"You MUST NOT drive under the influence of drugs or medicines. When taking prescribed medicines, ask your doctor if it is safe to drive. When taking other medicines, ask the pharmacist".

We shall consider any further action in the light of findings from the three-year survey of road fatalities that we are currently undertaking.

Computer Crime

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many cases of computer hacking, fraud and theft, including theft of computer chips his Department has recorded in the last five years. [14557]

Mr. Bowis: The number of cases of computer hacking, fraud and theft, including theft of computer chips the Department of Transport has recorded in the last five years is 71.

Mr. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions in each of the last five years computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers in his Department. [14556]

Mr. Bowis: The following is the information:

1991–92: None
1992–93: None
1993–94: None
1994–95: One
1995–96: Two.

Driving Examiners

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many contracts of employment introduced by the Driving Standards Agency in the last year restricted examiners to working one day per month; and what proportion this constitutes of the total. [14586]

Mr. Bowis: None. The 322 examiners recruited by the agency on fixed-period contracts are guaranteed a minimum of one day's work per month but they have generally been required to work for longer periods. Contract staff currently represent some 28 per cent. of the total driving examiner work force.

Fishing Boats (Safety)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the draft safety regulations for fishing boats under 12 m in length to be brought into force; in what form they will be brought before the House; what financial help will be made available for boat owners to enable them to comply with these regulations; and if he will make a statement. [13452]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. George Foulkes, dated February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your Question about the proposed safety regulations for fishing vessels less than 12 metres in length.

Since I wrote to you on 3 December 1996, the draft Code of Safe Practice for Registered Fishing Vessels Less Than 12 Metres Length has been approved by the Code Steering Committee and has been endorsed by the Fishing Industry Safety Group.

It is hoped that public consultation on the draft Code and on its supporting legislation will take place within the next two months and that publication of the Code will follow shortly thereafter. Owners and skippers will have time to become familiar with the Code requirements and recommendations prior to its enforcement. It is expected that a Statutory Instrument to bring the Code into force will be presented to Parliament early in 1998.

With regard to financial help to vessel owners, grant aid is a question entirely for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) and I understand that MAFF Ministers will be considering this matter in the light of responses to the consultation exercise and once responses to that exercise have been analysed.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Jobcentres

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many jobcentres there are in England. [14579]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Ms Harriet Harman, dated 6 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me to reply to your question about the number of Jobcentres in England. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

I can confirm that there are currently 903 Jobcentres in England.

I hope this is helpful.

Further Education

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 3 February, *Official Report*, column *468*, what sanctions the Further Education Funding Council is able to apply to further education colleges who are operating deficits. [14646]

Mr. Paice: The Further Education Funding College applies no sanctions to further education colleges with operating deficits. Colleges that are categorised as being in a financially weak position are, however, required to draw up recovery plans.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *397*, when she last met the chairman or chief executive of the Further Education Funding Council to discuss the state of college finances. [14645]

Mr. Paice: My right hon. Friend has not met the chairman or chief executive of the Further Education Funding Council for England recently. On her behalf, as the Minister with responsibility for further education, I last met them to discuss the funding of further education on 5 February 1997.

Quantock School, Taunton

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she expects to publish the Office for Standards in Education report on the Quantock school, Taunton. [14393]

Mrs. Gillan: This is a matter for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

Schools (Capital Allocation)

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the capital allocation bids for schools made by Birmingham city council in each of the past five years, the amount of spending approved by her Department and the percentage of the bids that this represents. [13687]

Mrs. Gillan *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* Birmingham LEA's bids for capital expenditure on schools, the approved allocations and the allocations shown as a percentage of the bids in each of the past five years have been as follows:

Year	*Planned LEA expenditure £ million*	*Annual capital guideline (ACG) £ million*	*ACG as percentage of plans*	*Supplementary credit approvals (SCAs) £ million*
1993–94	27.3	6.25	23	1.7
1994–95	53.8	10.9	20	
1995–96	40.9	9.21	23	0.2
1996–97	59.83	5.38	9	1.28
1997–98	53.49	1.06	1.98	0.1

Birmingham city council submitted a bid totalling £41.95 million under the capital challenge fund. This included an educational component relating to school improvement work. The authority will receive support totalling £5.75 million over the next three years starting in 1997–98. This includes the rebuilding of Perry Beeches school—the authority's largest education project included in its bid.

Expenditure on voluntary aided and special agreement schools

£ thousand

Year	*Total bid*	*Total allocation*
1993–94	1,516	1,372
1994–95	1,674	1,132
1995–96	838	422
1996–97	773	193
1997–98	539	514

Total allocations include the LEA's annual allocation for minor works improvement projects and committed expenditure on projects started in previous financial years, which LEAs do not bid for. Therefore, percentage of allocation compared to the bid is not calculated. Total allocation quoted is that announced in the preceding December and excludes any in-year adjustments for individual projects.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many available places there are under the assisted places scheme in *(a)* Portsmouth grammar school, *(b)* Portsmouth high school for girls and *(c)* Sir John's college, Southsea; and how many have been taken up. [13919]

Mrs. Gillan: The information requested is given in the following table.

Assisted places scheme: Academic year 1996–97

	Number of assisted places available	*Number of assisted places taken up*
(a) Portsmouth grammar school	234	188
(b) Portsmouth high school for girls	180	135
(c) Sir John's college, Southsea	200	199

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Scottish Grand Committee

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if the Committee has considered if meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee in Scotland should be advertised in local and regional newspapers. [14815]

Mr. Michael J. Martin: At its meeting on 28 January, the Administration Committee considered a proposal from the Lord President that meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee held in Scotland might be advertised in regional and local newspapers.

The Committee endorsed the proposal, and agreed that the Scottish Office should act as the House's agent, subject to certain guidelines:

Such advertisements are drafted by House officials, not by the Scottish Office;

The relevant officials from the House and the Scottish Office should liaise in order to agree which newspapers the advertisements appear in; and

The cost of inserting the advertisements should be borne by the House, not by the Scottish Office.

Mr. Darling: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, what has been the cost of the meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee in Scotland in *(a)* the last Session of Parliament and *(b)* the current Session. [14293]

Mr. Beith *[holding answer 4 February 1997]:* Detailed costs are not currently recorded for individual meetings, but a manual check has been done of the accounting records. The approximate costs to date of the 13 meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee held in the last Session and the first three meetings in the current Session are given in the table. These may not be the final costs as some invoices and claims may still be outstanding. Excluded from these figures are staff standard hours and overtime, some Members' travel and the costs to Government Departments or others in attending the Committees.

Approximate cost of meetings by Session

		£
1995–96 Session:	13 meetings	114,362.00
1996–97 Session (up to 13 January 1997)	3 meetings	19,446.00
		133,808.00

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will list each meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee held in the current Parliament, its location, and in each case the cost of the meeting; what have been the total costs to date of the meetings; and what estimate he has made of the average increase in costs per session since July 1994. [13693]

Mr. Beith *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* The direct costs to date, coming within the purview of the House of Commons, for meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee held this Parliament up to 13 January 1997 are given in the table by financial year. These are not the final costs as there are still some invoices and claims outstanding. Excluded from these figures are staff standard hour costs and overtime, some travel by Members, and the costs to Government Departments or others in attending the Committees.

It has not been possible to establish a meaningful trend, as the costs of each meeting are dependent on many variables. For example, the cost of travel to different locations varies and not all local authorities charge for room hire or the provision of policing.

The average cost to date for meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee is approximately £7,500.

Location and financial year	*Date of meeting*	*Cost £*	*Average*
1994–95			
Edinburgh	5 December 1994	8,226	
Glasgow	19 December 1994	2,199	
Edinburgh	13 February 1995	9,685	
		20,110	6,703
1995–96			
Aberdeen	23 October 1995	2,771	
Edinburgh	11 December 1995	8,023	
Glasgow	18 December 1995	4,842	
Edinburgh	15 January 1996	11,045	
Stirling	29 January 1996	8,288	
Inverness	5 February 1996	7,576	
Aberdeen	19 February 1996	7,893	
Kilmarnock	4 March 1996	6,951	
		57,389	7,174
1996–97			
Inverness	22 April 1996	8,093	
Dundee	13 May 1996	15,439	
Dunfermline	20 May 1996	8,758	
Ayr	10 June 1996	6,539	
Perth	17 June 1996	7,737	
Dumfries	8 July 1996	13,178	
Cupar	25 November 1996	8,620	
Hamilton	9 December 1996	6,136	
Edinburgh	13 January 1997	4,690	
		79,190	8,799
Total this Parliament		156,689	7,834

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefits Fraud Hotline

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many calls have been made to the fraud hotline, broken down by type of benefit and outcome of investigation. [13051]

Mr. Heald: Up to end of December 1996, in the region of 130,000 calls had been made to the national benefit fraud hotline. Approximately 97,000 referrals have been received by the benefit fraud investigation service so far. Of these, around 76,000 were recorded on the fraud management information system and 5,000 have been recorded separately as part of spotlight initiative. The remaining 16,000 cases are either in transit between offices, awaiting initial scrutiny before entry on to the system, or linked to a referral previously received where an investigation is already under way.

From the recorded referrals, so far around 31,000 are being investigated, with 15,500 completed, of which 5,100 have scored benefit savings in the region of £14.1 million. The remaining 15,500 are expected to generate an additional £13.4 million in benefit savings. We believe that the existence of the fraud hotline also has a significant, although unquantifiable, impact on the level of fraud committed.

The fraud hotline caller does not always know the benefits in payment. Consequently, details of calls on a benefit-by-benefit basis have not been kept. This information is available for general fraud referrals, but it is not possible to track referrals in this way for specific fraud initiatives, such as hotline.

Benefit Claimants

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many and what proportion of claimants of *(a)* income support, *(b)* housing benefit and *(c)* council tax benefit have earnings above the relevant disregard, giving figures separately for (i) couples, (ii) single people and (iii) lone parents. [13050]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table:

Income support/housing benefit/council tax benefit recipients with disregarded earnings: May 1995

	Income support		*Housing benefit*		*Council tax benefit*	
	Number	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*
Couples	51,000	5.4	149,000	28.9	190,000	23.9
Single without dependants	33,000	0.9	98,000	10.1	81,000	6.7
Single with dependants	43,000	3.8	102,000	76.9	92,000	74.3
All cases	127,000	2.2	349,000	21.6	362,000	17.1

Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. Numbers refer to cases with earnings brought into account above the relevant disregard.
3. Proportions expressed are recipients with earnings above the relevant disregard as a proportion of the relevant group type (i.e., all couples/single/lone parents).
4. Figures refer to benefit units which may be a single person or a couple.
5. For the purpose of housing benefit and council tax benefit, earners have been identified as those with earnings from employment and self employment including those with part-time earnings.
6. Housing benefit/council tax benefit cases also in receipt of income support have been excluded as earnings have not been disregarded in terms of the housing benefit/council tax benefit assessment as they have already been taken into account in the Income Support assessment.

Sources:
1. Income support statistics quarterly inquiry May 1995.
2. Housing benefit management information system annual 1 per cent. sample inquiry, without income support, taken at the end of May 1995.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what payments are made to doctors carrying out medical examinations for incapacity benefit claims; and what was the total cost in the last year for which figures are available. [14028]

Mr. Burt: The administration of Benefits Agency medical services is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Jimmy Hood, dated 5 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent parliamentary question about what payments are made to doctors carrying out medical examinations for Incapacity Benefit (IB) claims; and what was the total cost in the last year for which figures are available.

Doctors who undertake medical examinations in connection with IB are self employed contractors and are paid fees for the examinations they conduct. Additional expenses are also paid where appropriate.

For examinations conducted on Benefits Agency (BA) premises, doctors are paid a fee of £30.70 per hour. If the examination is conducted in a client's home, the fees are £37.90 for up to and including 1.5 hours, £56.90 for over 1.5 and up to 2.5 hours, and £88.40 for over 2.5 hours. Travelling and subsistence costs are also paid, based on prescribed amounts.

The total cost for the year ending March 1996 was £12,187,989, this figure is provisional and subject to change.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Rent Allowances

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many single people *(a)* under the age of 25, *(b)* between 25 and 60 and *(c)* over 60 years are currently receiving rent allowances (i) in total and (ii) in each local authority area in England. [13779]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

	Single people without children receiving rent allowances by standard region and age as at May 1995				*Lone parents receiving rent allowances by standard region and age at May 1995*				*Total all cases*
	Claimant aged under 25	*Claimant aged between 25 and 60*	*Claimant aged over 60*	*Total*	*Claimant aged under 25*	*Claimant aged between 25 and 60*	*Claimant aged over 60*	*Total*	
North	9,000	23,000	24,000	56,000	4,000	13,000	—	17,000	73,000
Yorkshire and Humberside	14,000	38,000	30,000	83,000	7,000	19,000	—	26,000	109,000
East Midlands	11,000	28,000	19,000	58,000	5,000	15,000	—	20,000	78,000
East Anglia	5,000	15,000	19,000	39,000	2,000	10,000	—	12,000	51,000
South-East	64,000	220,000	147,000	431,000	25,000	101,000	—	126,000	557,000
Greater London	35,000	139,000	62,000	236,000	10,000	49,000	—	59,000	295,000
Rest of South-East	29,000	81,000	85,000	195,000	15,000	52,000	—	67,000	262,000
South-West	19,000	46,000	34,000	99,000	6,000	21,000	—	27,000	125,000
West Midlands	11,000	34,000	33,000	78,000	6,000	21,000	—	26,000	104,000
North-West	21,000	69,000	54,000	145,000	14,000	32,000	—	46,000	191,000
England	153,000	474,000	360,000	987,000	68,000	231,000	1,000	300,000	1,287,000
Wales	9,000	30,000	15,000	54,000	5,000	14,000	—	20,000	74,000
Scotland	11,000	37,000	24,000	72,000	6,000	15,000	—	21,000	93,000
Great Britain	173,000	541,000	398,000	1,112,000	79,000	261,000	1,000	341,000	1,453,000

Notes:
1. Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. — = nil or negligible.
3. Due to rounding totals may not sum.
4. Single people with or without children may have non-dependants in their households.
5. Rent allowances may be paid to regulated, deregulated and housing association tenants.

Source:
Housing benefit management information system, annual 1 per cent. sample May 1995.

Benefit Uprating

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the £16,000 upper capital limit for housing benefit and council tax benefit would be in 1997–98 if it had been uprated by *(a)* prices and *(b)* earnings since introduction. [14286]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table:

	£
Uprated by prices	[1]21,408.90
Uprated by average earnings	[2]22,820.65

Notes:
[1] Based on the retail prices index (all items) less rent, local taxes and mortgage interest payments.
[2] Based on the average earnings index (whole economy unadjusted).
1. Council tax benefit replaced community charge benefit in April 1990.

Source:
Office for National Statistics.

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the value of the £3,000 capital limit for housing benefit and council tax benefit in 1997–98 if it had been uprated by *(a)* prices and *(b)* earnings since its introduction. [14285]

Mr. Evans: The information is set out in the table:

	£
Uprated by prices	[1]4,421.40
Uprated by average earnings	[2]5,111.65

Notes:
[1] Based on the retail prices index (all items) less rent, local taxes and mortgage interest payments.
[2] Based on the average earnings index (whole economy unadjusted).
1. Council tax benefit replaced community charge benefit in April 1990.

Source:
Office for National Statistics.

War Pensions

Mr. Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what estimate he has made of the administrative costs of *(a)* the War Pensions Agency and *(b)* the war pensions appeals tribunals in 1996–97; [14021]

(2) how many staff are employed by the War Pensions Agency, and how many there were in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1990. [14019]

Mr. Heald: These are matters for Mr. Kevin Caldwell, chief executive of the War Pensions Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from K. C. Caldwell to Mr. Jon Trickett, dated 5 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the administrative costs of the War Pensions Agenda (WPA) and Ware Pensions Appeal Tribunals in 1996–97 and the number of people now employed in the Agency and employed in 1979 and 1990.

The budget for the WPA's administrative costs for 1996/97 is £36.991m. The estimated spend is forecast to be within this budget.

War Pensions Appeal Tribunals do not come under the jurisdiction of the WPA. However, we have contacted the Pension Appeal Tribunals (PAT) for England/Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and their estimated administrative costs for 1996/97 are as follows:

England/Wales: £2,450,284.00

Scotland: £274,561.00

Northern Ireland: £50,300.00.

The average number of staff employed by the WPA in the current financial year is 1346. Comparable staffing figures for the years 1979 and 1990 are not available. The WPA began operating in April 1994. Before that date, staff numbers were included in the Benefits Agency's complement and, before 1991, in the Department of Social Security figures. Relevant comparisons with WPA's current staff levels cannot therefore be made for years before 1994/95.

I hope you find my reply helpful.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what final payments to an individual by an employer on termination of employment are taken into account when assessing entitlement to *(a)* contribution-based and *(b)* income-based jobseeker's allowance; [14601]

(2) how payments in lieu of notice affect entitlement to *(a)* contribution-based jobseeker's allowance and *(b)* income-based jobseeker's allowance. [14602]

Mr. Roger Evans:

Payments made on Termination of Full-time Work—16 hours or more a week.

Normal earnings, expenses and any earnings held "in hand" which are paid on termination of employment are ignored when assessing entitlement to contribution-based and income-based jobseeker's allowance.

Compensation payments, for example pay in lieu of notice or remuneration, made in respect of the termination of the employment, and holiday pay payable at termination, have the effect of treating the individual as continuing to be in full-time work after the termination of employment. Neither contribution-based nor income-based jobseeker's allowance is payable after the termination for a period equivalent to that for which the compensation or holiday pay has been paid.

Payments made under employment protection legislation for unfair dismissal, or under trades union legislation for unfair dismissal or redundancy on grounds of involvement in trade union activities, are taken into account as earnings in contribution-based and income-based jobseeker's allowance, subject to the appropriate disregard, normally £5 a week. They are taken into account for a period equivalent to that for which the payments has been made.

Lump sum redundancy payments and holiday pay payable more than four weeks after the termination of the employment are treated as capital and do not affect contribution-based jobseeker's allowance. Income-based jobseeker's allowance is affected only if the total capital held by the individual and his family is more than £3,000.

Payments made on Termination of Part-time Work—less than 16 hours a week.

Normal earnings, expenses and any earnings held "in hand" which are paid on termination of employment are ignored when assessing entitlement to contribution-based and income-based jobseeker's allowance.

Compensation payments, holiday pay payable at termination, and payments made under employment protection or trades union legislation are taken into account as earnings in contribution-based and income-based jobseeker's allowance, subject to the appropriate disregard, normally £5 a week. They are taken into account for a period equivalent to that for which the payment has been made.

Lump sum redundancy payments and holiday pay payable more than four weeks after the termination of the employment are treated in the same way as on termination of full-time work.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

BSE (Germany)

2. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with his German counterpart since the discovery of BSE in cattle in that country. [13104]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I and my predecessors have had a number of discussions with our German counterparts on BSE since the first case was reported in Germany in March 1994.

Animal Welfare

12. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the protocol on animal welfare which he has tabled at the intergovernmental conference. [13116]

Mrs. Browning: Discussions continue on our proposal for a protocol on animal welfare which would place a legally binding obligation on Community institutions. I am pleased to report an encouraging response.

BSE

13. **Ms Corston:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from United Kingdom farm workers' representatives concerning BSE. [13117]

Mr. Boswell: In May 1996, I met representatives of the rural, agricultural and allied workers group of the Transport and General Workers Union to review the BSE situation, including implications for jobs and safety matters.

Conservation

14. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps the Government have taken to promote technical conservation measures. [13118]

Mr. Baldry: I have brought together in the fisheries conservation group practical fishermen, fisheries scientists and fisheries managers. They have reviewed the current technical conservation measures and continue to provide invaluable advice on the European Commission's current proposal for new EU-wide technical measures. I am promoting these practical ideas in the current negotiations in Brussels.

Fruit and Vegetables

15. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the value, in the last year for which figures are available, of home-grown fruit and vegetables which were left unsold. [13119]

Mr. Boswell: We do not have information about the removal of unsaleable fruit and vegetables from the market by growers and traders. However, in the 1995–96 season, public intervention in the UK removed 8,785 tonnes of apples, pears and cauliflowers at a cost of £827,000.

Common Fisheries Policy

18. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the impact of the enlargement of the European Union on the common fisheries policy. [13122]

Mr. Baldry: Negotiations for the further enlargement of the European Union are not scheduled to start until after the conclusions of the intergovernmental conference. The possible impact of enlargement on the common fisheries policy will depend on the accession terms proposed, which will be discussed in full with the UK industry before the Government determine their fisheries objectives for the negotiations.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next proposes to meet the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations to discuss the common fisheries policy. [13120]

Mr. Baldry: I plan next to meet the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations to discuss the common fisheries policy on 25 February.

Common Agricultural Policy

19. **Sir Trevor Skeet:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress he has made in advancing the case for fundamental reform of the CAP with the EU Commission and other member states. [13124]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Both the Commission and most EU member states now recognise that further CAP reform is inevitable. This has been the Government's position for some time.

Broiler Chickens

22. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to improve the welfare of broiler chickens. [13127]

Mrs. Browning: We are working in various ways to improve these in line with the recommendations of the Farm Animal Welfare Council.

Farm Paperwork

23. **Mr. Sweeney:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has taken to reduce the amount of paperwork required of farmers. [13128]

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps the Government have taken to reduce the amount of non-BSE related paperwork required of farmers. [13108]

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales last year commissioned an efficiency scrutiny on simplifying farmers' paperwork, which included working farmers on the team. We are now implementing the bulk of the recommendations.

Live Animal Transport

24. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps the Government have taken to consult the farming industry over the new rules on animal transportation. [13129]

Mrs. Browning: We have consulted the farming industry extensively on our plans. The Department has issued three consultation documents—in October 1995, and in August and December 1996. Numerous discussions have been held with farming interests, including a workshop entirely devoted to the subject, which my right hon. and learned Friend and I held on 5 November 1996.

Beef Exports

25. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he estimates the European ban on British beef will be lifted. [13130]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We will shortly submit our proposals for a certified herds scheme, which will be the basis of the first step towards the phased lifting of the export ban; we will press the Commission to give them urgent consideration so that we can begin exports of meat and meat products from these herds as soon as possible.

Rural White Paper

26. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received to the follow-up to the rural White Paper. [13131]

Mr. Boswell: We have received a number of representations and a very positive response from people and organisations involved in rural issues to the follow-up to the rural White Paper "Rural England 1996".

Nutritional Policy

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his nutritional policy. [13111]

Mrs. Browning: Our policy is that consumers should have access to information that enables them to choose a safe, balanced, and nutritious diet.

Food Labelling

Mr. Day: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has received regarding the adequacy of present food labelling laws. [13121]

Mrs. Browning: Food labelling laws are wide ranging. We continue to receive representations from a variety of interested parties about them.

Fishing Targets

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps the Government have taken to ensure that the United Kingdom fishing fleet will meet multi-annual guidance programme targets. [13125]

Mr. Baldry: The Government are providing up to £53 million for a voluntary decommissioning programme and have introduced a range of changes to the licensing regime. We are also in discussion with the Commission about its figures for UK performance to date. If the necessary changes are agreed, we will be within a handful of points of our overall tonnage targets and will have met the target for engine power.

Natural Habitats

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to encourage farmers to protect natural habitats; and if he will make a statement. [13126]

Mr. Boswell: Over the last three years, the Ministry has greatly expanded the range of voluntary incentive schemes to encourage environmentally beneficial farming practices. The environmentally sensitive areas, countryside stewardship and habitat and moorland schemes in particular encourage farmers to protect natural habitats.

In addition, the Ministry funds free conservation advice to farmers and its codes of good agricultural practice provide guidance to all farmers on protecting the environment.

Geese

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the number of geese slaughtered for food in the last year; what estimate he has made of their average value; and if he will make a statement. [13436]

Mrs. Browning: In 1996, it is estimated that 500,000 geese were slaughtered for food in England and Wales, with an estimated average farm gate value of £14 per bird.

Cattle Cull

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking *(a)* to increase incineration capacity for cattle culled over the over-30-months slaughter scheme, *(b)* to reduce storage costs and *(c)* to increase throughput of cattle; and if he will make a statement. [14523]

Mr. Baldry: The Government are seeking to increase the incineration capacity available to the over-30-months scheme by competitive tender.

The unit cost of storing frozen carcases has been minimised by the competitive procurement of commercial cold store capacity and the conversion of three Government-owned stores; it will be further minimised by the consolidation of residual stocks and release of storage capacity. Stocks are being reduced as quickly as the availability of suitable rendering and direct incineration capacity allow.

Producers are now able to present animals for processing under the over-30-months scheme at their normal point of slaughter. To increase throughput would not therefore be justified.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many incinerators are available to deal with BSE casualties; what is their capacity; and what is their daily throughput. [14522]

Mr. Baldry: There are currently 13 incinerators accepting on-farm slaughtered cattle over 30 months of age. The theoretical capacity available is 285 cattle per day, but actual capacity depends upon the volume of other business. The average daily throughput of over-30-months cattle through incinerators since the beginning of the year has been 180 cattle.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what means of disposal is planned to be used for the disposal of the remaining meat and bonemeal from animals slaughtered under the over-30-months scheme; [14026]

(2) what is the planned timetable for completing the disposal of meat and bonemeal from animals slaughtered under the over-30-months scheme. [14027]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 5 February 1997]:* The Government are actively pursuing a number of options for the disposal of rendered meat and bonemeal in store derived from cattle slaughtered under the over-30-months scheme. The Intervention Board executive agency recently agreed a contract with a high temperature incineration company to burn MBM and is in the process of tendering for further incineration capacity from which additional MBM disposal facilities are expected to emerge. Also, combustion trials have been carried out at PowerGen's test facilities at Ratcliffe on Soar, Nottinghamshire, and at National Power's test facilities at Didcot, Oxfordshire, to establish the feasibility of burning

MBM in power stations. These trials have been monitored by the Environment Agency and the results will be placed on the public register. The test results are being fully evaluated, with full weight being given to the protection of human health and of the environment in reaching any conclusion. It is too early to say when a decision will be made or, therefore, when the disposal of the MBM from cattle slaughtered under the OTMS will be completed.

Computer Crime

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on how many occasions in each of the last five years computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers in his Department. [14562]

Mr. Boswell: There have been no known instances of anyone external to the Department illegally accessing MAFF's computer systems in the past five years. As far as we can ascertain, there have been no recorded incidents of hacking internally.

Mr. Foster: To ask he Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of computer hacking, fraud and theft, including theft of computer chips, his Department has recorded in the last five years. [14563]

Mr. Boswell: The number of cases of computer hacking, fraud and theft recorded in the Department in the past five years is as follows:

Incident	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Hacking	0	0	0	0	0
Fraud	0	0	0	0	0
Theft	12	5	21	21	19

Genetic Engineering

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the *(a)* dates and *(b)* conclusions of the meetings which his Department has held with food producers to discuss genetic engineering in the last two months; and if he will make a statement. [14485]

Mrs. Browning: I held a series of meetings on 7 January with the animal feed trade, food manufacturers, retailers and consumer organisations to discuss genetic modification. All groups were keen to ensure that consumers were fully informed about the potential benefits genetic modification offers.

The Department also organised a very successful consultation meeting on 22 January with a wide range of interested groups including environmental and non-governmental organisations, consumer representatives and food producers. The meeting provided an opportunity for those with concerns to air them and identify any changes needed to existing safeguards. These results will be considered further at a national biotechnology conference to be held on 10 March.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment his Department has made of the potential dangers of allowing unprocessed genetically engineered maize to enter the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [14486]

Mrs. Browning: The Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes advised that the use of processed genetically modified maize was safe, although there was a small but finite risk associated with the use of Ciba Geigy's GM maize in an unprocessed form. The ACNFP's concerns were examined in detail by three EC scientific committees, which concluded that the risk was too small to justify banning imports into the Community. There are therefore no grounds on which the Government can legally object to the use of this material.

Live Animal Transport (MV Cap Afrique)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the consignment of piglets exported on 24 January on the MV Cap Afrique was accompanied by an export health certificate as worded in model 111 of the annexe to Council directive 64/432/EEC. [14604]

Mrs. Browning: Yes.

Cattle Tracing

Mr. Charles Wardle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on measures to improve the traceability of cattle. [13123]

Mr. Baldry: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) on 10 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *104*. We are currently considering the responses to the consultation exercise on our proposals.

Farms (Negative Equity)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many full-time farm businesses had a negative equity in each year since 1985; and if he will make a statement. [12757]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 28 January 1997]:* Results of the farm business survey indicate that the proportion of farms in the sample with negative equity did not exceed 1 per cent. in any year since 1986–87, the first for which this information is readily obtainable.

Departmental Publicity

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list *(a)* his Department's budgeted expenditure on (i) advertising, (ii) publicity and (iii) public information campaigns for the period January to March 1997 and *(b)* the actual expenditure on (1) advertising, (2) publicity and (3) public information campaigns in the period January to March in each of the past five years. [13459]

Mr. Boswell: Expenditure on advertising, publicity and public information campaigns, January to March, for each

of the last five financial years—and an estimate for the current financial year—are as follows:

	£
1991–92	1,757,000
1992–93	684,000
1993–94	1,699,000
1994–95	1,142,000
1995–96	1,590,000
1996–97	[1]1,160,000

[1] A separate allocation, amounting to £1.7 million in total, has been established specifically for the production and distribution of information relating to BSE. About £860,000 of that is available for January to March 1997.

HEALTH

GP Trainees

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many trainee general practitioners there were in each training centre for each of the last five years; and how many places were available. [13756]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is not available. However, the numbers of general practitioner trainees by region is available in "General Medical Statistics England and Wales", copies of which are available in the Library.

District Nurses and Health Visitors

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* district nurses and *(b)* health visitors there were in each health authority in London in each of the last five years. [13654]

Mr. Horam: Information for the five years to 1995, the latest available, has been placed in the Library.

Volatile Substance Abuse

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will seek the withdrawal of the Health Education Authority's literature published on 14 October 1996 in respect of volatile substance abuse. [13660]

Mr. Burns: No. The Department of Health believes that young people need to learn of the very real risks of volatile substance abuse. The available evidence suggests that the overwhelming majority of abusers learn about volatile substance abuse from friends and not from health education materials where they are told that it can kill.

Prostate Cancer

Sir Julian Critchley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department will circulate to GPs' surgeries a leaflet advising on the dangers of prostate cancer and the availability of a prostate-specific antigen test. [13916]

Mr. Horam: The national health service centre for reviews and dissemination has today issued a patient leaflet, "Screening for prostate cancer: the evidence", to general practitioners and other health professionals which includes up-to-date information on the prostate specific antigen test. Copies will be placed in the Library.

The Department is also planning to produce material which will provide general information and advice for men in their middle years on a wide range of health topics, including prostate cancer. The material, which we are aiming to launch later this year, will be distributed through a number of outlets. We anticipate that this will include general practitioners' surgeries.

HIV–AIDS

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total amount of Government research expenditure on HIV–AIDS in 1996–97; and how many people received treatment for HIV–AIDS in 1996–97. [13999]

Mr. Horam: The total Government expenditure in 1996–97 on research on HIV–AIDS is estimated at £13.7 million. This figure includes expenditure by the Medical Research Council, the Department of Health and other Government Departments. There is relatively little contribution towards HIV–AIDS research from other sources such as charities. The Department of Health does not collect information on all treatments given to those living with HIV and AIDS. The survey of prevalent diagnosed HIV infections estimates that 13,817 individuals with diagnosed HIV infection were reported as having received care from statutory medical services during 1995. Information for 1996–97 is not available. These data are subject to under-reporting.

Health Expenditure

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the United Kingdom's gross domestic product was devoted to health in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1990 and *(c)* the latest year for which figures are available. [14239]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is contained in the table.

Year	*United Kingdom gross national health service expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product*
1979–80	4.7
1990–91	5.2
1995–96	5.8

1. Gross domestic product adjusted to remove the distortion caused by the abolition of domestic rates.

2. UK NHS expenditure figures include figures for Northern Ireland which are estimates due to the fact that Northern Ireland's health services and personal social services are provided on an integrated basis.

Medicinal Drugs (Driving)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is his Department's policy in respect of driving under the influence of medicinal drugs; and if he will make a statement; [14518]

(2) if he will list the medicinal drugs on sale in the United Kingdom which his Department assesses to affect drivers' reactions when taken in normal doses; and if he will make a statement. [14585]

Mr. Malone: Where there is evidence that a medicine can affect driving ability, this information is included in the summary of product characteristics for the doctor, and suitable warnings are provided on the label or in the leaflet for the patient as appropriate. The "British National Formulary" carries prescribing information for doctors, including information on side-effects that can impair driving ability, and advises pharmacists to attach a cautionary label when dispensing medicines that can cause drowsiness. The Medicines Control Agency reminded doctors and pharmacists of the possible effects of medicines on driving in its bulletin, "Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance" in November 1995, copies of which are available in the Library. This identifies groups of medicines which may impair driving ability.

Benzodiazepines and Tricyclates

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has evaluated into the *(a)* short-term and *(b)* long-term effects associated with (i) benzodiazepines and (ii) tricyclates; and if he will make a statement. [14517]

Mr. Malone: For all marketed medicines, the available research into the side effects—both short and long—term— of benzodiazepines and tricyclic antidepressants was assessed at the time of granting the marketing authorisations and continues to be evaluated by the Medicines Control Agency. Recognised side-effects for both categories of drug are included in the authorised product information and the "British National Formulary".

Medicinal Drugs (Labelling)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans his Department has to require clearer labelling on medicinal drugs in respect of *(a)* verbal descriptions of products, *(b)* symbols and *(c)* the use of colours to draw attention to the possible side effects and dangers of products; and if he will make a statement; [14583]

(2) what guidelines his Department issues to drug manufacturers on the labelling of their products in respect of *(a)* their contents and *(b)* dangers associated with their use; and if he will make a statement. [14520]

Mr. Malone: All medicines are required by United Kingdom legislation implementing directive 92/27/EEC—on the labelling of medicines for human use and on package leaflets—to give essential particulars of the product on the labelling, including a description of the product and any necessary warnings. Where appropriate the warnings are placed separately in a boxed area to draw the reader's attention. Symbols and pictograms which can be readily identified by the public are actively encouraged as a means of simplifying essential messages. Medicines must also be accompanied by further detailed information in an enclosed patient leaflet unless the labelling contains all the information necessary under the directive. The directive requirements are being phased in by therapeutic category and it is anticipated that these requirements will be met for all medicines by the end of 1998.

The European Community is currently consulting on detailed guidelines for the labelling of medicines covering, in particular, special warnings and information on excipients which are known to have a recognised action or effect. We are participating in producing these guidelines which are expected to be available later this year.

The Medicines Control Agency prepared guidelines for the pharmaceutical industry when directive 92/27/EEC was implemented into UK law and intends to issue a revised edition to reflect EC guidance as appropriate.

Medicinal Drugs (Sales to Children)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department has taken to reduce the sales of medicinal drugs to children under 16 years; and if he will make a statement. [14519]

Mr. Malone: We are considering the need for further restrictions on the sale of medicine to children and, subject to further consideration of the available evidence of risk, we will bring forward any necessary proposals.

Medicinal Drugs (Sales)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria his Department sets for medicinal drugs permitted to be sold over the counter; and if he will make a statement. [14584]

Mr. Malone: The criteria set for allowing medicines to be available over the counter are laid down in Council directive 92/26/EEC and have been incorporated into section 58A of the Medicines Act 1968. Medicines are considered unsuitable for sale or supply without a doctor's prescription when they:

- are likely to present a danger either directly or indirectly, even when used correctly, if utilised without medical supervision, or
- are frequently and to a very wide extent used incorrectly, and as a result are likely to present a direct or indirect danger to human health, or
- contain substances or preparations thereof the activity and/or side effects or which require further investigation, or
- are normally prescribed by a doctor to be administered parenterally.

Cancer Screening

Sir Julian Critchley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what factors underlie his Department's priorities in allocating funding for the screening of *(a)* prostrate cancer, *(b)* cervical cancer, and *(c)* breast cancer. [14378]

Mr. Horam: The Government look to the national screening committee for advice on the introduction, review, modification or cessation of population screening programmes. In order to determine priorities for screening, the national screening committee uses criteria

based upon the principles of screening developed by Wilson and Jungner for the World Health Organisation. The key principles are: that the condition should pose an important health problem; the natural history of the disease should be well understood; there should be a recognisable early stage; treatment at an early stage should be more beneficial than treatment started later; there should be a suitable test acceptable to the population with facilities for diagnosis and treatment; screening should be repeated at intervals where appropriate; the chance of physical or psychological harm to those screened should be less than the chance of benefit; the cost of a screening programme should be balanced against the benefit it provides.

Computer Crime

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasion in each of the last five years computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers in his Department. [14544]

Mr. Horam: There have been no reported incidents of illegal hacking on the Department of Health's computer systems over the last five years.

Mr. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of computer hacking, fraud and theft, including theft of computer chips his Department has recorded in the last five years. [14554]

Mr. Horam: For the calendar years 1992 to 1996 inclusive, 267 cases of computer theft—mostly minor—were reported, 21 of which concerned computer chips. No cases of hacking or fraud were reported during that period.

Meningitis

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the most common laboratory difficulties involved in diagnosing whether a patient is suffering from C group meningitis. [13018]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* Pre-treatment with antibiotics is the main cause of difficulty in diagnosing meningococcal infection. New molecular techniques currently being developed will help overcome this difficulty. A further difficulty is that the organism may be slow to grow which can delay diagnosis.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what occasions in the last five years a vaccination programme against type C meningitis has been commenced before there is an established strain link between the cases involved. [13013]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* Meningococcal immunisation programmes are advised only when the epidemiological evidence supports a link between the cases and at least one case has been identified as group C infection. Data on meningococcal immunisation programmes have been collected centrally only for the period since April 1995. We are aware of three community and 10 schools' meningococcal immunisation programmes in the period 1 April 1995 to 31 March 1996. Data are collected each March for the preceding full year. We are aware that all three community immunisation programmes and five of the school programmes were linked by the same strain.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate how long it currently takes, on average, for a microbiology laboratory test to identify whether a patient is suffering from the C group of meningitis. [13015]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* When alive meningococcus is isolated from a case—currently about 60 per cent. of cases—provisional confirmation of the serogroup as "C" can usually be made within 24 hours. Confirmation of this provisional typing will take longer. Quite frequently a meningococcus is not isolated, usually as a consequence of successful pre-hospital antibiotic treatment by the general practitioner, and confirmation of the "C" strain can then be done only by molecular methods at a reference laboratory. It cannot be achieved in all cases, and takes up to two weeks. In some cases, molecular methods do not provide a diagnosis and serological tests may then show evidence of infection several weeks after the acute episode.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Prison Visits

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the annual budget of the assisted prison visits scheme; what are the costs of administering the scheme in (i) the Northern Ireland Office and (ii) the Department of Health and Social Services; how many claims have been made from each of the prisons in Northern Ireland; and how much was allocated in payments to prisoners' families in each of the last five years. [14090]

Sir John Wheeler: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Northern Ireland Prison Service under its chief executive, Mr. Alan Shannon. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Alan Shannon to Ms Majorie Mowlam, dated 5 February 1997:

The Secretary of state has asked me to reply to the Parliamentary Question you tabled relating to the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme.

The Assisted Prison Visits Scheme in Northern Ireland is administered, on behalf of the Prison Service, by the Benefits Agency of the Department of Health and Social Services through its network of local offices. Claims are made in person and are paid in advance, either by travel warrant or by Girocheque.

The costs of the scheme, including the administration costs, are wholly borne by the Prison Service and are made up of the administration fee charged by the Benefits Agency, the staff costs (which are not separately quantified but which are in the order of £15k per annum) incurred by the Service and the amounts paid to eligible claimants.

The table below illustrates the breakdown of costs from the beginning of the 1992/93 financial year to 31 December 1996, the latest date for which figures are available. You will note that the number of claims paid in each year is split into local claims and those to prisons in England and Wales and Scotland; visits to Channel island prisons or the Isle of Man prison are not covered.

Financial year	Visits in Northern Ireland	Visits in Great Britain	Total paid out £ thousand	Administration costs £ thousand	Total cost £ thousand
1992–93	2,266	231	76.6	15.0	91.6
1993–94	2,437	344	95.0	17.4	112.4
1994–95	2,396	357	110.0	18.0	128.0
1995–96	2,336	257	86.7	17.6	104.3
1996–97	1,834	367	82.4	15.9	98.3

[1] Against a 1996–97 baseline provision of £145.0 thousand.

In order to come into line with the rest of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland increased the number of paid visits in any 12 month period to 26, with effect from January 1996.

I hope this is helpful.

Local Government Finance

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the general Exchequer grant allocations to district councils for the 1997–98 financial year. [14324]

Sir John Wheeler: The total provision for general Exchequer grant for 1997–98 is £37.7 million. Distribution of the grant will be in accordance with the statutory formula.

Social Security Benefits

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many individuals are in receipt of *(a)* disability living allowance, *(b)* incapacity benefit, *(c)* severe disablement benefit, *(d)* family credit, *(e)* income support, *(f)* jobseeker's allowance, *(g)* widow's benefit, *(h)* state retirement pension and (i) child benefit, in each parliamentary constituency. [13314]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject has been delegated to the Social Security Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Alec Wylie, and I have asked him to arrange for a response to be given.

Letter from Alec Wylie to Mr. Seamus Mallon, dated 4 February 1997:

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the number of people in receipt of various social security benefits in each parliamentary constituency.

I have attached a table which shows the number of customers in receipt of five of the benefits listed in your question. Unfortunately, information about Widows Benefit, Child Benefit and Retirement Pension is not available in the format you requested. It will also be some time before the figures are available for Jobseeker's Allowance.

I hope this explains the position for you but I would be happy to provide any further information you require.

Number of people in receipt of various social security benefits

Constituency	Severe Disablement Allowance (August 1996)	Incapacity benefit[1] (August 1996)	Disability living allowance (August 1996)	Income support (August 1996)	Family credit (February 1996)
Strangford	652	4,508	4,080	8,085	956
Belfast East	547	3,703	4,213	9,206	806
North Down	646	3,778	3,721	7,809	993
South Down	1,061	6,228	5,980	13,602	1,819
Lagan Valley	702	4,841	6,063	11,694	1,285
South Antrim	1,054	4,630	5,025	8,957	1,340
North Antrim	795	4,731	4,002	11,492	1,531
East Antrim	677	4,756	4,670	10,186	1,327
East Londonderry	979	5,399	4,992	15,512	1,805
Mid-Ulster	1,091	6,910	7,195	16,403	1,957
Newry and Armagh	1,130	6,352	6,596	16,160	1,555
Upper Bann	821	6,760	7,256	11,818	1,537
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	936	4,676	5,327	15,395	1,735
Foyle	1,243	8,179	10,157	22,963	2,046
Belfast South	482	3,412	3,822	11,372	613
Belfast West	860	6,350	10,397	20,355	1,652
Belfast North	745	5,893	7,436	15,693	1,291
Unknown[2]	624	3,070	3,515	7,410	649

[1] Includes customers in receipt of credits only.
[2] Benefit recipients which cannot be assigned to a particular constituency.

Educational Expenditure

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total capital expenditure by the Department of Education in each parliamentary constituency in each of the past 10 financial years, indicating the cost of each project. [13343]

Mr. Ancram: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Computer Crime

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) on how many occasions in each of the last five years computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers in his Department; [14550]

(2) how many cases of computer hacking, fraud and theft, including theft of computer chips his Department has recorded in the last five years. [14551]

Sir John Wheeler: During each of the past five years the number of occasions when computer systems within this Department have been illegally accessed by computer hackers is as follows:

Year	*Number of occasions*
1991–92	2
1992–93	2
1993–94	0
1994–95	1
1995–96	0
1996[1]	0

[1] To date.

Over this period, there were no recorded cases of computer fraud or theft of computer chips, there were however 10 cases of theft in this period.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 7 February 1997

TREASURY

Fixed Exchange Rate System

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the net *(a)* benefits and *(b)* costs to the United Kingdom economy of sterling's membership of a fixed exchange rate system. [14238]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Chancellor considered carefully the case for joining the new exchange rate mechanism in stage 3 of economic and monetary union linking the euro with non-participating member states, but concluded that the best way to secure lasting exchange rate stability is to achieve low inflation and sound public finances. Hence, the Government have no intention of re-entering sterling into a fixed exchange rate system, such as the new ERM. The Government recognise the value of a stable exchange rate but do not have a target for sterling.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people are employed by his Department to provide advice on the application of equal opportunities; and at what cost in the last year for which figures are available. [14479]

Mrs. Angela Knight: A number of staff in personnel including the departmental equal opportunities officer provide advice on equal opportunities issues, all of whom have additional duties. A breakdown of the cost of time spent solely on equal opportunities issues is therefore not available.

Dorneywood

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the members of the management board of the Dorneywood trust; and if he will make a statement. [14619]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Dorneywood trust is a private trust, for which I am not responsible and for which Ministers are not answerable to Parliament.

Privatisation (Revenues)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the revenues from privatisation which will be received in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–1 and *(e)* 2001–2; how much of the revenue in each year relates to privatisation which took place before 1 February; if he will list the additional bodies assumed to be privatised after that date; and if he will make a statement. [14817]

Mr. Jack: As published in table 5.3 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1997–98", privatisation proceeds are expected to be:

(a) £2.0 billion in 1997–98;

(b) £1.5 billion in 1998–99;

(c) £1.0 billion in 1999–2000.

No estimates have been made for the years 2000–01 and 2001–02. The proceeds for 1997–98 relate to privatisations which took place before 1 February. The other proceeds estimates include the planned privatisation of the National Air Traffic Services Ltd., and reflect the Government's ongoing commitment to privatisation. The Government will announce future privatisation plans when they are ready to do so.

Stamp Duty

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the advice commissioned from the Securities and Investments Board on the regulatory implications of the proposed liberalisation of stamp duty on UK equity stock borrowing. [15317]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Securities and Investments Board has submitted to the Treasury a report, "The fiscal liberalisation of stock borrowing and repo in UK equities; regulatory recommendations". This report was produced in response to a request from the Chancellor in September 1995, following the Director General of Fair Trading's report on the rules of the London stock exchange relating to market makers. Copies of the report are available in the Libraries of the House.

The Government fully accept the SIB's key recommendations that there is no immediate need to tighten or extend regulation in this area, but that further work on stock borrowing should be undertaken by the SIB, to cover guidance on good practice; the disclosure regime for short selling, and the stock borrowing regime for smaller companies.

The way is now clear for Parliament to consider the proposals set out in the Finance Bill for a sweeping reform of the current fiscal regime as it affects the lending and borrowing of UK equities. These proposals amount to a substantial liberalisation and modernisation of existing tax rules. Taken together with the SIB's proposed light regulatory touch, they should enhance the competitive development of this market, to the benefit of investors and market intermediaries alike.

Personal Pensions

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people who have been mis-sold personal pensions have so far received compensation. [11395]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 28 January 1997]:* Accurate figures are not available for the total number of people who have received compensation for being mis-sold a personal pension.

Profit-related Pay Schemes

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many companies have notified the Inland

Revenue their intention of introducing a profit-related pay scheme since *(a)* September 1996 and *(b)* December 1996. [14425]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* Between 1 September 1996 and the end of January 1997 the Inland Revenue received almost 7,500 applications to register a profit-related pay scheme. That figure includes some businesses which have previously had a registered scheme and some which have not. Of this total, about half—3,700—applied in the three months before 1 December 1996, and about half—3,800—applied in the two months following that date.

Computer Crime

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions in each of the last five years computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers in his Department. [14566]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* There have been no recorded instances of hacking into Treasury computer systems in any of the last five years.

Mr. Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cases of computer hacking, fraud and theft, including theft of computer chips his Department has recorded in the last five years. [14567]

Mrs. Knight *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* There have been no recorded instances of hacking into Treasury computer system or their fraudulent use in any of the last five years.

There have been some cases of thefts of computer equipment as follows:

1991–92: 1

1992–93: 1

1993–94: 1

1994–95: 2

1995–96: 5.

TRANSPORT

Rail Transport (Bicycles)

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when (i) he and (ii) his officials last had discussions with Connex South Eastern about the provision of bicycle accommodation on trains between Sevenoaks and Blackfriars; and if he will make a statement. [13443]

Mr. Watts: Neither my right hon. Friend nor I have had discussions with Connex South Eastern about the carriage of bicycles on its services, which is a matter for it. The franchising director and his officials meet with Connex South Eastern regularly to discuss the operation of the franchise when any pertinent matter may be raised.

In respect of the carriage of bicycles on trains generally, the franchising director has included in franchise agreements a requirement that, so far as reasonably practicable, and subject to the availability of appropriate space on its rolling stock, franchisees should ensure that facilities are made available for the carriage of cycles on trains. Franchise operators may not charge passengers unreasonable amounts for the provision of these facilities.

It would, however, be impracticable to require franchisees to make facilities available on all services. For example, not all existing rolling stock is designed to carry cycles. The provisions therefore strike a balance between the desire for operators to accommodate cyclists while acknowledging that it may not always be possible for them to do so.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people are employed by his Department to provide advice on the application of equal opportunities; and at what cost in the last year for which figures are available. [14466]

Mr. Bowis: The management of equal opportunities is an integral part of personnel work in the Department and its agencies, but certain staff carry specific responsibilities for particular equal opportunities issues. In the central transport group there are six, in the Highways Agency, three, in the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, four, in the Vehicle Certification Agency, three, in the Driving Standards Agency, four, in the Vehicle Inspectorate, one, in the Marine Safety Agency, one, and in the Coastguard Agency, one. The cost of that part of their work, and of other staff in handling equal opportunities issues, cannot readily be disaggregated.

In addition, the 18 staff in the Department's mobility unit handle issues covering disability, gender and race in relation to transport. Again, the part of their work which specifically focuses on equal opportunities cannot readily be disaggregated.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many people are employed by his Department to provide advice on the application of equal opportunities; and at what cost in the last year for which figures are available. [14473]

Mr. Bates: The information requested on staff employed to provide advice on the application of equal opportunities in the departments and agencies for which my right hon. Friend is responsible and other areas which fall to the Cabinet Office vote is as follows:

	Number of staff 1996–97 (full-time equivalents)	*Cost £*
Cabinet Office/OPS (Departmental Policy)	0.7	17,500.00
Cabinet Office/OPS (Service-wide Advice)	10.5	301,000.00
Civil Service College	0.3	8,000.00
Central Computer and Telecommunication Agency	0.2	4,500.00
Central Office of Information	0.1	1,300.00

	Number of staff 1996–97 (full-time equivalents)	Cost £
Property Advisors to Civil Estate	0.2	3,500.00
Security and Facilities Executive	0.1	1,500.00
The Buying Agency	0.2	4,000.00

Admiralty House

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer of 4 February, *Official Report*, column *526*, if he will provide a breakdown of the £723,000 spent on the running costs of Admiralty house in 1995–96. [14964]

Mr. Freeman: The figure of approximately £723,000 spent on the running costs of Admiralty house in 1995–96 may be broken down as follows:

	£
Rent	250,000
Maintenance, including centrally managed maintenance costs	248,000
Security	135,000
Contribution in lieu of rates	38,000
VAT surcharge	22,000
Staff costs	16,000
Cleaning	12,000
Fuel and utilities	2,000
Total	723,000

Manchester City Centre

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he is yet in a position to respond to proposals for the redevelopment of Manchester city centre following the IRA bombing. [15318]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have kept closely in touch with the proposals produced by the task force representing Manchester city council and the private sector, under the chairmanship of Sir Alan Cockshaw, chairman of AMEC Building Ltd. and I hope to be in a position to make an announcement early next week.

Cash Limits

Mr. Mans: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proposals he has to change the Cabinet Office; Security and Intelligence Services cash limits for 1996–97. [15390]

Mr. Freeman: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XVIII, vote 2 will be increased by £3,750,000 from £751,058,000 to £754,808,000. The running costs cash limit will be increased by £17,631,000 from £386,973,000 to £404,604,000. The increase in running costs will be offset by savings on capital provision, and also the take up £2,670,000 running costs end year flexibility. There will be an increase in appropriation in aid of £2,000,000 and a net increase in superannuation payments of £450,000. The increase will be charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Her Majesty's Stationery Office

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the value of contracts to supply publications entered into by HMSO before privatisation which were cancelled at the time of privatisation; and if compensation was paid by HMSO in this respect. [14702]

Mr. Freeman: HMSO did not cancel any contracts to supply publications at the time of privatisation and did not therefore have to pay any compensation. All customers were given the opportunity to novate their existing contracts from HMSO to The Stationery Office Ltd.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the publications HMSO was contracted to supply to the Open university prior to privatisation and which at the time of privatisation HMSO withdrew from sale. [14703]

Mr. Freeman: HMSO did not withdraw any items for sale at the time of privatisation, and as a result of privatisation.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Young Workers

Mr. Luff: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to consult on implementing provisions in the EC young workers directive requiring the creation of certain entitlements for adolescent workers; and if he will make a statement. [15231]

Mr. Lang: I am today publishing a consultation document with proposals for regulations to change employment law to give adolescent workers required entitlements to certain minimum daily and weekly rest periods and daily work breaks, and to health and capacity assessment before assignment to night work and at regular intervals thereafter.

We were able to agree to the EC directive on the protection of young people at work which requires these measures—the young workers directive—because its terms also give us an opt-out from what would have been unacceptable arbitrary limits on young people's working hours.

The consultation document seeks views on our proposals for enforcement arrangements to secure these entitlements, and on our assessment that, in general, employers will not have to make significant changes to their current practices in respect of employing young people. The Department of Health has already consulted on proposals for the changes which the directive requires us to make to the law regulating the employment of children, and the Health and Safety Commission about changes required to health and safety legislation.

The consultation period last until 7 May. We will then consider the position in the light of responses.

Inward Investment

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the (i) value of inward investment located in Britain and (ii) number of inward investment jobs

which have come to Britain from *(a)* Gibraltar, *(b)* Italy, *(c)* Malta, *(d)* France, *(e)* Scotland, *(f)* the Netherlands, *(g)* Sweden, *(h)* the Azores, *(i)* Bermuda, *(j)* the USA, *(k)* Mexico, *(l)* Jamaica, *(m)* the Lesser Antilles, *(n)* the Windward Islands, *(o)* the Leeward islands, *(p)* Portugal, *(q)* Greece, *(r)* Cyprus, *(s)* Russia, *(t)* Egypt, *(u)* Saudi Arabia, *(v)* the UAE, *(w)* India, *(x)* the Yemen, *(y)* Finland, *(z)* Denmark, *(aa)* Grand Canary, *(bb)* Ivory Coast, *(cc)* Namibia, *(dd)* Ghana, *(ee)* Senegal, *(ff)* Maderia, *(gg)* Germany, and *(hh)* the Balearic Islands, in each of the last five years. [14424]

Mr. Greg Knight *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* Where figures for new jobs—source: Invest In Britain database—and capital flows of investment—source: OECD—into the United Kingdom are available, these are detailed in the two tables.

New jobs

Country	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Denmark	149	654	60	150	296
Finland	13	27	0	225	623
France	1,533	362	1,836	1,409	2,348
Germany	2,274	2,264	1,567	4,811	5,613
India	20	0	0	11	0
Italy	174	427	83	57	327
Netherlands	691	509	780	115	378
Portugal	52	0	0	0	15
Saudi Arabia	0	0	56	0	100
South Africa	0	300	0	34	32
Sweden	314	291	617	281	384
USA	8,375	8,485	15,267	13,285	20,922
Yemen	141	0	0	0	0

Source:
IBB Database.

£ million

Country	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Denmark	1,610	396	1,261	656	195
Finland	36	8	53	–41	42
France	1,551	1,333	802	–35	655
Germany	1,610	396	1,261	656	195
Greece	–2	–3	—	—	—
India	1	1	2	21	–8
Italy	–43	45	–38	82	179
Mexico	–2	—	—	—	—
Netherlands	2,085	2,334	1,135	1,245	1,691
Portugal	–9	1	7	–	8
Russia (USSR)	–27	–12	–68	50	—
Sweden	1,658	5	129	–55	37
USA	5,094	1,878	3,748	5,144	1,873

Note:
1. These flow figures include UK disposals by foreign companies. Flow figures are volatile and fluctuate year to year in part due to the cyclical nature of reinvestment profits and of mergers and acquisition actively.
2. The negative flow figures represent disinvestment in the UK by inward investors. An inward investor may for example sell a UK based company to a UK investor. This is not outward investment but negative investment.
3. Figures on a FY basis are not available.
Source:
International Direct Investment Statistics Yearbook, 1996, OECD.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Dyslexic Prisoners

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prisoners were diagnosed with dyslexia while in prison during each year since 1990; [13823]

(2) how many prison officer hours were spent training to deal with dyslexic prisoners during each year since 1990; [13827]

(3) what plans there are to introduce tests to screen prisoners for dyslexia; [13825]

(4) what provision is available within the Prison Service for prisoners with dyslexia; [13824]

(5) what training in dealing with dyslexic prisoners is available to staff working in the Prison Service; [13826]

(6) what proportion of prisoners were diagnosed with dyslexia before entering prison during each year since 1990. [13822]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 7 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your six recent Questions about dyslexia among prisoners.

Education in prisons, including the provision of help to prisoners suffering from dyslexia, is provided by contractors rather than by prison officers. Contract terms require them to offer the Basic Skills screening test in numeracy and literacy to all prisoners. There are no plans to introduce additional tests to diagnose dyslexia.

Basic literacy is included in the Prison Service's core education curriculum. It is the policy of the Prisons Board towards prisoners who have any learning disabilities, including dyslexia, that those who need to improve basic literacy and are prepared to attend education classes will be given every opportunity to do so.

A number of prisons are trying to find better ways of giving basic skills training to prisoners as part of vocational training and in the course of daily work in prison workshops. This work is being supported by the Basic Skills Unit, with whom the Prison Service works closely. The Unit has contracted Amersham and Wycombe College to provide a National Support project to this end. Instructional officers are being encouraged to attend a one day course which is based on an initial certificate in teaching basic skills in the workplace.

The number of prisoners identified by the Basic Skills Screening test as having a learning disability, and the number of prisoners diagnosed with dyslexia before entering prisons, are not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Glen Parva Young Offenders Institution

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when a decision was made concerning the closure of the therapeutic community at HM YOI Glen Parva; [13831]

(2) what plans he has to provide alternative facilities at HM YOI Glen Parva following the recent closure of its therapeutic community; [13829]

(3) how many hours per month were spent by prisoners undergoing rehabilitation at HM YOI Glen Parva since January 1995; and of these hours, how many were spent undergoing rehabilitation in the therapeutic community; [13832]

(4) for what reasons the therapeutic community at HM YOI Glen Parva has recently closed; [13828]

(5) how long a period of notice of closure of the therapeutic community at HM YOI Glen Parva was given to *(a)* the prisoners and *(b)* the staff involved with the unit. [13830]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 7 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Questions about the Therapeutic Community at HMYOI Glen Parva and the reasons for its closures.

The decision to close the Therapeutic Community was taken on 13 December 1996 and prisoners and staff were given about half a day's notice of its closure.

The Therapeutic Community has been temporarily closed to allow the Governor to re-deploy existing health care staff to provide an increased level of cover and observation on the acute psychiatric and assessment wards following a decision to close the seclusion rooms for prisoners at risk of self-harm.

There are no immediate plans to provide alternative facilities at Glen Parva, however health care facilities are currently being reviewed and the outcome of this review will determine the long term future of the Therapeutic Community. In the meantime a new therapeutic community unit has recently opened at Aylesbury Young Offenders Institution and priority will be given to prisoners from Glen Parva when considering admissions to this unit.

Prisoners at Glen Parva have each spent an average of 79.19 hours a month undergoing rehabilitation since January 1995. The figure for those held within the Therapeutic Community, for the same period, was an average of 74.75 hours a month for each prisoner.

Prisoners (Transport)

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if male and female prisoners are escorted in the same vehicle; and if he will make a statement. [15222]

Miss Widdecombe: Male and female prisoners are escorted in the same vehicles at the same time in area 7—east midlands and Humberside—but not elsewhere. In the three years in which this practice has been followed in area 7, no problems have resulted. The vehicles are cellular; female prisoner custody officers are used to handle female prisoners; and careful loading procedures are followed to ensure proper segregation. On the basis of these safeguards, I have agreed that the practice may be extended to the other contract areas.

Whitemoor Prison (Escape)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost of the role playing training session held on how to behave in court for those HMP Whitemoor personnel due to give evidence at the trial of the men accused of the 1994 escape from Whitemoor; who took the decision to organise the session; what legal advice was obtained regarding the lawfulness of the session prior to that decision; and if he will make a statement. [13421]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Kevin McNamara dated 7 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about training of Whitemoor personnel due to give evidence at court.

Three training sessions aimed at preparing staff to give evidence in court have been run at Whitemoor Prison since September 1996. This training was chosen by the Governor of Whitemoor particularly because a number of staff at the prison were expected to be asked to give evidence in the coming months; it was expressly for the purpose of general briefing for staff on the appropriate behaviour for court appearances and on court procedures. Because the training was part of the normal local programme, no additional costs were incurred.

Governors have been encouraged, at least since 1991, to provide training to staff on what is involved in being a witness to reduce the possibility of trials being prejudiced as a result of inappropriate action by staff. Legal advice was sought before the training was delivered.

Prisoners (Deaths)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to publish

the conclusions of reports into deaths of prisoners held by the Prison Service; and if he will make a statement. [13953]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 3 February 1997]:* The reports of inquiries by the Prison Service into the deaths of prisoners are not published and there are no plans to do so.

Prison Reports

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the reasons for the delays in publishing each of the reports of Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons which have been received by him but not yet published. [14223]

Miss Widdecombe: The reports of Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons to the Secretary of State of the inspection of prison establishments generally contain much detailed information and discussion and make a number of recommendations. Before the reports are published, Ministers receive the advice of the Director General of the Prison Service on them and the Prison Service's response to their recommendations, with an indication of the action which has been or is to be taken. Action does not wait until publication of the report, but Ministers are accountable for the Prison Service and it is essential that they should be satisfied about the Prison Service response to inspection reports before they are published.

Some 25 reports have been received from Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons but have not yet been published. Fifteen of these reports have been considered by the Prison Service and by Ministers and are expected to be published during February and March. They are the reports of the inspections of the following establishments: Channings Wood, Dartmoor, Dover, Featherstone, Gloucester, Guys Marsh, Hatfield, Holloway, Lancaster Castle, Low Newton, Onley, Portland, Ranby, Risley and The Verne.

The remaining 10 reports are under consideration and will be published as soon as possible. They are the reports of the inspections of the following establishments: Acklington, Albany, Belmarsh, Chelmsford, Eastwood Park, Everthorpe, Shepton Mallet, Usk/Prescoed, Whitemoor and Wormwood Scrubs.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a breakdown of the spending by his Department on external advice in relation to the Scott inquiry, indicating how much has been spent on legal advice and from whom it was obtained. [14527]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* No money has been sent by my Department on external advice in relation to Sir Richard Scott's inquiry.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total cost of salaries since 1992 paid to persons in his Department employed on a part-time or full-time basis in any capacity relating to the Scott inquiry. [14526]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* No officials in my Department are, or have been, wholly employed on matters relating to the Scott inquiry. Some officials have been involved on an occasional basis as part of their normal duties, but the direct salary cost is unquantifiable.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Arts Council

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what has been the cumulative change in the Arts Council of England grant in aid for each year since 1993–94. [13209]

Mr. Sproat: The Arts Council of England has received grant in aid to fund its operating costs and grant programmes as follows:

£ million

	Grant in aid	*Cumulative change*
1993–94	[1]189.15	nil
1994–95	185.99	–3.16
1995–96	191.13	+1.98
1996–97	186.13	–3.02
1997–98	186.10	–3.05

[1] The Arts Council of England came into being in April 1994. The sum shown for 1993–94 is an estimate of that attributable to England from the grant in aid to the Arts Council of Great Britain.

Sports Clubs

Mr. Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what consultations she has had with the Department of the Environment concerning the planning implications for playing fields and sports clubs arising from the recent judgment against Thames Ditton lawn tennis club; [12820]

(2) what discussions she has had with *(a)* the Lawn Tennis Association, *(b)* the Central Council of Physical Recreation, *(c)* the National Playing Fields Association and *(d)* the Sports Council about the implications of the recent judgment against Thames Ditton lawn tennis club; and if she will make a statement; [12815]

(3) if she will investigate the implications for sports clubs of the recent judgment against Thames Ditton lawn tennis club; [12816]

(4) what assessment her Department has made of the implications of the recent judgment against Thames Ditton lawn tennis club; [12817]

(5) what steps she intends to take to remedy the problems for sports clubs relating to the recent judgment against Thames Ditton lawn tennis club. [12818]

Mr. Sproat: I have looked very carefully indeed at the problems experienced by the Thames Ditton lawn tennis club. My Department has had lengthy discussions with both the Sports Council and with the Department of the Environment, about the recent judgments against an application for a renewal of its lease. I have also examined the possibility of listing the club, which has not proved to be justifiable.

While I understand that many people are concerned about the decision to demolish the site, the land is privately owned, and the Government cannot intervene in the disposal of an individual's private property in these circumstances.

I would encourage the club to continue to discuss with the English Sports Council how best to secure its long term future.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of people engaged in the jobseeker's allowance scheme in the constituency of Alyn and Deeside; and if he will make a statement. [14052]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of the jobseeker's allowance is a matter for Peter Mathison and Leigh Lewis, the chief executives of the Benefits and Employment Service Agencies. Mr. Mathison will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Barry Jones, dated 6 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking, what is his estimate of the number of people engaged in the Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) scheme in the constituency of Alyn and Deeside; and if he will make a statement.

I have assumed your question refers to the number of staff employed in the delivery of JSA. The information is not available in the format requested. The delivery of JSA is undertaken jointly by the Benefits Agency (BA) and the Employment Services (ES) Agency.

There are 27 ES members of staff employed in your constituency, based at Shotton and Mold Jobcentres.

Staffing data for BA is only available by BA Districts and not by Parliamentary Constituencies. The BA District of Wrexham and North Wales Coast has offices at Colwyn Bay, Deeside, Rhyl and Wrexham. Currently there is a total of 50 BA staff employed in the delivery of JSA within these sites and in the corresponding ES sites at Colwyn Bay, Flint, Holywell, Llandudno, Llandudno-Conwy, Llandudno-Llanrwst, Mold, Rhyl, Rhyl-Denbigh, Rhyl-Prestatyn, Shotton and Wrexham, Wrexham-Cefn Mawr, Wrexham-Llangollen. These figures are provisional and subject to amendment.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Benefits Agency Offices

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many Benefits Agency offices there are currently in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales. [14603]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Ms Harriet Harman, dated 6 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many Benefits Agency (BA) offices there are currently in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales.

The information requested is shown in the table below:

Country	*Number*
England	688
Scotland	116
Wales	91
Total	895

Figures are provisional and subject to change.

These figures include BA Central Services and other locations which do not deal directly with benefit payments. There is no public service at 109 of these sites.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Income Support

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the percentage of the population currently dependent on income support. [14821]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table.

Income support beneficiaries February 1996

	Number	*Proportion of the population (GB)*
Beneficiaries	9,809,000	17.2 per cent.

Notes:

1. Beneficiaries includes claimants, their partners and any dependants.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.
3. Decimals are rounded to one decimal place.
4. Sample size 5 per cent.

Source:

1. Income support statistics quarterly inquiry February 1996.
2. Office for National Statistics mid-term estimates of the population 1995.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Singapore Summit

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *225*, if he will make a statement on the policy towards Burma that the Government will advance at the EU-ASEAN summit in Singapore. [14598]

Mr. Hanley: Together with our EU partners, we shall be explaining to ASEAN representatives our concerns at recent events in Burma. We also hope to discuss ways of encouraging democratic reform and respect for human rights in Burma, as urged in the UN General Assembly resolution on Burma, which was adopted by consensus on 12 December 1996.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people are employed by his Department to provide advice on the application of equal opportunities; and at what cost in the last year for which figures are available. [14480]

Mr. Hanley: In this Department, the responsibility for the provision of advice on equal opportunities is shared between seven individuals.

The total estimated cost to this Department, including the Overseas Development Administration, for the current financial year is £51,659.

Mr. Syed Zahoorul

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will call for a report concerning the arrest of Mr. Syed Zahoorul on 22 January in Srinagar by the border security force. [14818]

Dr. Liam Fox: I have asked our high commission in New Delhi to look into the alleged arrest of Mr. Syed Zahoorul, and to report the findings. I will write to the hon. Member thereafter.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Mark Gibson (Parole)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reasons the Prison Service has refused access to the notes, minutes and records of the Life Sentence Review Board's decision to defer consideration of parole for Mr. Mark Gibson, in Her Majesty's prison Maghaberry, to Mr. Gibson's solicitor. [14068]

Sir John Wheeler: It is the practice of the Northern Ireland Office, influenced by considerations of public interest and confidentiality, not to make disclosure of reports considered by the Life Sentence Review Board.

Life Sentence Reviews

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reasons prisoners serving life sentences in Northern Ireland do not have the right of access to dossiers concerning their life sentence review; and in what ways this differs from the situation in England and Wales. [14069]

Sir John Wheeler: It is the practice of the Northern Ireland Office, influenced by considerations of public interest and confidentiality, not to give disclosure to life sentence prisoners of dossiers concerning their life sentence reviews. This practice is set in the context of circumstances in which the majority of life sentence prisoners have been convicted of very serious terrorist-related offences. Both the law and practice in England and Wales is different, where prisoners are normally entitled to disclosure of papers which are put to the Parole Board.

Psychotic Diseases

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will estimate how many people in Northern Ireland were registered sufferers of *(a)* Alzheimer's disease, *(b)* schizophrenia and *(c)* other psychotic diseases in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [14664]

Sir John Wheeler: Sufferers of mental illness are not required to be registered. Information on the total numbers of people suffering from different types of mental illness is not available.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Education Funding (Lancashire)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what *(a)* private finance initiative and *(b)* public funding went into the education system in Lancashire in each year since 1992. [13279]

Mr. Robin Squire: PFI is new to the schools sector and to date no contracts involving Lancashire schools have been signed. A number of Lancashire schools are considering PFI options, and St. Wilfrid's Church of England high school, Blackburn is taking forward a PFI project to rebuild the school on a new site.

The following table lists capital allocations to Lancashire since 1993–94. Equivalent information for 1992–93 is not available. Allocations for grant-maintained schools are a matter for the Funding Agency for Schools.

Capital allocations to Lancashire LEA and VA schools in Lancashire

All figures in £000s

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Annual capital guideline	11,129	7,948	8,105	8,166	5,225
Supplementary credit approvals	1,179	448	51	762	626
Allocations to VA schools	5,577	5,367	3,085	3,081	3,425
Total	17,885	13,763	11,241	12,009	9,276

Policy Initiatives

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to which policy initiative she has devoted most funding in each of the last five years; and if she will make a statement on progress with each initiative. [13929]

Mr. Robin Squire: The effectiveness of initiatives in education and employment does not depend solely on the funding allocated to them, and many of the initiatives of the Departments and its predecessors have been aimed at making better use of existing resources. Among the important measures in the last five years have been:

- in 1992–93, the setting up of the Office for Standards in Education as an independent Government department; the introduction of the new further and higher education sectors and the subsequent increase in numbers and efficiency; and the publication of the first school performance tables;
- in 1993–94, the introduction of procedures to deal with failing schools; the formation of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority; and the launch of the technology colleges programme;

in 1994–95, the piloting of modern apprenticeships; and the setting up of the Teacher Training Agency;

in 1995–96, the launch of the improving schools programme, covering a broad range of measures to raise standards in all schools; and legislation to provide vouchers for nursery education; and

in 1996–97, the start of the national literacy and numeracy project; and the implementation of the jobseeker's allowance, which aims to improve the operation of the labour market, secure better value for money for the taxpayer, and improve the service to unemployed people themselves.

These and other initiatives have contributed to the fact that participation rates in education are at historically high levels, that pass rates in examinations have continued to rise, and that in the labour market the UK has a higher proportion of its people in work and fewer out of work than any other major EU country.

External Education (Recoupment)

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she proposes to take to change Northumberland county council's proposed finance settlement in respect of local authority recoupment relating to children being educated outside their county of residence. [12848]

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 4 February 1997]:* My right hon. friend has no plans to change Northumberland county council's finance settlement in respect of inter-authority recoupment relating to pupils educated outside their area of residence.

Disabled Pupils

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what funds she provides to improve facilities for disabled children in mainstream education; and if she will make a statement. [14336]

Mrs. Gillan: The Government are providing support totalling £12 million over the next three years under the schools access initiative for projects to make more mainstream schools accessible to pupils with disabilities. Some 800 mainstream schools have already benefited from schools access initiative projects in 1996–97.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many pupils with physical disabilities have been refused places in mainstream schools over the last year. [14338]

Mrs. Gillan: This information is not collected centrally. The annual report of the Special Educational needs tribunal for 1995–96 shows that, in that year, 26 appeals were registered concerning the placement of a child with physical handicap; of these, 12 were upheld. Local education authorities have a duty to secure education in a mainstream school for children with a statement of SEN, where this is what parents wish, provided the placement is appropriate for the child and is compatible with the education of other children and the efficient use of resources.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children with physical disabilities have been refused places in Roman Catholic schools in the Leicester area over the last year. [14337]

Mrs. Gillan: This information is not collected centrally.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people are employed by her Department to provide advice on the application of equal opportunities; and at what cost in the last year for which figures are available. [14465]

Mrs. Gillan: This Government are committed to equal opportunities and issued to all Departments model guidance on policy appraisal for equal treatment. This ensures that the impact on particular groups, such as women, is considered as part of the policy development and review process. Specific guidance, based on this model was issued within the Department last September.

Consequently, in addition to the personnel related functions in respect of the Department's own employees, advice on the application of equal opportunities is an important strand in a wide number of the Department's activities and apart from two specialised units, for which details are given, it is not possible to disaggregate either the number or the cost of staff involved.

The Department's sex and race equality division has responsibility for the sex discrimination legislation, promoting equality of opportunity in education, training and at work, particularly with regard to gender and race; and to further women's issues more generally. The division has 57.2 staff with a budget for 1996–97 of £1,905,661. This includes 21 employees in the race relations employment advisory service with a budget of £669,376.

The team responsible for the successful implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act has 5.6 staff and a budget for 1996–97 of £181,910.

Further Education Funding

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on what date she received the Further Education Funding Council's claim for additional grant in aid for demand-led element enrolments for colleges exceeding their growth targets. [14625]

Mr. Paice: Further to my reply of 3 February, *Official Report*, column *460*, the Department received the latest claim on 4 February.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she last made a statement on the availability of demand-led funding for colleges exceeding their growth targets. [14624]

Mr. Paice: On behalf of my right hon. Friend, I wrote to the Further Education Funding Council for England and

to all further education colleges in England about demand-led funding on 5 February. I am placing a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much of the demand-led element of funding for further education has been used as core funding in the most recent financial year. [14698]

Mr. Paice: None. The £82 million additional grant in aid that the Department is making available in the current financial year to the Further Education Funding Council for England for it to pay colleges for demand-led funding is additional to the original provision for further education set out in the estimates for financial year 1996–97.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much of the demand-led element of funding for further education was consolidated into college targets for 1993–94. [14699]

Mr. Paice: Within the Department's planned provision for financial year 1993–94, the Department made available to the Further Education Funding Council for England £152,500,000 for demand-led funding including in college's enrolment targets.

Financial year 1993–94 was the first year of the sector's existence. During that year, £152,500,000 was paid to colleges for demand-led funding included in colleges' enrolment targets. This sum was found within the planned provision for further education and did not require additional resources.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the effect on financial control in further education of moving college accounting to a year end of 31 July while maintaining a year end of 31 March for her Department's transfers to the funding council; and if she will make a statement on how the demand-led element of funding is affected by using two different year end dates. [14700]

Mr. Paice: Further education colleges have used a 1 August to 31 July financial year since the creation of the further education sector, with the exception of its first financial year which ran from 1 April 1993 to 31 July 1994. The Further Education Funding Council for England takes account of the difference in the Government and college financial years in determining its spending plans and in making payments to colleges. Demand-led funding is paid to colleges in February, April and July each year. The timing of those payments is not affected by the year end dates and I have made it clear to all colleges that demand-led payments due to them for contractual commitments for the academic year 1996–97 entered into on or before 28 January 1997 will be made under existing arrangements.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if the vote incorporating the demand-led element of further education funding is cash limited. [14701]

Mr. Paice: The vote incorporating the demand-led element of further education funding is not cash limited.

Moral Values

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking to promote moral values within the educational system. [14695]

Mrs. Gillan: My right hon. Friend expects to receive advice from the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority later this month on the recommendations of its national forum for values in education and the community.

Scouts and Guides (Funding)

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will provide public funding to support *(a)* the Scout Association and *(b)* the Girl Guides; and if she will make a statement. [14997]

Mr. Paice: Both the Scout Association and the Girl Guides receive funding through the Department's scheme of grants for national voluntary youth organisations. The current scheme runs from 1996–99. For 1997–98, £3.05 million had been allocated for grants under the scheme including £125,000 for the Scout Association and £40,855 for the Girl Guides. All grants are for approved programmes of work designed to promote the personal and social education of young people.

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what is *(a)* the average sum per pupil and *(b)* the average percentage of the general schools budget, allotted by each local education authority in the current financial year for (i) mandatory exceptions from delegation, (ii) discretionary exceptions outside the potential schools budget, (iii) discretionary exceptions within the potential schools budget and (iv) the aggregated schools budget; [10401]

(2) what is *(a)* the average sum per pupil and *(b)* the average percentage of the general schools budget, allotted by each local education authority in the current financial year for discretionary exceptions outside the potential schools budget and which is (i) delegated and (ii) not delegated to schools; [10400]

(3) what is *(a)* the average sum per pupil and *(b)* the average percentage of the general schools budget, allotted by each local education authority in the current financial year for (i) money allocated to schools via age-weighted pupil units, (ii) premature retirement compensation, (iii) school transport, (iv) statementing and support for statemented pupils and (v) school meals (net of income). [10402]

Mr. Robin Squire [*pursuant to his reply, 13 January 1997, c. 75-84*]: The following table corrects the figures previously given in the columns showing the amount per pupil allocated through discretionary exceptions within the potential schools budget, the percentage of the general schools budget allocated through mandatory exceptions and the percentage of the GSB allocated through the cost of statements.

Amounts per pupil and percentage of GSB—section 122 1996–97

LEA	Aggregated schools budget		Discretionary exceptions outside the PSB		Discretionary exceptions within the PSB		Mandatory exceptions	
	£ per pupil	Percentage of GSB	£ per pupil	Percentage of GSB	£ per pupil	Percentage of GSB	£ per pupil	Percentage of GSB
Barking/Dagenham	2,031	60.8	213	6.4	144	4.3	952	28.5
Barnet	1,994	67.3	236	8.0	171	5.8	561	18.9
Barnsley	1,512	70.9	193	9.1	179	8.4	248	11.6
Bath and North-east Somerset	1,926	77.1	220	8.8	161	6.5	190	7.6
Bedfordshire	1,771	73.6	145	6.0	205	8.5	167	6.9
Berkshire	1,825	76.8	128	5.4	109	4.6	314	13.2
Bexley	1,718	73.5	152	6.5	144	6.2	323	13.8
Birmingham	1,971	77.1	187	7.3	214	8.4	184	7.2
Bolton	1,694	74.6	219	9.7	201	8.8	156	6.9
Bradford	1,684	64.8	193	7.4	220	8.5	502	19.3
Brent	2,042	71.0	115	4.0	183	6.4	534	18.6
Bristol	2,113	78.7	216	8.0	157	5.9	199	7.4
Bromley	1,689	71.1	256	10.8	99	4.2	332	14.0
Buckinghamshire	1,704	68.6	210	8.4	136	5.5	437	17.6
Bury	1,762	78.2	143	6.4	221	9.8	127	5.6
Calderdale	1,636	69.5	200	8.5	166	7.1	353	15.0
Cambridgeshire	1,670	67.6	196	7.9	180	7.3	423	17.1
Camden	2,530	63.6	338	8.5	186	4.7	924	23.2
Cheshire	1,784	77.0	171	7.4	158	6.8	203	8.7
Cornwall	1,730	69.8	229	9.3	174	7.0	345	13.9
Corporation of London	3,196	66.9	360	7.5	439	9.2	780	16.3
Coventry	1,934	76.4	193	7.6	131	5.2	272	10.8
Croydon	1,934	72.3	184	6.9	225	8.4	332	12.4
Cumbria	1,780	73.9	169	7.0	198	8.2	263	10.9
Derbyshire	1,551	70.7	187	8.5	228	10.4	226	10.3
Devon	1,765	75.6	170	7.3	192	8.2	206	8.8
Doncaster	1,795	71.9	247	9.9	182	7.3	273	10.9
Dorset	1,610	73.0	185	8.4	132	6.0	278	12.6
Dudley	1,752	81.6	71	3.3	152	7.1	171	8.0
Durham	1,681	74.1	217	9.6	181	8.0	190	8.4
Ealing	2,019	76.5	213	8.1	262	9.9	146	5.5
East Riding	1,854	77.4	215	9.0	230	9.6	97	4.0
East Sussex	1,840	74.2	203	8.2	187	7.5	250	10.1
Enfield	1,916	68.5	208	7.4	158	5.7	514	18.4
Essex	1,751	75.5	192	8.3	180	7.8	195	8.4
Gateshead	1,806	66.5	275	10.1	149	5.5	488	17.9
Gloucestershire	1,640	73.3	157	7.0	121	5.4	318	14.2
Greenwich	2,357	78.6	173	5.8	220	7.3	250	8.3
Hackney	2,355	68.8	280	8.2	405	11.8	382	11.2
Hammersmith/Fulham	2,505	73.5	241	7.1	390	11.4	273	8.0
Hampshire	1,872	76.9	183	7.5	144	5.9	235	9.7
Haringey	2,134	64.9	336	10.2	243	7.4	573	17.4
Harrow	2,096	77.1	231	8.5	75	2.8	316	11.6
Hartlepool	1,685	76.7	207	9.4	158	7.2	146	6.7
Havering	1,894	83.6	161	7.1	90	4.0	120	5.3
Hereford/Worcester	1,724	75.0	186	8.1	120	5.2	268	11.6
Hertfordshire	1,891	79.1	128	5.4	170	7.1	200	8.4
Hillingdon	1,915	72.5	208	7.9	134	5.1	385	14.6
Hounslow	2,061	72.9	229	8.1	138	4.9	400	14.2
Hull	1,735	77.4	196	8.8	202	9.0	109	4.9
Isle of Wight	1,757	76.4	199	8.6	148	6.5	195	8.5
Isles of Scilly	3,289	76.9	234	5.5	281	6.6	473	11.1
Islington	2,313	68.1	150	4.4	194	5.7	741	21.8
Kensington/Chelsea	2,804	72.6	288	7.5	229	5.9	539	14.0
Kent	1,753	74.4	217	9.2	119	5.1	267	11.3
Kingston	1,926	80.3	195	8.1	83	3.5	195	8.1
Kirklees	1,693	73.5	210	9.1	177	7.7	222	9.7
Knowsley	1,885	77.5	139	5.7	204	8.4	203	8.4
Lambeth	2,361	66.1	339	9.5	297	8.3	574	16.1
Lancashire	1,736	73.1	217	9.2	201	8.4	221	9.3
Leeds	1,840	72.2	124	4.9	167	6.5	419	16.4
Leicestershire	1,750	76.2	238	10.4	176	7.7	131	5.7
Lewisham	2,285	78.6	248	8.5	236	8.1	140	4.8
Lincolnshire	1,815	75.1	218	9.0	128	5.3	254	10.5
Liverpool	1,824	76.3	143	6.0	185	7.7	238	10.0
Manchester	1,837	71.2	164	6.4	235	9.1	346	13.4
Merton	1,933	63.7	222	7.3	77	2.5	802	26.4
Middlesbrough	1,761	66.8	239	9.1	183	6.9	451	17.1
North east Lincolnshire	1,801	77.4	203	8.7	218	9.4	105	4.5
Newcastle	1,855	74.6	229	9.2	201	8.1	201	8.1
Newham	1,855	68.4	324	11.9	190	7.0	344	12.7
Norfolk	1,846	72.0	178	6.9	222	8.7	317	12.4
North Lincolnshire	1,813	75.2	228	9.5	242	10.0	129	5.3
North Somerset	1,891	77.4	220	9.0	158	6.5	173	7.1

Amounts per pupil and percentage of GSB—section 122 1996–97

LEA	Aggregated schools budget		Discretionary exceptions outside the PSB		Discretionary exceptions within the PSB		Mandatory exceptions	
	£ per pupil	Percentage of GSB	£ per pupil	Percentage of GSB	£ per pupil	Percentage of GSB	£ per pupil	Percentage of GSB
North Tyneside	1,769	73.2	154	6.4	183	7.6	312	12.9
North Yorkshire	1,828	79.2	191	8.3	181	7.8	108	4.7
Northamptonshire	1,770	74.9	136	5.7	124	5.2	334	14.1
Northumberland	1,739	75.3	170	7.4	229	9.9	172	7.4
Nottinghamshire	1,588	73.9	198	9.2	196	9.1	168	7.8
Oldham	1,811	77.9	185	7.9	190	8.2	138	5.9
Oxfordshire	1,798	70.5	156	6.1	151	5.9	446	17.5
Redbridge	1,959	75.2	172	6.6	129	4.9	346	13.3
Redcar and Cleveland	1,741	76.5	217	9.5	165	7.3	151	6.6
Richmond	2,032	81.3	194	7.8	55	2.2	217	8.7
Rochdale	1,701	76.2	122	5.4	201	9.0	210	9.4
Rotherham	1,732	78.0	201	9.1	134	6.0	153	6.9
Salford	1,775	66.3	184	6.9	191	7.1	528	19.7
Sandwell	1,692	75.2	206	9.1	141	6.3	211	9.4
Sefton	1,821	74.7	217	8.9	154	6.3	244	10.0
Sheffield	1,690	72.8	243	10.5	189	8.1	198	8.5
Shropshire	1,718	71.2	153	6.3	214	8.9	327	13.6
Solihull	1,834	81.8	109	4.9	161	7.2	137	6.1
Somerset	1,769	77.9	171	7.5	113	5.0	219	9.7
South Gloucestershire	1,863	74.0	212	8.4	172	6.8	271	10.8
South Tyneside	1,668	74.8	208	9.3	143	6.4	209	9.4
Southwark	2,255	71.9	269	8.6	299	9.5	313	10.0
St. Helens	1,821	77.1	204	8.6	201	8.5	136	5.7
Staffordshire	1,675	77.5	126	5.8	171	7.9	189	8.7
Stockport	1,801	74.4	174	7.2	150	6.2	294	12.2
Stockton on Tees	1,790	78.7	189	8.3	205	9.0	88	3.9
Suffolk	1,879	79.4	150	6.4	166	7.0	170	7.2
Sunderland	1,819	77.5	119	5.1	148	6.3	261	11.1
Surrey	1,860	72.0	195	7.6	226	8.7	302	11.7
Sutton	1,896	66.7	179	6.3	174	6.1	592	20.8
Tameside	1,556	66.8	175	7.5	165	7.1	433	18.6
Tower Hamlets	2,241	65.4	262	7.6	252	7.4	672	19.6
Trafford	1,556	72.7	202	9.4	147	6.9	236	11.0
Wakefield	1,586	62.0	232	9.1	184	7.2	556	21.7
Walsall	1,758	78.9	197	8.9	84	3.7	190	8.5
Waltham Forest	2,160	73.8	139	4.8	255	8.7	374	12.8
Wandsworth	2,313	72.7	272	8.5	243	7.6	355	11.2
Warwickshire	1,713	66.6	194	7.6	185	7.2	480	18.7
West Sussex	1,795	77.4	218	9.4	139	6.0	167	7.2
Westminster	2,351	71.7	278	8.5	215	6.5	435	13.3
Wigan	1,892	77.7	146	6.0	179	7.4	217	8.9
Wiltshire	1,713	73.5	191	8.2	246	10.6	180	7.7
Wirral	1,780	75.3	182	7.7	184	7.8	219	9.3
Wolverhampton	1,756	74.9	149	6.4	162	6.9	283	12.1
York	1,718	78.6	213	9.8	119	5.4	136	6.2

The information in this table has been derived from financial statements produced under the section 122 of the Education Act 1996 (formerly section 42 of the Education Reform Act 1988), incorporating LEA's changes to their statements notified to the Department by 31 December 1996.

LEA	Premature retirement compensation		Home to school transport		Cost of statements		School meals (net of income)	
	£ per pupil	Percentage of GSB	£ per pupil	Percentage of GSB	£ per pupil	Percentage of GSB	£ per pupil	Percentage of GSB
Barking/Dagenham	16	0.5	27	0.8	74	2.2	71	2.1
Barnet	13	0.4	60	2.0	75	2.5	39	1.3
Barnsley	19	0.9	16	0.8	88	4.1	78	3.7
Bath and North-east Somerset	44	1.8	80	3.2	68	2.7	39	1.6
Bedfordshire	22	0.9	65	2.7	19	0.8	65	2.7
Berkshire	10	0.4	57	2.4	15	0.6	25	1.1
Bexley	5	0.2	25	1.1	51	2.2	43	1.9
Birmingham	23	0.9	49	1.9	41	1.6	94	3.7
Bolton	20	0.9	35	1.5	83	3.6	59	2.6
Bradford	38	1.4	39	1.5	81	3.1	101	3.9
Brent	42	1.5	59	2.0	18	0.6	70	2.4
Bristol	41	1.5	46	1.7	24	0.9	70	2.6
Bromley	6	0.3	36	1.5	100	4.2	40	1.7
Buckinghamshire	15	0.6	82	3.3	36	1.4	17	0.7
Bury	38	1.7	23	1.0	18	0.8	93	4.1
Calderdale	25	1.1	20	0.9	88	3.7	61	2.6
Cambridgeshire	22	0.9	61	2.5	90	3.6	45	1.8
Camden	7	0.2	54	1.3	63	1.6	88	2.2
Cheshire	22	0.9	57	2.4	40	1.7	17	0.7

LEA	Premature retirement compensation		Home to school transport		Cost of statements		School meals (net of income)	
	£ per pupil	Percentage of GSB	£ per pupil	Percentage of GSB	£ per pupil	Percentage of GSB	£ per pupil	Percentage of GSB
Cornwall	19	0.8	60	2.4	120	4.8	49	2.0
Corporation of London	19	0.4	5	0.1	0	0.0	313	6.6
Coventry	26	1.0	29	1.1	33	1.3	67	2.6
Croydon	10	0.4	51	1.9	50	1.9	51	1.9
Cumbria	46	1.9	62	2.6	72	3.0	42	1.7
Derbyshire	22	1.0	48	2.2	93	4.2	87	4.0
Devon	28	1.2	89	3.8	61	2.6	40	1.7
Doncaster	27	1.1	24	0.9	96	3.8	53	2.1
Dorset	16	0.7	73	3.3	43	1.9	25	1.2
Dudley	18	0.8	28	1.3	11	0.5	54	2.5
Durham	23	1.0	61	2.7	83	3.7	51	2.2
Ealing	20	0.8	77	2.9	66	2.5	77	2.9
East Riding	25	1.1	85	3.6	6	0.3	58	2.4
East Sussex	9	0.4	51	2.1	36	1.5	58	2.4
Enfield	19	0.7	29	1.0	70	2.5	65	2.3
Essex	6	0.3	76	3.3	87	3.7	34	1.5
Gateshead	35	1.3	27	1.0	32	1.2	76	2.8
Gloucestershire	22	1.0	71	3.2	72	3.2	30	1.3
Greenwich	4	0.1	52	1.7	9	0.3	98	3.3
Hackney	17	0.5	93	2.7	55	1.6	133	3.9
Hammersmith/Fulham	11	0.3	97	2.8	67	2.0	161	4.7
Hampshire	13	0.5	47	1.9	24	1.0	39	1.6
Haringey	19	0.6	34	1.0	15	0.4	106	3.2
Harrow	12	0.4	32	1.2	74	2.7	26	1.0
Hartlepool	23	1.0	28	1.3	16	0.7	70	3.2
Havering	12	0.5	23	1.0	61	2.7	25	1.1
Hereford/Worcester	9	0.4	73	3.2	76	3.3	16	0.7
Hertfordshire	14	0.6	59	2.5	68	2.9	17	0.7
Hillingdon	15	0.6	92	3.5	21	0.8	0	0.0
Hounslow	9	0.3	37	1.3	40	1.4	52	1.9
Hull	30	1.3	44	2.0	7	0.3	83	3.7
Isle of Wight	10	0.4	58	2.5	70	3.1	56	2.4
Isles of Scilly	78	1.8	74	1.7	207	4.8	102	2.4
Islington	0	0.0	51	1.5	42	1.2	74	2.2
Kensington/Chelsea	16	0.4	7	0.2	69	1.8	146	3.8
Kent	13	0.5	72	3.1	72	3.1	35	1.5
Kingston	22	0.9	35	1.5	72	3.0	22	0.9
Kirklees	21	0.9	35	1.5	64	2.8	56	2.4
Knowsley	29	1.2	36	1.5	14	0.6	98	4.0
Lambeth	4	0.1	71	2.0	168	4.7	131	3.7
Lancashire	31	1.3	56	2.3	107	4.5	53	2.3
Leeds	22	0.9	31	1.2	20	0.8	53	2.1
Leicestershire	14	0.6	64	2.8	85	3.7	42	1.8
Lewisham	5	0.2	35	1.2	65	2.2	104	3.6
Lincolnshire	23	1.0	95	3.9	69	2.8	14	0.6
Liverpool	34	1.4	34	1.4	36	1.5	88	3.7
Manchester	50	1.9	40	1.6	8	0.3	119	4.6
Merton	27	0.9	35	1.1	88	2.9	3	0.1
Middlesbrough	11	0.4	22	0.8	17	0.7	71	2.7
North-east Lincolnshire	41	1.8	32	1.4	12	0.5	78	3.4
Newcastle	0	0.0	23	0.9	52	2.1	111	4.5
Newham	26	1.0	33	1.2	105	3.9	88	3.2
Norfolk	18	0.7	95	3.7	73	2.8	48	1.9
North Lincolnshire	34	1.4	66	2.7	4	0.2	69	2.8
North Somerset	40	1.6	81	3.3	72	3.0	40	1.7
North Tyneside	35	1.4	23	1.0	63	2.6	78	3.2
North Yorkshire	11	0.5	111	4.8	47	2.0	20	0.9
Northamptonshire	11	0.5	53	2.3	19	0.8	28	1.2
Northumberland	40	1.7	80	3.5	64	2.8	39	1.7
Nottinghamshire	45	2.1	36	1.7	12	0.6	56	2.6
Oldham	17	0.7	17	0.7	16	0.7	72	3.1
Oxfordshire	42	1.6	79	3.1	63	2.5	37	1.5
Redbridge	13	0.5	56	2.2	19	0.7	32	1.2
Redcar and Cleveland	24	1.0	34	1.5	29	1.3	61	2.7
Richmond	10	0.4	27	1.1	73	2.9	0	0.0
Rochdale	25	1.1	26	1.1	36	1.6	102	4.6
Rotherham	13	0.6	29	1.3	31	1.4	51	2.3
Salford	34	1.3	46	1.7	42	1.6	85	3.2
Sandwell	11	0.5	37	1.6	31	1.4	61	2.7
Sefton	26	1.1	28	1.1	40	1.7	71	2.9
Sheffield	40	1.7	35	1.5	78	3.4	75	3.2
Shropshire	28	1.2	90	3.7	41	1.7	36	1.5
Solihull	18	0.8	31	1.4	47	2.1	31	1.4
Somerset	17	0.7	72	3.2	80	3.5	27	1.2
South Gloucestershire	35	1.4	54	2.1	67	2.7	69	2.8

LEA	Premature retirement compensation		Home to school transport		Cost of statements		School meals (net of income)	
	£ per pupil	Percentage of GSB	£ per pupil	Percentage of GSB	£ per pupil	Percentage of GSB	£ per pupil	Percentage of GSB
South Tyneside	25	1.1	16	0.7	16	0.7	74	3.3
Southwark	10	0.3	87	2.8	65	2.1	118	3.8
St. Helens	44	1.9	54	2.3	71	3.0	60	2.5
Staffordshire	27	1.3	47	2.2	48	2.2	40	1.8
Southport	14	0.6	24	1.0	66	2.7	56	2.3
Stockton-on-Tees	5	0.2	30	1.3	24	1.1	60	2.6
Suffolk	13	0.6	78	3.3	45	1.9	21	0.9
Sunderland	10	0.4	26	1.1	38	1.6	59	2.5
Surrey	18	0.7	98	3.8	71	2.7	28	1.1
Sutton	6	0.2	45	1.6	27	1.0	46	1.6
Tameside	27	1.2	34	1.5	50	2.2	24	1.0
Tower Hamlets	21	0.6	48	1.4	82	2.4	135	3.9
Trafford	19	0.9	34	1.6	49	2.3	48	2.2
Wakefield	20	0.8	31	1.2	61	2.4	79	3.1
Walsall	30	1.3	20	0.9	34	1.5	55	2.5
Waltham Forest	20	0.7	43	1.5	4	0.1	73	2.5
Wandsworth	14	0.4	82	26	107	3.4	72	2.3
Warwickshire	35	1.4	68	2.6	23	0.9	43	1.7
West Sussex	3	0.1	53	2.3	40	1.7	30	1.3
Westminster	15	0.5	27	0.8	77	2.3	113	3.5
Wigan	46	1.9	32	1.3	24	1.0	53	2.2
Wiltshire	21	0.9	113	4.9	52	2.2	48	2.0
Wirral	45	1.9	53	2.2	40	1.7	67	2.8
Wolverhampton	50	2.2	35	1.5	22	1.0	75	3.2
York	10	0.5	45	2.1	55	2.5	33	1.5

The information in this table has been derived from financial statements produced under the section 122 of the Education Act 1996 (formerly section 42 of the Education Reform Act 1988), incorporating LEA's changes to their statements notified to the Department by 31 December 1996.

WALES

Osiris Network

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list *(a)* the main software systems in use in his Department on the date of commencement of the Osiris network and *(b)* the purposes for which the systems were installed; and to whom the intellectual property rights belong. [14340]

Mr Hague: The following table gives details of the main software systems in use in the Welsh Office at the start of the Osiris contract. Intellectual property rights rest with the Welsh Office for bespoke systems and with the suppliers for commercial packages.

Type of purpose	Product	Commercial/Bespoke
Office automation	DisplayWrite	Commercial
	Lotus 123	Commercial
	Smart	Commercial
Financial package	JBA	Commercial
Statistical package	SPSS	Commercial
Highways information	Access	Bespoke
Grant administration	Dataflex	Bespoke
Financial information	Ingress	Bespoke
	Visual C	Bespoke
	Visual basic	Bespoke
	Smart	Bespoke

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if part of his Department's computer *(a)* hardware and *(b)* software systems was transferred to the Osiris project and its private owners; and what policy his Department agreed with the company installing Osiris under the private finance initiative as to (i) the disposal of redundant computer hardware and software systems and (ii) the transfer of intellectual property rights. [14349]

Mr. Hague: Ownership of part of my Department's computer hardware passed to Siemens Business Services under the Osiris contract. There was no transfer of ownership for software systems. Siemens Business Services is required under the contract to remove unwanted equipment with minimum disruption and to meet the Department's security requirements for equipment no longer in use. As no software systems were transferred the question of the transfer of intellectual property rights does not arise.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the main types of computers in use in his Department on the date of commencement of the Osiris network; and if he will categorise those computers by age and approximate capital value when new and after depreciation. [14348]

Mr. Hague: The following table gives details of the main types of computer in use in the Welsh Office at the start of the Osiris contract.

Type	Age range (years)	Original value (£)	Depreciated value (£)
Personal computers	1 to 10	—	[1]2,350,000
Machines under UNIX	1 to 6	154,727	99,317
AS400	2 to 6	415,895	59,413
Mainframe 4381	10	1,350,000	Nil

[1] Personal Computers have a depreciation life of three years, at the end of which their value is nil. To have replaced all the personal computers with new equipment would have cost about £2,350,00.

Hospital Statistics

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairmen of the Welsh health authorities concerning the supply of statistics on the number of non-emergency operations cancelled since Christmas 1996 to assist hospitals in coping with the surge in medical emergency admissions; if he will give such statistics as have been collected; and if he will make a statement. [14965]

Mr. Hague: None. I shall, however, be meeting health authority chairmen on 10 March 1997 when a range of issues, including emergency medical admissions, will be discussed.

Early Retirement

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the financial payments for Treasury grant in aid to his departmental costs in running its voluntary early retirement scheme, with particular reference to the start and completion date of the scheme and the costs to *(a)* public funds and *(b)* his Department's budget in (i) 1994–95, (ii) 1995–96, (iii) 1996–97 and (iv) 1997–98. [14820]

Mr. Hague: No grant in aid was received from Treasury for the Department's early retirement scheme which ran from 1 April 1995 to 31 March 1996.

The cost of the scheme from the Department's own funds was:

1994–95: £0.7 million

1995–96: £0.7 million

1996–97: £1.8 million estimated

1997–98: £0.4 million estimated.

The Treasury meets its portion of the costs of early retirements directly from the civil superannuation vote. No funding is transferred to the Department.

Psychotic Diseases

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate how many people in Wales were registered sufferers of *(a)* Alzheimer's disease, *(b)* schizophrenia and *(c)* other psychotic diseases in each of the last five years, and if he will make a statement. [14663]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is not held centrally.

ENVIRONMENT

Parish Council Elections

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what date each of the district councils concerned was informed of the Government's decision that parish elections, in areas due to hold their first unitary council elections in 1997, would not be held in 1997. [14822]

Sir Paul Beresford: As no ordinary parish council elections are due in 1997, it is not necessary to inform any district councils that they will not take place.

HEALTH

Sick Children Nurses

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by trust the number of registered sick children nurses. [12055]

Mr. Horam: The information requested will be placed in the Library shortly.

Lariam

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the safety of lariam. [14275]

Mr. Malone: Lariam (mefloquine) is an authorised medicine used in the treatment and prevention of malaria which is considered to have an acceptable level of safety in relation to its benefits. A rigorous evaluation of quality, safety and efficacy of mefloquine by the Licensing Authority and its expert advisory body, the Committee on Safety of Medicines was carried out before a marketing authorisation was granted in 1990. Mefloquine, like all medicines, has side effects, and the Medicines Control Agency and the CSM continue to monitor its safety. If new relevant evidence comes to light, this is reviewed in order to ensure the risk of possible side-effects is outweighed by the benefits. Information on how to use mefloquine, including its side effects and precautions in use, is available to health care professionals and to patients through the manufacturer's product information authorised by the MCA, the British National Formulary and the bulletin *Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance*.

Public Health Consultants

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many public health consultants there were in public health medicines in each health authority in 1980, 1985, 1990 and 1996. [14331]

Mr. Malone: The available information is shown in the table.

Consultants[1] in Public Health Medicine by region as at 30 September each year

(whole time equivalent)

	1980	*1985*	*1990*	*1995*
Northern	40	30	40	30
Yorkshire	30	40	30	30
Trent	40	40	30	40
East Anglia	20	30	20	40
North-west Thames	30	40	30	40
North-east Thames	20	30	30	30
South-east Thames	20	30	30	30
South-west Thames	30	40	20	30
Wessex	20	20	20	30
Oxford	20	20	20	20
South Western	30	30	30	30
West Midlands	50	50	50	60
Mersey	20	20	20	30
North Western	50	50	50	50
Wales	30	40	30	40
Total	440	490	440	540

N.B. all figures are rounded to the nearest ten. Totals may not match the sum of the individual regions due to rounding.

[1] Includes regional and district directors of public health.

The figures are comparable for the years requested, only if given by the old regional health authorities.

Senior Medical House Officers

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what approval is required from the dean of faculty to enable a district general hospital to appoint a senior house officer in medicine once training approval has been granted by the Royal College of Physicians; and if he will make a statement. [14315]

Mr. Malone: Arrangements for the recruitment of medical and dental trainees are set out in an executive letter EL(94)58, and copies have been placed in the Library. Senior house officer posts may be given staffing approval by the regional task force on junior doctors' hours in consultation with the postgraduate dean. In approving a new SHO post, the postgraduate dean will wish to have regard to the distribution of posts within a region, the balance of training opportunities for each specialty and the availability of applicants and resources.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the professional guidelines for the ratio of senior medical house officers to patient work load *(a)* in day-time hours and *(b)* out of hours. [14317]

Mr. Malone: In each national health service trust the number and grading mix of doctors is based on careful appraisal, by department, of the service and training commitments, the tasks required, and the skills and competencies needed. These requirements vary according to the type of trust, service needs and local circumstances.

Food Safety Council

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health where the new food safety council will be located. [14328]

Mr. Horam: A decision will be announced in due course.

Trust Chairmen

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many chairmen of NHS trusts in Cheshire were previously employed by ICI. [14482]

Mr. Malone: The chairman of Mid-Cheshire Hospitals NHS trust, Mr. Robin Farmer, was previously employed by ICI Ltd. None of the other chairmen of NHS trusts in Cheshire have been employed by ICI.

Neuroleptic Drugs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidance his Department issues to the medical profession for prescribing neuroleptic drugs; and if he will make a statement; [14654]

(2) if he will list the neuroleptic drugs currently available on prescription; [14655]

(3) if he will estimate *(a)* how many and *(b)* what percentage of people suffering from (i) Alzheimer's disease, (ii) schizophrenia and (iii) other psychotic diseases are currently prescribed neuroleptic drugs; and if he will make a statement. [14660]

Mr. Malone: Guidance on prescribing issues, including on neuroleptics, is available to general practitioners from a variety of sources. Publications funded by the Department include the British National Formulary, which is regularly updated and provides advice for all doctors on the choice of suitable drugs, and the "MeReC Bulletin", which provides prescribing advice to all general practitioners. Copies of both documents are available in the Library.

The neuroleptic drugs—antipsychotic and antipsychotic depot injections—currently licensed and available on prescription in the United Kingdom are listed in sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 in the BNF. However, information on the number of patients being prescribed these drugs is not available centrally.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what warnings his Department currently requires on the packaging of neuroleptic drugs; and if he will make a statement. [14656]

Mr. Malone: All medicines are labelled to show any appropriate warnings. There are no statutory warnings relating specifically to neuroleptic drugs. Products information for doctors and patients produced by the manufacturer and authorised by the Medicines Control Agency includes extensive information on precautions in use, contraindications and side effects. The British National Formulary recommends that all such medicines, when dispensed against a doctor's prescription carry the standard warning:

> "WARNING: May Cause Drowsiness. If affected do not drive or operate machinery. Avoid alcoholic drink".

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what research his Department has evaluated into the side effects of neuroleptic drugs on patients with *(a)* Alzheimer's disease, *(b)* schizophrenia and *(c)* other psychotic diseases; and if he will make a statement; [14658]

(2) what research his Department has evaluated into the link between neuroleptic drugs and *(a)* the speed at which sufferers from dementia lose their cognitive abilities, *(b)* aggressive tendencies, *(c)* sleeping difficulty and *(d)* paranoia; and if he will make a statement. [14659]

Mr. Malone: As for all marked medicines, the available research into the side effects of neuroleptics was assessed at the time of granting the marketing authorisations and continues to be evaluated by the Medicines Control Agency whenever new information emerges. Recognised side effects for neuroleptics are included in the authorised product information and the British National Formulary.

Information regarding the sensitivity of patients with dementia, particularly those with Lewy-body-type, to neuroleptics has previously been given to doctors in an article in the bulletin of the Medicines Control Agency and the Committee on Safety of Medicines in "Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance, May 1994".

Psychotic Diseases

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate how many people were registered sufferers of *(a)* Alzheimer's disease, *(b)* schizophrenia and *(c)* other psychotic diseases in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [14661]

Mr. Burns: Information on the number of mentally ill people with a particular diagnosis is not collected centrally. We estimate that there were around 600,000 people in the United Kingdom with a diagnosis of dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, in 1994.

Heart Attack Treatment

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to evaluate the treatment for heart attacks proposed by Professor Noble, of Charing Cross and Westminster hospital medical school. [14905]

Mr. Horam: None.

Meningitis

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if a same-strain link has to be established between two cases of meningitis before his Department describes them as a cluster. [13017]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* No, the definition of a cluster does not require any microbiological link.

When laboratory confirmation of meningococcal disease is not available for one or more cases in a potential cluster, a very common situation, management guidance varies from case to case. Consultants in communicable disease control are advised to seek expert advice from the Public Health Laboratory Service. Advice is always available and additional guidance on the management of clusters of meningococcal disease was included in a letter sent to all doctors from the chief medical officer on 3 January and in the PHLS's communicable disease report review of 10 January. Copies are available in the Library.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Police Officers (Criminal Conduct)

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Attorney-General what plans he has to review the handling by the Crown Prosecution Service of allegations of criminal conduct made against police officers by members of the public which are reportable to the Director of Public Prosecutions under the provisions of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. [15265]

The Attorney General: The Crown Prosecution Service from its inception until 31 January 1997 handled such cases in accordance with the arrangements set out in paragraph 12 of the White Paper (Cmnd 9411) published in December 1984. With the exception of cases involving allegations of non-fatal motoring offences, they were dealt with by specialist teams comprising part of the CPS central casework in order to avoid any suggestion that decisions might be influenced by the working relationship between the public and local Crown prosecutors. However, an internal review concluded that central handling is no longer necessary to achieve this nor is it desirable for any other reason. Following consultations with interested parties, new arrangements have been agreed with police forces for the majority of cases involving allegations of criminal conduct by police officers to be considered by the CPS at local level. To guard against local influence, these cases will be assigned to CPS lawyers with suitable experience who have no working relationship or other connection with the officer concerned. Wherever possible, cases will be handled in a CPS branch which covers a different police force from the one in which the officer serves.

A list of those cases which will continue to be dealt with by CPS central casework has been placed in the Libraries of the House. They are the more serious or complex cases and include allegations involving interference with the administration of justice, corruption, offences alleged to have been committed by officers of the rank of superintendent and above and cases involving deaths in police custody.

The new arrangements came into effect in most police areas on 3 February 1997.

INDEX TO THE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 289**

SESSION 1996–97

27th January—7th February 1997

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instruments etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker's rulings and statements'.

Other contributions by Speaker and deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates and Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates, etc.* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions.*

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Comm = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

Column numbers followed by the letter W refer to Written Questions. These appear at the end of each daily part or volume with their own sequence of column numbers printed in italics.

A30
Badgers 137w

A46
129w

A47
129w

A74
Road works 645–6w

A89
Road construction 999, 1005–6

A465
Road accidents 290w

Abbey Wood
32w

Abbott, Ms Diane
Questions
Career development loans, Ethnic minorities 264–5w

Aberdeen College of Education
Employment agencies 1003
Manpower 1003

Abortion
333–4w

Abortion (Amendment) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R order read (31.01.97) 647

Absent voting
British residents abroad 690–3w

Access funds
267w

Access to buildings
Police stations 552w

Access to countryside
Forests 240–1w

Accident and emergency departments
401w, 593w, 597w
Hospital consultants 399w
Patients 597w
Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust 109w

Accidents
Erskine bridge 249w

Accounting
Charities 149w

Acid rain
Wales 616w

Action for Community Employment
Northern Ireland 50–2w, 370–1w, 493–4

Activity Centres (Young Persons' Safety) Act 1995
Questions
Scotland 626w

Acute beds
Borders General Hospital 993
Scotland 62–4w

Adams, Mrs Irene
Debates etc.
Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill, Rep and 3R (29.01.97) 373–5, 378
Witness Prosecution Bill, 2R (31.01.97) 637–9

Administration of justice
Scotland 622w
Young offenders 313–4w

Admiralty House
526w
Operating costs 735w

Advanced Television Services Regulations 1996
Debates etc.
(04.02.97) 803

Advertising
Job centres 259w
Ministry of Defence 685w

Advisory services
Social security benefits 426–7w

Aerospace industry
Government assistance 169w
Mergers 508w

Agenda 21
135w

Agricultural surpluses
715w

Agriculture
Nature conservation 717w
Negative equity 720w

Aid financed trade
126w
Jakarta 27w

AIDS
268–9w, 722w
Death 269w, 331–2w
Motor neurone disease 268w

Ainger, Mr Nick
Questions
Air accidents, Mull of Kintyre 439–40w
Ambulance services, Wales 159w
Asbestos 14–6w, 24–5w
Asbestos, Death 14–5w
Castlemartin Range, Compensation 438w
Centre for Environment Fisheries and Aquaculture Science 515–6w
Children, Departmental coordination 113–4w
Home Office, Legal costs 378–80w
Legal aid scheme, Fraud 385–6w
National Lottery, Sports facilities 658
Nurses, Wales 40–1w
Nurses' training, Student numbers 117w
Nurses' training, Wales 40w
Queen's flight 682–3w
RAF Valley, Helicopters 683w

Ainsworth, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Local government finance (03.02.97) 684, 703, 714, 752–5
Questions
Inheritance tax, Tax allowances 234w
Road finance 56–60w

Air accidents
Military aircraft 619–20w
Mull of Kintyre 439–40w

Air force
(06.02.97) 1157–236
Redundancy 203w

Air freight transport
650w
Charter flights 569–70w
Hazardous materials 128w

Air pollution
531w, 785
Bexley 137w
Road traffic 54w
South East London 785–6

Air pollution control
786

Air safety
Boeing 737 359–60w

Air traffic control
128w
Prestwick Airport 506–7w

Aircraft
Baggage 127–8w

Aircraft noise
(28.01.97) 155–6

Aircrew
Medical examinations 570–1w

Airlines
360w

Airport tax
659, 797

Airports and Aerodromes (Noise) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
1R (28.01.97) 155–6

Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Debates etc.
Revenue support grant, Kent County Council (05.02.97) 946

Albania
Pyramid selling 505w

Alcoholic drinks
324w
Public order offences 689w

Alcoholism
Rehabilitation centres (31.01.97) 648–56

Alexander, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Food Safety Council (30.01.97) 527
Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill, 2R (31.01.97) 583, 594–9
Questions
Farmers, Bureaucracy 716w

Algrade Trust
446w

Alison, Rt Hon Michael, Second Church Estates Commissioner
Debates etc.
Sex Offenders Bill, 2R (27.01.97) 52–4
Subsidence, Coal mining (30.01.97) 568–71
Questions
Church and state 18–9
Church Commissioners, Investment 46–7w
Church Commissioners, Set-aside land 48w
Church Commissioners, Tenant farmers 351–2w
Church finance 19–20
Church finance, Poverty 48w
Church of England, Turnbull Commission 47–8w
Church property, Security 47w
Church property, Valuation 47w
Clergy, Pensions 46w

Allason, Mr Rupert
Debates etc.
Business questions (30.01.97) 538

Allen, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
Local government finance, East Midlands (29.01.97) 480–4
Questions
Local government finance, Kent 792
Members' facilities, Child care 458w
SAFE programme 536w

Alternative energy
Electricity generation 694–6w

Alton, Mr David
Debates etc.
Ford Motor Company, Halewood (05.02.97) 930–1
Sex Offenders Bill, 2R (27.01.97) 27
Questions
Computer privacy, EC law 456w
European Commission 540w
European Court of Human Rights 539–43w
European Court of Human Rights, Judgments 345w, 540–2w
Hawksworth Hall School, Professional misconduct 460w

Alyn and Deeside
Jobseeker's allowance 743w

Alzheimer's disease
763w
Drugs 761–2w
Wales 759w

Ambulance services
Wales 159w

Amess, Mr David
Questions
Business questions 1150
Common fisheries policy 1135
Fire services, Essex 788–9
GP fundholders, Scotland 627–8w

Ammonium nitrate
Labelling 418w
Tilbury 317w, 355w, 359w

Ancram, Rt Hon Michael, Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office
Questions
Action for Community Employment, Northern Ireland 370–1w, 493–4
Beef premiums, Northern Ireland 601–2w
EC grants and loans, Northern Ireland 499w
Education and Library Boards (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 370w
Educational finance, Northern Ireland 492, 727–9w
Educational qualifications, Northern Ireland 501w
Electricity interconnectors, Northern Ireland 372w
Ethnic minorities, Northern Ireland 500–1w
Farm incomes, Northern Ireland 652w
Farms, Negative equity 656w
Fishing, Northern Ireland 655–6w
Foreign investment in UK 501
GCE A level, Northern Ireland 654w
Hard core unemployed, Northern Ireland 371w
Hill livestock allowances, Northern Ireland 413–4w
Integrated schools, Northern Ireland 369w
Jobseeker's allowance, Northern Ireland 494
Livestock, Northern Ireland 370w
Non-domestic rates, Northern Ireland 493
Northern Ireland Dept of Education, Government buildings 602w
Northern Ireland education and library boards 309w
Northern Ireland government 301–2w, 494
Official hospitality, Northern Ireland 651–2w
Polling stations, Northern Ireland 652w
Power failures, Newry and Mourne 173–4w
Public bodies, Northern Ireland 651w
School admission, Northern Ireland 491–2
School population, Northern Ireland 368w
Scrabo High School 305w

Ancram, Rt Hon Michael—continued
Secondary education, Northern Ireland 491
Social policy, Northern Ireland 368w
Special schools, Northern Ireland 171–2w
Suckler cow premiums, Northern Ireland 656w
Tourists, Northern Ireland 369w
Unemployment, Northern Ireland 492–3

Andersen Consulting
Northern Ireland Office 500w

Anderson, Mr Donald
Debates etc.
Civil Procedure Bill (HL) 2R and money res* (30.01.97) 545, 554–6
Ford Motor Company, Halewood (05.02.97) 932–3
Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill, 2R (31.01.97) 581–9, 593, 596–7, 599, 603, 610, 615, 619, 621, 632
Local government finance, Wales (04.02.97) 861, 878, 895–6
Sex Offenders Bill, 2R (27.01.97) 29, 34–5, 67–8
Questions
European Council, Cardiff 411w
Whips and whipping 7

Angola
Overseas aid 17

Animal breeding
Cattle 186w
Ethics 513–4w

Animal experiments
Genetic engineering 287w
Licensing 216–7w

Animal feed
Avoparcin 49–50w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 354w

Animal quarantine
186w, 513w
Codes of practice 405w

Animal welfare
714w, 1130–1
Consumer information 1129–30
EC action 1130
Export of live animals 405–6w
Greece 1130–1
Intergovernmental Conference 1996 1129
National Lottery 667
Poultry 716w
Veterinary Investigation Service 352w

Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986
Questions
1w

Antarctic Treaty
26w

Antidepressants
Drug side effects 723w

Antidumping duties
Cotton 232–3w

Apprentices
Manufacturing industries 151w

Arable farming
Wild animals 574–5w

Arbuthnot, Mr James, Minister of State for Defence
Debates etc.
Air Force (06.02.97) 1174, 1227–36
Questions
Abbey Wood 32w
Arms to Iraq Inquiry, Ministry of Defence 684–5w
Arms trade, Turkey 526w

Arbuthnot, Mr James—continued
Auxiliary Oiler Replenishment Vessels, Defence procurement 199w
AWE Aldermaston, Defence research 29w
Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty 31w
Defence contracts, Lancashire 349–50w
Defence contracts, North West region 483w
Defence research 196w
Defence research, USA 29–30w, 195–6w
Electronic warfare 487w
European fighter aircraft 484w
Hawk aircraft 439w
Hawk aircraft, Arms trade 621w
Lasers, Defence equipment 30w
Nuclear power 196w
Nuclear weapons policy 28–9w
Nuclear weapons policy, Military alliances 29w
Nuclear weapons policy, USA 195w
Radar, Defence procurement 684w
Riot control weapons, Health hazards 619w
Royal yacht 201w, 483w
Submarines, Defence procurement 199w
Trident, Expenditure 484w
Weather forecasting, Equipment 209w

Area Museum Councils
18–9w

Areas of outstanding natural beauty
Sussex 788

Argyll and Bute
Special islands needs allowance 1002

Armed forces
Disciplinary proceedings 196–7w, 206w
Employment protection 203w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict 206w
Redundancy 31w
Smoking 197–8w, 526w

Armed forces cadets
203–6w

Armed forces catering services
Contracts 206–8w, 485–6w
Contracts for services 684w

Armed forces housing
32–3w

Armed forces officers
Armed forces recruitment 484–5w

Armed forces recruitment
Age 348–9w
Armed forces officers 484–5w
Publicity 484w

Armed forces strength
203w

Armed forces training
Joint Service Command and Staff College 525–6w

Arms to Iraq Inquiry
Attorney General 701w
Deputy Prime Minister 675w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 659–60w, 663w
Home Office 741–2w
Ministry of Defence 684–5w
Office of Public Service 675w

Arms trade
Hawk aircraft 621w
Indonesia 419–20w
Iraq 349w
Rwanda 13
Turkey 526w
United Arab Emirates 697–8w

Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Debates etc.
Local government finance (03.02.97) 697, 735, 760–3
Revenue support grant, Kent County Council (05.02.97) 943, 947, 959–62

Army
683–4w
Museums and galleries 32w, 193–4w

Army bases
Colchester 621w

Army in Northern Ireland
483–4w, 494–6
Inquiries 505–6
Prisoners 209–10w, 438w, 498–9

Army strength
485w

Arnold, Mr Jacques
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 223–4, 234
Revenue support grant, Kent County Council (05.02.97) 945, 953–4, 960–1
Questions
Administration of justice, Scotland 622w
Business questions 1153
Darenth Park Hospital, Private finance initiative 7
Intimidation of witnesses, Northern Ireland 499
Local government finance, Kent 791–2
RAF Personnel Management Agency 350–1w
Rwanda, Industrial development 13
Schools, Standard spending assessments 259–60w

Arrests
Zahoorul, Syed 745w

Art education
662

Art works
(04.02.97) 908
Palace of Westminster 351w

Arts
Student grants 18w
Young people 660–1

Arts Council of England
Government grants 314–6w, 742w
National Lottery 490w

Arts finance
Young people 661

Arts Forum
583w

Arts grants
Theatre 491–2w

Arts sponsorship
Business 487–8w

Asbestos
14–6w, 24–5w, 445–7w
Death 14–5w

Ashby, Mr David
Questions
UK membership of EC 504

Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Questions
British citizenship, Hong Kong 1139–40
Northern Ireland government 504–5

Aspartame
Health hazards 597–8w

Assisted places scheme
73–5w, 556–7w

Assisted places scheme—continued
Portsmouth 706w
Scotland 242–9w
Sir John's College Southsea 706w
Staffordshire 352–3
Wales 157w, 289w, 520w

Assisted prison visits scheme
Northern Ireland 726–8w

Association of South East Asian Nations
Burma 225w
International conferences 226w

Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993
Questions
192–3w

Atkins, Rt Hon Robert,
Questions
Educational finance, Lancashire 347–8
Landlord and tenant 316w
Lorry drivers, Prosecutions 129–30w
Sports facilities, Judgments 742–3w

Atkinson, Mr David
Questions
Housing benefits, Service charges 294–5w
Mental health services, Sheltered housing 362w

Atkinson, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Education (05.02.97) 1094
Local government finance (03.02.97) 757–9
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 1132
Cabinet Office, Cash limits 373w
North of England Assembly of Local Authorities, Finance 787

Attorney General
Arms to Iraq Inquiry 701w

Austin-Walker, Mr John
Questions
Housing benefits 362w

Auxiliary Oiler Replenishment Vessels
Defence procurement 199w

Average earnings
335–6w

Avoparcin
Animal feed 49–50w

AWE Aldermaston
Defence research 29w

Axle weights
Lorries 128–9w, 391w

Ayrshire
Community hospitals 685–7w

Ayrshire and Arran Health Board
177–8w

Badgers
A30 137w

Baggage
Aircraft 127–8w

Baglan Hospital
158w

Baker, Sir Nicholas,
Questions
Local education authorities, Administrative costs 264w

Baldry, Mr Tony, Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Questions
Beef, Exports 49w

Baldry, Mr Tony—continued
Beef, Prices 48–9w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Compensation 575w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Costs 1136
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Data banks 720w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 352w, 354–5w, 514w, 573w, 718w, 1125
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Grimsby 631–2w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Northern Ireland 514–5w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Waste disposal 718–9w, 1125, 1136
Centre for Environment Fisheries and Aquaculture Science 515–6w
Common fisheries policy 49w, 715w, 1135
Common fisheries policy, EC enlargement 715w
Fish, Imports 288–9w
Fisheries 715w
Fishing quotas 1136
Fishing vessels, EC grants and loans 288w
Fishing vessels, Government grants 717w
Industrial fishing 1135
Integrated administration and control system 286–7w
Pesca initiative 48w
Rice, EC overseas countries and territories 407w
Suckler cow premiums 516w
Veterinary services, Import of live animals 1125–6

Ballygowan
Road safety 654w

Bank of Credit and Commerce International
Company liquidations 170w

Bank of England
145w

Banks, Mr Matthew
Debates etc.
NHS (05.02.97) 1017, 1021–2, 1032–9, 1043, 1052, 1054–5
Questions
Customs and Excise, Cash limits 422w
Dept of National Heritage, Cash limits 492w
EC Finance Council 334–5w
Government Actuary, Cash limits 422w
Inland Revenue, Cash limits 423w
Office for National Statistics, Cash limits 422–3w
Pay Review Bodies 698–701w

Banks, Mr Robert
Questions
Caravan sites 606–7w
Charities Act 1992 607w

Banks, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Business questions (30.01.97) 541
Food Safety Council (30.01.97) 530–1
House of Commons Chamber, Points of order (04.02.97) 802
Intervention during Business statement (30.01.97) 539
Local government finance (03.02.97) 681
Questions
Animal welfare, EC action 1130
Bullingdon Prison, Hunger strikes 218–9w
Church Commissioners, Set-aside land 48w
Hunger strikes 366
Import of live animals 417w, 562w

Banks, Mr Tony*—*continued
Retirement pensions 147–8
Royal yacht 436w
Wild animals, Licensing 223–4w
World Cup 661

Barnes, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Business questions (30.01.97) 538–9
House of Commons debates, Points of order (06.02.97) 1156
Local government finance (03.02.97) 730
Local government finance, East Midlands (29.01.97) 483
Northern Ireland Parades and Marches Review (30.01.97) 521–2
Questions
Beef, Exports 1131–2
Business questions 1148
Child Support Agency, Administrative delays 427–8w
Further education 258w
McAliskey, Roisin, Extradition 452–3w
Northern Ireland Office, Andersen Consulting 500w

Bates, Mr Michael, Paymaster-General
Questions
Civil servants 119w
Civil servants, Political impartiality 120w
Computers, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 674–5w
Computers in government departments 2–3
Coordination and Presentation of Government Policy Ministerial Committee 119w
Darenth Park Hospital, Private finance initiative 7
Departmental coordination, Economic policy 7–8
Economic policy 8–9
Equal opportunities, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 734–5w
House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975 674w
Public expenditure, Private finance initiative 8
Royal yacht 7, 9
Social security abuse, North East region 3
Whips and whipping 7

Batiste, Mr Spencer
Questions
AIDS, Death 331–2w
AIDS, Motor neurone disease 268w
Cold weather payments, West Yorkshire 140

Battle, Mr John
Questions
Aspartame, Health hazards 597–8w
Energy prices 33–4w
Global Environmental Facility 459w
Hospital waiting lists, Leeds 343–4w
Intensive care, Leeds 471w
Long stay patients, Northern and Yorkshire region 164w
NHS and private practice, West Yorkshire 471w
West Yorkshire Health Authority, Health service staff 471–2w

Bayley, Mr Hugh
Debates etc.
Local government finance (03.02.97) 687
Questions
Airport tax 659
Cancer, Hospital waiting lists 343w
Child Support Agency 187w
Employment schemes, North Yorkshire 468–9w
Employment schemes, York 338w

Bayley, Mr Hugh*—*continued
Hospital beds 277–8w
Intensive care, Children 276–7w
"Social Trends", Costs 613–4w
Youth unemployment, York 479w

Beaches
Wales 411w

Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Questions
Arms trade, Iraq 349w
Export licensing, Iraq 418w

Beef
Exports 49w, 71w, 716w, 1131–3
Prices 48–9w
Wales 522w

Beef premiums
Northern Ireland 601–2w

Beggs, Mr Roy
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 170, 215–6
Questions
Antidumping duties, Cotton 232–3w
EC grants and loans, Northern Ireland 499w
Electricity interconnectors, Northern Ireland 993–4
Jobseeker's allowance, Non-teaching staff 579w
Northern Ireland Environment and Heritage Service, Consultants 653–4w
Polling stations, Northern Ireland 652w
Shellfish, Northern Ireland 311–2w
Tipping of waste, Magheramorne 53–4w
Unemployment, Northern Ireland 492–3

Beith, Rt Hon A J
Debates etc.
Education (05.02.97) 1078, 1093–7
Police grant (29.01.97) 466, 470–3
Questions
Fishing, Scotland 69w
Royal yacht 5
Scottish Grand Committee 707–8w

Belfast
Housing construction 173w
Litter 304w
Taking and driving away 368–9w

Belgium
EC grants and loans 571w

Bellingham, Mr Henry
Questions
Fishing quotas 1136
Social security abuse 136–7
Transport of animals 716w

Bellwin scheme
North Devon 538–9w

Belvedere
Refuse derived fuel 233w

Benefits Agency
see Social Security Benefits Agency

Benefits Agency district offices
743–4w
Wales 426–7w

Benefits Agency Medical Service
106–7w
Scotland 638–9w

Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Questions
Immigrant detainees 364–5

Bennett, Mr Andrew F
Debates etc.
Sex Offenders Bill, 2R (27.01.97) 58–60

Bentley, Derek
160–1w

Benton, Mr Joe
Debates etc.
Ford Motor Company, Halewood (05.02.97) 933–4
Questions
Income support, Children 188–9w

Beresford, Sir Paul, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of the Environment
Debates etc.
Great Barr Hall (06.02.97) 1241–4
Local government finance, East Midlands (29.01.97) 484–8
Revenue support grant, Kent County Council (05.02.97) 954, 961–3
Telecommunications technology, Planning permission (07.02.97) 1318–22
Questions
Ammonium nitrate, Tilbury 317w
Asbestos 15–6w, 446–7w
Asbestos, Death 14–5w
Computers, Dept of the Environment 677w
Council tax capping 531w, 787
Dept of the Environment, Public appointments 677w
Dredging, Licensing 12–3w
Equal opportunities, Dept of the Environment 676w
Government grants to local authorities, Manchester 223w
Judicial review, Dept of the Environment 676w
Local government elections 759w
Local government expenditure, Redbridge 532w
Local government finance 794
Local government finance, Hounslow 676w
Local government finance, Kent 791–2
Local government finance, Private finance initiative 11w
Local government finance, Wolverhampton 794
Local government pensions 535w
Local government property 448w
Local government reform, Hertfordshire 448w
Local government revenue 447w
Local government services, Contracts for services 787–8
Local government services, Kent 792
Mine safety 224w
Mineral resources, Planning permission 10–1w
North of England Assembly of Local Authorities, Finance 787
Opencast mining, Warwickshire 536w
Out of town shopping centres, Rural areas 171w
Planning permission, Telecommunications technology 220–1w
Publicity, Dept of the Environment 448w
Revenue support grant, Manchester 13w, 223w, 530w
Rock characterisation facility, United Kingdom NIREX 448w
SAFE programme 536w
Standard spending assessments 531w
Standard spending assessments, Buckinghamshire 221w
Standard spending assessments, Council tax 786–7
Teesside Development Corporation, Planning permission 133w
Twin towns, EC grants and loans 220w
Vehicle number plates, Dept of the Environment 9–10w

Bermingham, Mr Gerald
Debates etc.
Ford Motor Company, Halewood (05.02.97) 931–2
Questions
Tourist industry, EC Social Charter 668–9

Berry, Mr Roger
Questions
Abbey Wood 32w
Means tested benefits 135–6
Unemployment benefits, Social security claims 260w

Betts, Mr Clive
Questions
Breasts, Plastic surgery 165–6w
Hereditary diseases 167w
Prosthetics 166–7w
Silicone, Poisoning 166w

Bexley
Air pollution 137w
Tourism 251–2w

Bicycles
Trains 733–4w

Bilateral aid
Tanzania 13–4

Birds
Cardiff Bay barrage 41w
Export licensing 352w
Exports 316w
Nature conservation 13–4w

Birmingham
Educational finance 705–6w

Birmingham Prison
Immigrant detainees 4w, 212–4w

Birmingham relief road
571–2w

Black Country Careers Services
341w

Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Questions
General elections 148–9
Headteachers 795–6
Manifestos, Economic and monetary union 502–4
National debt 1138–9

Blind
Disabled workers 623w

Blunkett, Mr David
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep (27.01.97) 79
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 257–60
Questions
Education vouchers, Pre-school education 465–6w
Educational finance 83–6w
Educational standards 86–92w
General Certificate of Secondary Education 76–84w
Out of school childcare grant scheme 618w
Ridings School, Teachers 555w
School leaving 95w
School population 394w
Teachers, Early retirement 75w
Teachers, Pay 93–6w
Youth unemployment 351–2

Board of Inland Revenue
see Inland Revenue

Board of Trade
Environment protection 233w

Boateng, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Civil Procedure Bill (HL) 2R and money res* (30.01.97) 547–53, 562–5
Questions
Courts, Fees and charges 670–1

Boeing
McDonnell Douglas 508w

Boeing 737
Air safety 359–60w

Bolton
Dental health 161–2w, 399w
Magistrates 120w
Magistrates' courts 672

Bombings
Lockerbie 70–1w, 524–5w
Manchester 223w, 735w

Bonsor, Sir Nicholas, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Questions
Albania, Pyramid selling 505w
Antarctic Treaty 26w
Children, Ministerial duties 28w
European Commission 540w
European Court of Human Rights 505w, 539–43w
European Court of Human Rights, Judgments 540–2w

Booker Foodservice
486w

Booth, Mr Hartley
Debates etc.
Human Tissue (Amendment) Bill, 2R adjourned (07.02.97) 1305–6
Questions
Council of Ministers, Scottish Office 622w
Cultural heritage 490w
Millennium Exhibition 666

Borders General Hospital
Acute beds 993

Borders Health Board
Hospital finance 992

Boswell, Mr Tim, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food
Questions
Agricultural surpluses 715w
Agriculture, Negative equity 720w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 714–5w
Computers, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 719w
Deer, Devon 407w
Environment protection, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 50w
Farmers, Bureaucracy 716w
Flood control, Coastal erosion 1126–7
Flood control, Research 1126
Hill livestock allowances 573–4w
Nature conservation, Agriculture 717w
Organic farming 356w
Organic food, Imports 356w
Publicity, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 720–1w
"Rural England White Paper" 716–7w
Sustainable development, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 185–6w
Wild animals, Arable farming 574–5w

Bottomley, Mr Peter
Questions
Business questions 1147
Dept for Education and Employment, Cash limits 397–8w

Bottomley, Mr Peter—continued
Higher Education National Committee of Inquiry 558w
Manifestos 505
Northern Ireland government 494
School population 99–102w

Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia, Secretary of State for National Heritage
Questions
Area Museum Councils 18–9w
Art education 662
Arts, Young people 660–1
Arts Council of England, National Lottery 490w
Arts finance, Young people 661
Arts Forum 583w
Arts sponsorship, Business 487–8w
Dept of National Heritage, Cash limits 492w
EC Social Charter 663, 669
Film industry 491w
Film industry, National Lottery 488w
Inland waterways, National Lottery 659–60
Millennium Exhibition 253w, 314w, 490w, 659w, 664–6
National Lottery 488w
Radio broadcasting licences, Doncaster 490–1w
Tourist industry 669
Tourist industry, EC Social Charter 662–4, 667–9
Voluntary organisations, National Lottery 489w
World Cup 661

Bournemouth University
Multimedia 32w

Bovine spongiform encephalopathy
280–1w, 283–5w, 500, 573w, 714–5w, 1132
Animal feed 354w
Compensation 71w, 575w
Costs 513w, 1136
Data banks 720w
Disease control 156w, 352w, 354–5w, 514w, 573w, 631w, 718w, 1125, 1132
Germany 714w
Grimsby 631–2w
Import of live animals 1125
Northern Ireland 500–1, 514–5w, 652w
Rendering industry 284w, 353–4w
Research 71w, 281–3w, 354w
Scotland 71w
Wales 156w, 587–8w
Waste disposal 718–9w, 1125, 1136

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy Order 1996
Questions
280w

Bowden, Sir Andrew
Questions
Council tax benefits 711–2w
National Lottery, Elderly 150w
Pensioners, Tax rates and bands 143–4w
Residential care, Personal pensions 112–3w
Retirement pensions 637–8w

Bowis, Mr John, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Transport
Questions
Air freight transport 650w
Air freight transport, Charter flights 569–70w
Air freight transport, Hazardous materials 128w
Air traffic control 128w
Aircraft, Baggage 127–8w

***Bowis, Mr John**—continued*
Aircrew, Medical examinations 570–1w
Airlines 360w
Boeing 737, Air safety 359–60w
Buses, EC action 569–70w
Coastguard Agency 572–3w
Computers, Dept of Transport 703w
Driving, Drug side effects 703w
Driving Standards Agency, Contracts of employment 649–50w
Driving Standards Agency, Temporary employment 703–4w
EC grants and loans, Belgium 571w
Environment protection, Dept of Transport 130w
Equal opportunities, Dept of Transport 734w
Fishing vessels, Water safety 704w
Hammersmith bridge, Repairs and maintenance 650–1w
Jubilee line, Building workers 569w
Lorries, Axle weights 128–9w
Merchant seamen, English language 394w
Motor vehicles, Excise duties 130–1w
Motorways, Road accidents 646–8w
MV Cap Afrique 506w
Ports, Waste disposal 126–7w
Prestwick Airport, Air traffic control 506–7w
Publicity, Dept of Transport 507w
Road tax 55w, 390–1w
Sea pollution 127w
Sea pollution, Gibraltar 647w
Sea pollution, Prosecutions 127w
Speed limits, Cameras 130w
Sustainable development, Dept of Transport 131w

Bradley, Mr Keith
Questions
South Manchester Health Authority, Orthopaedics 276w

Brain
Injuries 622w

Bray, Dr Jeremy
Debates etc.
Food Safety Council (30.01.97) 525

Brazier, Mr Julian
Debates etc.
Air Force (06.02.97) 1172–3
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 243
Revenue support grant, Kent County Council (05.02.97) 944, 947, 951
Sex Offenders Bill, 2R (27.01.97) 36–7, 48–9, 56–8
Questions
Committee on Standards in Public Life, Public bodies 412w
Games, Expenditure 276w
Hill livestock allowances, Northern Ireland 413–4w
Northern Ireland Office, Cash limits 412–3w

Breast cancer
Screening 164w

Breasts
Plastic surgery 165–6w

Breeding and Sale of Dogs Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R. order read (07.02.97) 1316

Brent Spar
326w, 508–9w

Bridges
Public petitions (29.01.97) 479
River Calder (29.01.97) 479

British Academy of Sport
19w, 314w, 491w, 607w

British citizenship
Hong Kong 456w, 552–3w, 1138–40

British constitution
(05.02.97) 1010–1

British Fluoridation Society
163w
Government grants 162–3w

British Railways Board
Termination of employment 350w

British residents abroad
Absent voting 690–3w
EC countries 141w

British Waterways Board
Government grants 533w

Broadcasting Act 1996
Questions
150w

Broadcasting (Sign Language) Order 1997
Debates etc.
(27.01.97) 124

Bromley
School admission 263–4w

Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Questions
Immigrant detainees 364

Brown, Mr Michael
Questions
Animal welfare, Intergovernmental Conference 1996 1129
Bank of England 145w
Church and state 18
Environment, Disclosure of information 538w
Exchange rate mechanism 731w
Inflation 145–6w
Local government expenditure, Scotland 621w
Local government finance 794
Monetary policy 613w
Northern Ireland Water Service Agency 309–10w
Public sector borrowing requirement, Floating debt 420–1w
Public sector borrowing requirement, National Income 420w
Secondary education, Northern Ireland 491

***Browning, Mrs Angela**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food*
Questions
Ammonium nitrate, Tilbury 355w
Animal breeding, Ethics 513–4w
Animal experiments, Genetic engineering 287w
Animal quarantine 186w, 513w
Animal quarantine, Codes of practice 405w
Animal welfare 714w, 1130–1
Animal welfare, Consumer information 1129–30
Animal welfare, EC action 1130
Animal welfare, Greece 1130–1
Animal welfare, Intergovernmental Conference 1996 1129
Avoparcin, Animal feed 49–50w
Birds, Export licensing 352w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 280–1w, 283–5w, 573w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Animal feed 354w

***Browning, Mrs Angela**—continued*
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Costs 513w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Research 281–3w, 354w
Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy Order 1996 280w
Cattle, Animal breeding 186w
Dairy farming, Hormone treatments 574w
Export of live animals 406w, 1131
Export of live animals, Animal welfare 405–6w
Export of live animals, Pigs 720w
Food, Carcinogens 353w
Food, Genetic engineering 719w
Food, Safety standards 574w
Food, Urban areas 286w, 356w
Food hygiene 574w
Food industry, Improvement notices 357w
Food industry, Inspections 356–7w
Food industry, Pendle 357w
Food labelling 717w
Food labelling, Meat products 356w
Food Safety Council 1127–8, 1137
Fowl pest 403–4w
Genetically modified organisms, EC law 515–6w
Genetically modified organisms, Food 1127–9
Hedley Lomas (Ireland), Damages 406w
Maize, Genetic engineering 719–20w
Meat Products and Spreadable Fish Products Regulations 1984 285–6w
Nutrition and health 717w
Oils and fats 355w
Organophosphorous pesticides 403w
Ostriches, Farms 405w
Poultry, Animal welfare 716w
Poultry, Slaughterhouses 717–8w
Sheep, EC internal trade 406–7w
Specified Bovine Material (No 3) Order 1996 284w, 353–4w
Transport of animals 716w
Vegetables, Nitrates 355w
Veterinary Investigation Service, Animal welfare 352w

Bruce, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 199, 203, 210–1
Police grant (29.01.97) 461
Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.02.97) 811–4, 826–9, 831
Questions
Computers in government departments 2–3
Dept of the Environment, Cash limits 388–90w
Immigrant detainees 367
Income tax, Scotland 998
Temporary employment 256–7w

Bruce, Mr Malcolm
Questions
Assisted places scheme 75w
Business questions 1145
Capital gains tax 144w
Company cars 479–80w
Company cars, Tax allowances 334w, 425w
Company cars, Tax yields 480–1w
Computers in government departments, Millennium 121–2w
Defence research 196w
Dental charges 116–7w
Eye tests, Optical charges 115w
Habitual residence test, Expenditure 105w
Housing benefits, Young people 103–4w
Hydrocarbon oil duties 238w
Income support, Young people 104w

***Bruce, Mr Malcolm**—continued*
Income tax 238w
Income tax, Tax rates and bands 142–3w
Income tax on investment incomes, Tax allowances 335w
Industrial research, Government assistance 417w
Interest rates 424w
Jobseeker's allowance, Expenditure 105w
Jobseeker's allowance, Young people 97–8w
Mortgage relief 144w, 239w
National income 680w
National insurance contributions 363–4w, 579w
National insurance contributions, Fringe benefits 104w
National insurance contributions, Tax avoidance 364w
NHS 116w
NHS, Labour costs 114w
Personal equity plans, Tax allowances 142w
Personal tax allowances 142w
Police, Manpower 125w
Prescription charges 116w
Privatisation, Income 731–2w
Public expenditure 568w
Public sector debt 424w
Railway fares 360w, 481w
Road tax 55w
Social Fund, Expenditure 103w
Social security benefits, Political refugees 300w
Tobacco duties 236–7w
Trusts, Capital gains tax 337w
Trusts, Taxation 337w
Unemployment, Public expenditure 567–8w
VAT 237w
VAT, Fuels 238w
Venture capital trusts, Tax yields 142w
War pensions 299w

Buckinghamshire
Standard spending assessments 221w

Buckinghamshire Health Authority
NHS finance 278w

Building Research Establishment
Partners in Technology 224–5w
Privatisation 139w

Building workers
334w
Jubilee line 569w

Bullingdon Prison
Hunger strikes 218–9w

Burden, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Respite care, Public petitions (04.02.97) 909

Burma
Association of South East Asian Nations 225w
EC external relations 744w
Foreign relations 225w
Overseas investment 543w

***Burns, Mr Simon**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Health*
Debates etc.
Alcoholism, Rehabilitation (31.01.97) 652–6
Handicapped, Neurology (29.01.97) 327–30
Questions
Carbon monoxide, Death 641w

***Burns, Mr Simon**—continued*
Children, Departmental coordination 113–4w
Children, Migration 115w
Children in care 117–8w
Dept of Health, Government grants to voluntary organisations 644w
Geriatric patients, Health services 274w
Life expectancy 402w
Medical rehabilitation 110w
Mental health, Community care 163w
Mental health services 112w
Mental patients 108w
Mental patients, Extra contractual referrals 164w
Mentally disturbed offenders, NHS finance 163–4w
Residential care, Personal pensions 112–3w
Schizophrenia 763w
Social services 268w
Solvent abuse 400–1w
Solvent abuse, Butane gas 598w
Solvent abuse, Health education 721w
UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 118w

***Burt, Mr Alistair**, Minister of State, Dept of Social Security*
Questions
Benefits Agency Medical Service 106–7w
Benefits Agency Medical Service, Scotland 638–9w
Dept of Social Security, Cash limits 430–1w
Dept of Social Security, Contracts for services 578w, 632–4w
Dept of Social Security, Publicity 492–4w
Disability appeal tribunals 107w
Incapacity benefit 187w, 293–4w, 497–8w, 577w
Invalidity benefits 577w
Medical examinations, Fees and charges 709–10w
Mental health services, Sheltered housing 362w
Pensioners, Income support 144–6, 189w
Retirement pensions 145
Social security abuse, Housing benefits 138
Social security abuse, Liverpool 138
Social security benefits, Expenditure 188w
Social security recipients, Young people 190w
Sustainable development, Dept of Social Security 494–5w

Burundi
Health education 16w

Bus services
Glasgow 359w
Passengers 391w

Buses
EC action 569–70w

Business
Arts sponsorship 487–8w
Deregulation 1–2

Business Interchange Panel
469–70w

Business Link
562–3w, 610w

Business motions
(07.02.97) 1317
Scottish Grand Committee (19.06.97) 513

Business questions
1145–54

Business statements
(30.01.97) 533–41, 1143–5

Business travel
NHS Executive 279w

Butane gas
Solvent abuse 598w

Butler, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill, 2R (31.01.97) 582, 588, 591–2, 607–12, 616
Questions
Arts, Young people 660–1
Open University 357
Schools and parents 256w

By election writs
Wirral South (03.02.97) 657

By elections
Wirral South 795, 1141–2

Byers, Mr Stephen
Questions
Sight and Sound 151w
Unemployment 36–7w

Cabinet Office
Cash limits 373w

Caborn, Mr Richard
Questions
Small businesses, Deregulation 2

Cameras
Speed limits 130w

Campbell, Mrs Anne
Debates etc.
Air Force (06.02.97) 1162, 1207–9, 1229
Local government finance (03.02.97) 678
Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.02.97) 824–6, 841, 844, 846
Questions
Arms trade, United Arab Emirates 697–8w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 573w
Charities, Accounting 149w
Football Trust 491w
Hawk aircraft, Arms trade 621w
Information technology 25w
Ministers' visits abroad, United Arab Emirates 620w

Campbell, Mr Menzies
Debates etc.
Air Force (06.02.97) 1165, 1186, 1189, 1197–203, 1220, 1234
Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill, Rep and 3R (29.01.97) 375–9, 382, 385, 447, 450–2
Questions
Armed forces, Disciplinary proceedings 196–7w, 206w
Armed forces, Employment protection 203w
Armed forces strength 203w
Rwanda, Overseas aid 555w
Satellites 543w, 561w

Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Questions
Educational finance, Northumberland 747w

Campbell-Savours, Mr Dale
Debates etc.
NHS (05.02.97) 1013–4
Oral question time intervention (06.02.97) 1129
Revenue support grant, Kent County Council (05.02.97) 944, 947, 952–9, 961
Questions
Incapacity benefit 187w
Local government staff, Liability 532w

Canavan, Mr Dennis
Debates etc.
Oral question time intervention (29.01.97) 352
Questions
Training, Young people 349–50
Weather, Scotland 627w

Cancer
Digestive system disorders 344w
Hospital waiting lists 343w
Medical research 642w
Medical treatments 642w
Prostate gland 721–2w
Screening 724–5w

Cannabis
107w

Capital
478–9w
Manufacturing industries 566–7w

Capital gains tax
144w
Trusts 337w

Caravan sites
606–7w

Carbon monoxide
Death 641w

Carcinogens
Food 353w

Cardiff
European Council 160w, 411w
Railtrack 616–7w

Cardiff Airport
42w

Cardiff Bay barrage
35w
Birds 41w

Career development loans
340–1w
Ethnic minorities 264–5w

Carlile, Mr Alex
Debates etc.
Civil Procedure Bill (HL) 2R and money res* (30.01.97) 545, 549, 558–61
Local government finance, Wales (04.02.97) 885, 891–3
Northern Ireland Parades and Marches Review (30.01.97) 516–7
Questions
Cardiff Airport 42w
Crime prevention, Expenditure 314w
Ear disorders, Wales 43w
Local government finance, Wales 44–6w
Magistrates' courts 523–4w
Magistrates' courts, Wales 9w
NHS trusts, Finance 365w
Northern Ireland government 497
Police, Wales 667–8w
Police pensions, Wales 673w
Police stations, Access to buildings 552w
Policewomen, Wales 124–5w
Regional selective assistance, Wales 291w
Training and enterprise councils, Wales 290–2w
Welsh language, Primary education 46w
Young offenders, Administration of justice 313–4w
Young offenders, Custodial treatment 456–8w

Carlisle, Mr John
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 218, 230–1
Questions
Funeral payments 297w

Carlisle, Sir Kenneth
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 221

Cash, Mr William
Debates etc.
EC integration, Voting methods (29.01.97) 269–82, 287
NHS (05.02.97) 1025
Questions
EC law, Scotland 1000

Cash limits
Cabinet Office 373w
Crown Office for Scotland 376–7w
Customs and Excise 422w
Dept for Education and Employment 397–8w
Dept of Health 400w
Dept of National Heritage 492w
Dept of Social Security 430–1w
Dept of the Environment 388–90w
Dept of Trade and Industry 414–6w
Dept of Transport 391–3w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 426w
Government Actuary 422w
Home Office 384w
Inland Revenue 423w
Intelligence services 735w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 407–8w
Ministry of Defence 432w
Northern Ireland Office 412–3w
Office for National Statistics 422–3w
Office of Public Service 386–7w
Overseas Development Administration 377–8w
Parlt Commissioner for Administration 387w
Privy Council 377w
Public Record Office 384–5w
Scottish Office 374–6w
Welsh Office 411–2w

Castle Cement
Waste disposal 135w

Castlemartin Range
Compensation 438w

Category A prisoners
Prison accommodation 451w

Cattle
Animal breeding 186w

Census of population
Languages 473w

Central Africa
Overseas aid 14–5

Central Scotland Healthcare NHS Trust
Community nurses 1008

Centre for Environment Fisheries and Aquaculture Science
515–6w

Chairman of Committee of the Whole House
Debates etc.
Amendments and new clauses (07.02.97) 1292–3

Chambers of commerce training and enterprise
Training and enterprise councils 339w

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
Computers 674–5w
Environment protection 122w
Equal opportunities 734–5w

Chancellor of the Exchequer
see Treasury

Channel ferries
Shipping safety 796

Channel tunnel
Inquiries 251w

Chapman, Sir Sydney,
Questions
Arts sponsorship, Business 487–8w
Community care grants, Southall 578–9w
Dept of Social Security, Cash limits 430–1w
Greenbelt, Greater London 792–3
Royal yacht 4–5
Secondary education 259w

Charities
Accounting 149w
National Lottery 667

Charities Act 1992
Questions
607w

Charities Act 1993
Questions
149w

Charter flights
Air freight transport 569–70w

Cheltenham
Special schools 618w

Chemical weapons
Iraq 682w

Chemists' shops
Rural areas 374w

Chequers
524w

Cheshire
Educational finance 348–9
NHS trusts 761w

Chevening
425w, 660–2w

Chidgey, Mr David
Questions
Bus services, Glasgow 359w

Chief Medical Officer
593–4w

Child benefit
191w, 351

Child care
Members' facilities 458w

Child patients
Nurses 760w

Child safety
Deregulation initiative 120–1w

Child Support Agency
187w, 576w
Administrative delays 427–8w
Fees and charges 187–8w
Private sector 188w

Childbirth
Prisoners 8–9w

Children
Dental health 161–2w, 598–9w
Dental services 157w, 639w
Departmental coordination 113–4w
Departmental responsibilities 161w
Income support 188–9w
Intensive care 276–7w
Maintenance 428–9w
Migration 115w
Ministerial duties 28w

Children in care
117–8w
Educational qualifications 97w

Children in care—continued
Housing 16w

China
Forced labour 504w

Chisholm, Mr Malcolm
Questions
Acute beds, Scotland 62–4w
GP fundholders, Information technology 62w
Housing, Local government expenditure 250w
Housing benefits, Scotland 300w
Local government finance, Scotland 1002–3
NHS trusts, Scotland 326w, 330w
Scottish health boards, Consultants 61–2w
Unpaid taxes 336–7w

Choephel, Ngawang
Political prisoners 504w

Chorley
Unemployment 36w

Christmas
Drinking and driving 123w, 219w

Christmas bonus
Pensioners 189w

Church, Ms Judith
Questions
Unemployment 563–4w

Church and state
18–9

Church buildings
Cultural heritage 378w
English Heritage 489w
National Lottery 489–90w
Repairs and maintenance 673

Church Commissioners
Investment 46–7w
Set-aside land 48w
Tenant farmers 351–2w

Church finance
19–20
Poverty 48w

Church of England
Turnbull Commission 47–8w

Church property
Security 47w
Valuation 47w

Churchill, Mr Winston
Questions
War pensions 364w
War Pensions Agency 429w

City challenge
Stockton 782–3

Civil disorder
Northern Ireland 651w

Civil Procedure Bill (HL) 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R and money res* (30.01.97) 543–67

Civil proceedings
Tenant eviction 342w

Civil servants
119w
Political impartiality 9–10, 120w

Civil service manpower
National Audit Office 16

Clapham, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Local government finance (03.02.97) 739–41

Clappison, Mr James, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of the Environment
Debates etc.
Wates houses, Southampton (27.01.97) 131–4
Questions
Air pollution, Bexley 137w
Asbestos 14w, 445–7w
Badgers, A30 137w
Birds, Exports 316w
Castle Cement, Waste disposal 135w
Council housing, Housing stock 790–1
Council housing, Service charges 537–8w
Defective housing, East Lancashire 783–4
Domestic energy conservation 10w, 221–2w
Domestic energy conservation, Pensioners 534w
Environment, Disclosure of information 388w
Environment protection, Dept of the Environment 14w
Environment protection, EC grants and loans 133–4w
Fishing, Research 12w
Housing, Children in care 16w
Housing and elderly, Defective housing 784
Housing associations, Housing starts 530w
Kilns 132–3w
Land pollution 530–1w
Local government revenue, Council house sales 791
Nature conservation, Birds 13–4w
Noise Act 1996 537w
Plastics, Recycling 136w
Radon gas, Pollution monitoring 137–8w
Rural Development Commission 387–8w
Sanitary protection, Waste disposal 13w
Sustainable development, Dept of the Environment 134–5w
Water pollution, EC law 13w
Water treatment, EC law 136w
Wild animals, Licensing 223–4w

Clark, Dr David
Questions
Air Force, Redundancy 203w
Armed forces, Redundancy 31w
Armed forces cadets 203–6w
Armed forces recruitment, Age 348–9w
Armed forces recruitment, Armed forces officers 484–5w
Army 683–4w
Army strength 485w
Gulf war syndrome 200w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Armed forces 206w
Military aircraft, Air accidents 619–20w
Ministry of Defence, Advertising 685w
Radar, Defence procurement 684w

Clarke, Mr Eric
Questions
Crete, Rape 504w
Economic situation, Departmental coordination 624w
Electricity interconnectors, Northern Ireland 372w, 994
Museums and galleries, Scotland 249–50w
Part-time employment 255w

Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth, Chancellor of the Exchequer
Questions
Dorneywood 421w, 731w
Economic and monetary union 567w
Exchange rate mechanism 35–6w
National income, Stability pact 146w

Clarke, Mr Tom
Questions
Marshall Food Group 591–2w

Class sizes
256w, 394w

Clegg, Lee
Legal costs 203w

Clergy
Pensions 46w

Clifton-Brown, Mr Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Local government finance (03.02.97) 689, 693, 720, 726, 741–3, 761–2
Questions
Church buildings, Repairs and maintenance 673
Clergy, Pensions 46w
Commonwealth Institute, Government grants 323w
Crown Prosecution Service, Complaints against police 764w
Integrated schools, Northern Ireland 369w
Packaging 222–3w
Rwanda, Health education 16w

Clwyd
Deafness 156–7w
Interpreters 289w
Teachers 520w

Clwyd, Ann
Debates etc.
Sex Offenders Bill, 2R (27.01.97) 54–6
Questions
Aid financed trade, Jakarta 27w
EC Social Charter, Publications 609–10w
Export controls 160w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Scholarships 27w
Immigrant detainees, Hunger strikes 365, 673w
Indonesia, Arms trade 419–20w
Indonesia, Overseas aid 27w, 126w
Indonesia, Police 341w
Indonesia, Police training 17w
Indonesia, Public order policing 506w
Overseas aid, Police training 140–1w
Riot control weapons, Health hazards 619w

Coal
Imports 510–1w

Coal mine closures
Water pollution 675w

Coal mining
Productivity 511–2w
Subsidence (30.01.97) 568–74

Coastal erosion
Flood control 1126–7

Coastguard Agency
572–3w

Coffey, Ms Ann
Debates etc.
Sex Offenders Bill, 2R (27.01.97) 68–70
Questions
Mental patients 108w

Cohen, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.02.97) 832–4
Questions
Accident and emergency departments 593w
Albania, Pyramid selling 505w
Business questions 1150–1
Chief Medical Officer 593–4w

Cohen, Mr Harry—continued
Church Commissioners, Investment 46–7w
County courts, Fees and charges 670
Defence contracts 487w
Genetic engineering 604–5w
National Criminal Intelligence Service, Police discipline 545w
Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill 1996/97, Disclosure of information 107–8w
Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill 1996/97, Human rights 106w
Social security claims, Personal records 494w

Colchester
Army bases 621w

Cold weather payments
139–41, 146–7, 295–7w, 496–8w
Expenditure 187w
Leeds 140
Republic of Ireland 147
Scotland (29.01.97) 291–314
West Yorkshire 140

Cold Weather Payments (Wind Chill Factor) Bill 1996/97
Questions
139

Colvin, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Air Force (06.02.97) 1176, 1180–6
Questions
Foreign investment, EC countries 562w
Foreign investment in UK 512w
Nuclear weapons tests, Exservicemen 620w
Public Trust Office 342w
Trade 512w

Combined Cadet Force
210w

Combined heat and power
Electricity generation 510w
Employment opportunities 510w

Commission of the European Communities
see European Commission

Committee of Selection
(30.01.97) 489

Committee on Standards in Public Life
Public bodies 412w

Common agricultural policy
715–6w

Common fisheries policy
49w, 715w, 1135
EC enlargement 715w

Commonwealth Institute
Government grants 323w

Community care
Wales 518w

Community care grants
Southall 578–9w

Community charge
Non-payment 411w, 590w
Scotland 328–9w
Wales 411w, 590w

Community health services
Greater London 721w

Community hospitals
Ayrshire 685–7w
Wales 366w

Community nurses
Central Scotland Healthcare NHS Trust 1008

Companies House
167–8w

Company cars
479–80w
Tax allowances 334w, 425w
Tax yields 480–1w

Company liquidations
Bank of Credit and Commerce International 170w
Wales 517w

Competition
Economic growth 23w
Water supply industry 138–9w

Complaints against police
Crown Prosecution Service 764w
Northern Ireland 52–3w

Compliance cost assessments
Self-assessment of tax 679w

Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty
31w

Comptroller and Auditor General
see National Audit Office

Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland
see Northern Ireland Audit Office

Computer privacy
EC law 456w

Computers
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 674–5w
Dept of Health 725w
Dept of National Heritage 658w
Dept of the Environment 677w
Dept of Trade and Industry 696–7w
Dept of Transport 703w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 662w
Government information services 2–3
Home Office 673w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 719w
Northern Ireland Office 729–30w
Social Security Benefits Agency 105w
Treasury 733w
Welsh Office 664w, 758w

Computers in government departments
2–3
Millennium 121–2w, 508w

Congdon, Mr David
Debates etc.
Education (05.02.97) 1084, 1097–9, 1104
Questions
Council housing, Property transfer 317–9w
Economic policy 8
House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975 674w
Immigrant detainees 367
Local government revenue 11w
Local government services, Contracts for services 787–8
Metropolitan Police, Personnel management 552w
Public expenditure, Scotland 991
Unemployment 354–5
Voluntary organisations, National Lottery 489w

Connarty, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Cold weather payments, Scotland (29.01.97) 294, 310–2
Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill, Rep and 3R (29.01.97) 380, 444–7
Questions
Central Scotland Healthcare NHS Trust, Community nurses 1008

Connarty, Mr Michael—continued
Housing associations, Housing starts 530w

Consent to medical treatment
Dental services 161w

Constitutional Change Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
1R (05.02.97) 1010–1

Construction Industry Training Board
Industrial training board levies (03.02.97) 772

Consultants
Dept of Health 596w
Environmental health 760–1w
Home Office 550–1w
Northern Ireland Environment and Heritage Service 53–4w, 653–4w
Scottish health boards 61–2w
Tourism 20–4w

Consumer information
Animal welfare 1129–30

Consumption
Toothpaste 398w

Contempt of court
Evening Standard 315–6w

Contracts
Armed forces catering services 206–8w, 485–6w
Scottish Enterprise 179w
Scottish Office 179w

Contracts for services
Armed forces catering services 684w
Dept of Social Security 578w, 632–4w
Employment protection 1–2
Local government services 787–8
NHS 273w
Non-departmental public bodies 72w
Scottish Enterprise 178–9w
Social Security Contributions Agency 103w
Social services 192w

Contracts of employment
Driving Standards Agency 649–50w

Contributions Agency
see Social Security Contributions Agency

Control of Pesticides (Amendment) Regulations 1997
Debates etc.
(28.01.97) 261

Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
Local government finance 1001

Conveyancing
Scotland (29.01.97) 478

Conwy
Dental services 521w

Cook, Rt Hon Robin
Questions
Arms to Iraq Inquiry, Attorney General 701w
Arms to Iraq Inquiry, Deputy Prime Minister 675w
Arms to Iraq Inquiry, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 659–60w, 663w
Arms to Iraq Inquiry, Home Office 741–2w
Arms to Iraq Inquiry, Ministry of Defence 684–5w

Coombs, Mr Simon
Questions
Film industry, National Lottery 488w
Heart diseases, Scotland 624w
Sports sponsorship 315w

Coordination and Presentation of Government Policy Ministerial Committee
119w, 522w, 526–7w

Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Debates etc.
Severn bridge, Road construction (05.02.97) 973–6
Questions
Business questions 1146

Corbett, Mr Robin
Questions
Educational finance, Birmingham 705–6w
Part-time employment 353–4
Queen's flight 435–8w, 620–1w
Royal train 647–9w

Corbyn, Mr Jeremy
Debates etc.
Hunger strikes, Points of order (28.01.97) 240
Questions
Antarctic Treaty 26w
Army in Northern Ireland 494–5
Church finance, Poverty 48w
Immigrant detainees 1–2w
Immigrant detainees, Hunger strikes 359–62
Jobseeker's allowance 342
McAliskey, Roisin, Extradition 452w
McNamee, Danny 384w, 603w
Political refugees, Immigrant detainees 553w
Whitemoor Prison Escape Inquiry 553w

Cormack, Sir Patrick
Debates etc.
Business questions (30.01.97) 536
Sex Offenders Bill, 2R (27.01.97) 25
Questions
British citizenship, Hong Kong 456w
Church and state 19
Devolution, Northern Ireland 490

Corston, Jean
Debates etc.
Food Safety Council (30.01.97) 529
Local government finance (03.02.97) 725–9
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 714–5w
Dairy farming, Hormone treatments 574w
Government Office for the South West, Administrative costs 534w
Government Office for the South West, Expenditure 533w
Lone parents, Unemployment 474–8w
Malaria, Drug side effects 760w
National insurance benefits 191–2w
Prisoners, Childbirth 8–9w
Taxpayers, National insurance contributions 335w

Cost per pupil
Staffordshire 352

Cost per student
Further education 258w
Medical education 395w

Cottage hospitals
594w
Wales 366w

Cotton
Antidumping duties 232–3w

Couchman, Mr James
Debates etc.
Food Safety Council (30.01.97) 527–8
Revenue support grant, Kent County Council (05.02.97) 941–4

Couchman, Mr James—continued
Questions
Immigrant detainees 365–6
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food, Cash limits 407–8w

Council house sales
Local government revenue 791
Wales 408–10w

Council housing
Housing starts 530w
Housing stock 790–1, 793–4
Property transfer 317–9w
Repairs and maintenance 537–8w
Service charges 537–8w

Council housing management
793

Council of Ministers
320–3w, 505w
Scottish Office 622w

Council tax
Scotland 328–9w, 623w
Standard spending assessments 786–7

Council tax benefits
711–2w

Council tax capping
531w, 787
Scotland 184w

Council tenants
Rent arrears 72–4w
Scotland 72–4w

Countryside stewardship scheme
Wales 158w

County Councils
539w

County courts
672–3
Fees and charges 670
Germany 26w

Courts
Fees and charges 670–1
Normanton 503w
Police 125w

Cousins, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Local government finance (03.02.97) 733–4, 736
West Middlesex University Hospital (03.02.97) 778–9
Questions
Prisoners, Suicide 549w

Coventry
Magistrates' courts committees 502–3w

Cowarth Park School
Helicopters 486–7w

Cox, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
Sex Offenders Bill, 2R (27.01.97) 46
Questions
Asbestos 445–7w
Life imprisonment, Homicide 212w
Packaging, Waste 530w
Pensioners, Population 331w
Prisons, Violence 215w
Trade promotion, Greece 228–9w

Crete
Rape 504w

Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia
110–2w

Crewe
Railway travel 358–9w

Crime
Greater London 544w
Scotland (29.01.97) 373–454

Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
Rep and 3R (29.01.97) 373–454

Crime prevention
544w
Expenditure 314w

Crimes of violence
Dentists 210w
Northern Ireland 497–8w, 499, 499w

Criminal appeals
Kane, Patrick 500w, 602w

Criminal damage
Northern Ireland 310w

Criminal injuries compensation
Northern Ireland 310w

Criminal investigation
North East Regional Crime Squad 545w

Criminal Justice Act 1991
Questions
125w

Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994
Questions
124w

Critchley, Sir Julian
Questions
Cancer, Prostate gland 721–2w
Cancer, Screening 724–5w
Warships 620w

Crofting
Scottish Land Court 71–2w

Crown courts
254w

Crown Office for Scotland
Cash limits 376–7w

Crown Prosecution Service
Complaints against police 764w

Cultural heritage
490w
Church buildings 378w
National Lottery 657–8

Cummings, Mr John
Questions
Customs and Excise, Right of Search 235w
Excise duties, EC countries 235–6w
St Benedict's Hospice Sunderland 1140–1
Smuggling, EC countries 235w
Tobacco duties 236w

Cunliffe, Mr Lawrence
Questions
National Lottery, Animal welfare 667
Public expenditure 4

Cunningham, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Airports and Aerodromes (Noise) Bill, 1R (28.01.97) 155–6
Questions
Drug abuse, Young people 37w
Hospital nurses, Temporary employment 277w
Magistrates' courts committees, Coventry 502–3w
Medical education, Cost per student 395w
Medical education, Staff-student ratios 265–6w
Medical students, Student numbers 266w
Medical students, Student wastage 266w

Cunningham, Mr Jim—continued
Nurses, Emigration 277w
Nurses' training 279w
Nurses' training, Staff-student ratios 265–6w
Nurses' training, Student wastage 278w
Royal yacht 7

Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Questions
Area Museum Councils 18–9w
EC Social Charter 663
Millennium Exhibition 666

Cunningham, Roseanna
Debates etc.
Cold weather payments, Scotland (29.01.97) 291–8
Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill, Rep and 3R (29.01.97) 396–7

Currency movements
797

Curry, Rt Hon David, Minister of State, Dept of the Environment
Debates etc.
Local government finance (03.02.97) 692, 719, 759, 763–7
Questions
Bellwin scheme, North Devon 538–9w
Council housing, Housing stock 793–4
Council housing, Property transfer 317–9w
Council housing management 793
County Councils 539w
Fire services, Essex 788–9
Government Office for the South West, Administrative costs 534w
Government Office for the South West, Expenditure 533w
Homelessness 784–5
Housing 527w
Housing, Expenditure 528–9w
Local government borrowing, Kent County Council 137w
Local government expenditure, North Yorkshire 532w
Local government finance 317–8w
Local government revenue 531w
Local government staff, Liability 532w
Multiple occupation 527–8w
Private rented housing, Rents 529w
Regional government, South East region 530w
Regional planning and development, South East region 220w
Rents to mortgages scheme 529w
Right to buy 529w
Social rented housing 530w
Social rented housing, Housing starts 529w

Custodial treatment
Young offenders 456–8w

Customs and Excise
Cash limits 422w
Right of Search 235w

Cyprus
Military balance 11–2
Overseas aid 11–2
Peace negotiations 12

Dafis, Mr Cynog
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 165–7, 172
Local government finance, Wales (04.02.97) 888
Questions
European Parliament constituencies 551w
Grant maintained schools 357–8

Dairy farming
Hormone treatments 574w

Dalyell, Mr Tam
Debates etc.
Business questions (30.01.97) 536–7
Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill, Rep and 3R (29.01.97) 386
EC integration, Voting methods (29.01.97) 269, 272, 276, 281, 289
Food Safety Council (30.01.97) 527
Intervention during Speaker's statement (28.01.97) 154
Members' conduct, Points of order (29.01.97) 372
Questions
Aircraft, Baggage 127–8w
Arms trade, Turkey 526w
Army in Northern Ireland, Prisoners 209–10w, 438w, 499
Avoparcin, Animal feed 49–50w
Bombings, Lockerbie 70–1w, 524–5w
Business questions 1150
Disabled workers, Blind 623w
Dredging, Licensing 12–3w
Eye tests, Scotland 580w
Flood control, Coastal erosion 1126–7
Immigrant detainees 366
Local government finance, Scotland 69–70w
Nature conservation, Birds 13–4w
Plastics, Recycling 136w
Ports, Waste disposal 126–7w
Sanitary protection, Waste disposal 13w
Scottish Office, Redundancy 1006
Sea pollution 127w
Sea pollution, Prosecutions 127w
Water pollution, EC law 13w
Water treatment, EC law 136w
Xenotransplantation 114w

Damages
Hedley Lomas (Ireland) 406w

Dangerous Dogs Act 1991
Questions
458w, 605w

Dangerous Dogs (Amendment) Bill (HL) 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R order read (31.01.97) 646

Darenth Park Hospital
Private finance initiative 7

Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Questions
GP fundholders, Scotland 580–1w
National Lottery, Capital investment 145w
NHS, Audit 580w
NHS trusts, Directors 581w
Scottish Grand Committee 707w
Water and sewerage companies, Scotland 580w

Data banks
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 720w

Davidson, Mr Ian
Questions
By elections, Wirral South 795
Government grants to local authorities, Glasgow 989

Davies, Mr Bryan
Questions
Further education 258w
Further education, Finance 338w, 356–7, 460w, 748–9w

Davies, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.02.97) 809, 828–9, 845, 854
Questions
Scouts and guides, Government grants 750w
Student grants 260w

Davies, Rt Hon Denzil
Debates etc.
Local government finance, Wales (04.02.97) 861

Davies, Mr Ron
Debates etc.
Local government finance, Wales (04.02.97) 865–73, 875
Questions
Local government finance, Wales 517–8w
Prisoners, Death 740–1w
Prisoners, Restraint equipment 7w
Public houses, Machen 40w
Thomas, Geoffrey, Prisoners 449w, 554w
Welsh Office, Public expenditure 518w

Davis, Rt Hon David, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Debates etc.
EC integration, Voting methods (29.01.97) 289–90
Questions
Association of South East Asian Nations, International conferences 226w
Council of Ministers 320–3w, 505w
EC integration 27w
Economic and monetary union, Publicity 28w
European Commission, General elections 27w
European Movement, UK contributions 503–4w
Germany, County courts 26w
Germany, Employment discrimination 25–6w
Overseas aid, Police training 140–1w
Tripartite Commission for the Restitution of Monetary Gold 141w
UK membership of EC 27–8w

Day, Mr Stephen
Questions
Devolution 150
Food labelling 717w

Dead bodies
Islam 551–2w, 603w

Deaf
Wales 663–4w

Deafness
Clwyd 156–7w

Dearing Committee
see Higher Education National Committee of Inquiry

Death
AIDS 269w, 331–2w
Asbestos 14–5w
Carbon monoxide 641w
Motor neurone disease 331–2w
Prisoners 740–1w

Death registration
Hess, Rudolf 348w, 680w

Dec91/482/EEC
407w

Deer
Devon 407w
Somerset 407w

Defective housing
East Lancashire 783–4
Housing and elderly 784
Wales 290w

Defence contracts
487w
Lancashire 349–50w
North West region 483w

Defence equipment
Lasers 30w

Defence procurement
Auxiliary Oiler Replenishment Vessels 199w
Radar 684w
Submarines 199w

Defence research
196w
AWE Aldermaston 29w
USA 29–30w, 195–6w

Denbighshire
Dental services 521w

Denham, Mr John
Debates etc.
Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.02.97) 840–3, 847–8, 857
Wates houses, Southampton (27.01.97) 125–30
Questions
Income support, Mortgages 429–30w
Pensioners, Income support 145

Dental charges
116–7w

Dental health
Bolton 161–2w, 399w
Children 161–2w, 598–9w
Lancashire 598–9w

Dental services
161w, 399w, 643w
Children 157w, 639w
Consent to medical treatment 161w
Conwy 521w
Denbighshire 521w
Scotland 330w
Wales 157w

Dentists
643w
Crimes of violence 210w
Manpower 472–3w, 600w
Pay 162w
Training 112w
Wales 591w

Departmental coordination
3–6
Children 113–4w
Economic policy 7–8
Economic situation 624w

Departmental publications
Lord Chancellor's Dept 9w
Welsh Office 40w

Departmental responsibilities
Children 161w

Deportation
5–6w, 453–5w

Dept for Education and Employment
Cash limits 397–8w
Environment protection 97w
Equal opportunities 748w
Publicity 555–6w
Sustainable development 459–60w

Dept of Health
Cash limits 400w
Computers 725w

Dept of Health*—*continued
Consultants 596w
Environment protection 117w
Government grants to voluntary organisations 644w
Publicity 470w

Dept of National Heritage
Cash limits 492w
Computers 658w
Environment protection 378w
Government grants to voluntary organisations 657–8w
Publicity 606w
Sustainable development 252–3w

Dept of Social Security
Cash limits 430–1w
Contracts for services 578w, 632–4w
Environment protection 104w
Private finance initiative 632–4w
Publicity 492–4w
Sustainable development 494–5w

Dept of the Environment
Cash limits 388–90w
Computers 677w
Environment protection 14w
Equal opportunities 676w
Judicial review 676w
Public appointments 677w
Publicity 448w
Sustainable development 134–5w
Vehicle number plates 9–10w

Dept of Trade and Industry
Cash limits 414–6w
Computers 696–7w
Official hospitality 23w
Publicity 560w
Research finance 697w

Dept of Transport
Cash limits 391–3w
Computers 703w
Environment protection 130w
Equal opportunities 734w
Publicity 507w
Sustainable development 131w

Deputy Prime Minister
Arms to Iraq Inquiry 675w
Environment protection 122w
Ministerial policy advisors 120w

Deregulation
Business 1–2
Small businesses 2

Deregulation initiative
120w
Child safety 120–1w
Drugs 114w
Scotland 999

Deserts
Overseas aid 16w

Detection rates
Greater London 544w

Deva, Mr Nirj Joseph
Debates etc.
West Middlesex University Hospital (03.02.97) 773–6
Questions
British citizenship, Hong Kong 1138

"Developing Partnerships in Mental Health Consultation Paper"
593w

Development aid
Fraud 15

Devlin, Mr Tim
Questions
City challenge, Stockton 782–3

Devlin, Mr Tim*—*continued
Pensioners, Income support 145–6
Teesside Development Corporation, Planning permission 133w

Devolution
150, 342–3
House of Commons voting methods 991, 996
Northern Ireland 490
Scotland 622w

Devon
Deer 407w

Dicks, Mr Terry
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 210
Questions
Arts finance, Young people 661

Digestive system disorders
Cancer 344w

Digital broadcasting
150w

Digital television
Sign language (27.01.97) 124

Dir64/432/EEC
720w

Dir77/799/EEC
235w

Dir79/923/EEC
311w

Dir80/181/EEC
560–1w

Dir80/876/EEC
359w

Dir91/68/EEC
406–7w

Dir91/659/EEC
445–6w

DIR92/12/EEC
236w

Dir92/26/EEC
724w

Dir92/27/EEC
723–4w

Dir94/62/EC
222–3w

Director General of Telecommunications
see Office of Telecommunications

Directors
Disclosure of information 696w
NHS trusts 581w

Disability appeal tribunals
107w
Newport Gwent 362–3w

Disability living allowance
Northern Ireland 305–8w

Disabled Persons and Carers (Short-Term Breaks) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R order read (31.01.97) 646, (07.02.97) 1316

Disabled workers
341
Blind 623w
Scotland 623w

Disciplinary proceedings
Armed forces 196–7w, 206w

Disease control
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 156w, 352w, 354–5w, 514w, 573w, 631w, 718w, 1125, 1132

Dixon, Rt Hon Don
Questions
New parliamentary building, Construction 458–9w

Dobson, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
Local government finance (03.02.97) 685, 691–702, 704, 723, 729, 749
Questions
Local government revenue, Council house sales 791

Doctors
641w
Manpower 165–6w

Doctors' and Dentists' Pay Review Body
643w

Dogs
Land pollution 239–40w
Scotland 239–40w

Dogs (Electric Shock Collars) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R order read (07.02.97) 1316

Domestic energy conservation
10w, 221–2w
Northern Ireland 371–2w
Pensioners 534w
Scotland 327w
Wales 366w

Donaghadee
Water supply 652–3w

Doncaster
Radio broadcasting licences 490–1w

Donohoe, Mr Brian H
Questions
Air traffic control 128w
Ayrshire and Arran Health Board 177–8w
British residents abroad, Absent voting 690–3w
Child Support Agency 576w
Dept of Social Security, Publicity 492–4w
Dogs, Land pollution 239–40w
Driving Standards Agency, Contracts of employment 649–50w
Driving Standards Agency, Temporary employment 703–4w
Electoral register, Scotland 689–90w
Food poisoning, Scotland 65–8w
Grampian Enterprise 178w
Ministers' domestic visits, Ministry of Defence 197w
Motorways, Road accidents 646–8w
NHS finance, Scotland 625w
Non-departmental public bodies, Contracts for services 72w
Private health services, Scotland 991
Road construction, Scotland 67–9w
Scottish Enterprise, Contracts 179w
Scottish Enterprise, Contracts for services 178–9w
Scottish Enterprise, Disclosure of information 242w
Scottish Enterprise, Public relations 178w
Scottish Grand Committee 707–8w
Scottish Office, Contracts 179w
Scottish Office, Non-departmental public bodies 177w
Self-governing schools, Scotland 64–5w
Tropical diseases, Grampian Health Board 64w
Tropical diseases, Scotland 63–4w

Donohoe, Mr Brian H—continued
Urban development corporations, Scotland 630w
Vehicle number plates, Dept of the Environment 9–10w
Vehicle number plates, Welsh Office 38w
Wheelchairs, Scotland 61–2w

Dorneywood
421w, 681w, 731w

Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen, Secretary of State for Health
Questions
Dept of Health, Cash limits 400w
General Chiropractic Council 113w
Mental health services 593w

Douglas-Hamilton, Rt Hon Lord James, Minister of State, Scottish Office
Debates etc.
Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill, Rep and 3R (29.01.97) 381, 384–7, 395–6, 398–9, 406–7, 411–2, 416–7, 420–3, 425, 427–8, 430–4, 437, 448–9, 452
NHS (05.02.97) 1057–60
Questions
Acute beds, Borders General Hospital 993
Acute beds, Scotland 62–4w
Algrade Trust 446w
Ayrshire and Arran Health Board 177–8w
Bombings, Lockerbie 70–1w
Brain, Injuries 622w
British residents abroad, Absent voting 690–3w
Central Scotland Healthcare NHS Trust, Community nurses 1008
Chemists' shops, Rural areas 374w
Community hospitals, Ayrshire 685–7w
Dental services, Scotland 330w
Dogs, Land pollution 239–40w
Electoral register, Scotland 689–90w
Erskine bridge, Accidents 249w
Eye tests, Scotland 580w
Food poisoning, Scotland 65–8w, 626w
GP fundholders, Information technology 62w
GP fundholders, Scotland 580–1w, 627–8w
Greater Glasgow Health Board, Redundancy 685w
Health service staff, Scotland 327w
Health services finance, Scotland 992–3
Heart diseases, Scotland 624w
Highland Health Board 995
Hospital finance, Borders Health Board 992
Hospital waiting lists, Scotland 441–2w, 581w
Keith bypass 624w
Languages education, Scotland 329w
Life imprisonment, Scotland 624w
Lyme disease, Scotland 446w
Museums and galleries, Scotland 249–50w
NHS, Audit 580w
NHS finance, Scotland 625–6w, 991
NHS trusts, Directors 581w
NHS trusts, Scotland 326w, 330w
Non-departmental public bodies, Contracts for services 72w
Parkhead Hospital, Suicide 374w
Private finance initiative, Scotland 687–8w
Private health services, Scotland 991
Public expenditure, Scotland 991
Public order offences, Alcoholic drinks 689w
Residential care, Scotland 621w
Road construction, Scotland 67–9w, 624w
Scottish health boards, Consultants 61–2w
Scottish Office, Contracts 179w

Douglas-Hamilton, Rt Hon Lord James—continued
Scottish Office, Non-departmental public bodies 177w
Social services, Perth and Kinross 1007–8
Social services finance, Highland Health Board 995
Speech impaired, Scotland 327–8w
Speech therapists, Scotland 328w
Surgery, Scotland 627w
Tropical diseases, Grampian Health Board 64w
Tropical diseases, Scotland 63–4w
Wheelchairs, Scotland 61–2w

Dover, Mr Den
Questions
Educational finance, Lancashire 358
Small businesses, Uniform business rate 790
Unemployment, Chorley 36w

Dowd, Mr Jim
Questions
Elections, Fraud 490–1
Nature reserves, Northern Ireland 501–2w

D'Oyly Carte
148–9w, 657w

Dredging
Licensing 12–3w

Drinking and driving
Christmas 123w, 219w

Driving
Drug side effects 703w

Driving Standards Agency
Contracts of employment 649–50w
Temporary employment 703–4w

Drug abuse
Prisoners 210–2w, 216w
Research 605w
Wales 517w
Young people 37w

Drug labelling
723–4w

Drug side effects
Antidepressants 723w
Driving 703w
Malaria 760w
Road safety 722–3w

Drugs
Alzheimer's disease 761–2w
Deregulation initiative 114w
Labelling 762w
Overseas aid 119w
Retail trade 724w
Schizophrenia 761–2w

Dual carriageways
Flintshire 157w

Duke of York
Military aircraft 198–9w, 438w

Dunbartonshire Enterprise
178w

Duncan, Mr Alan
Questions
General Chiropractic Council 113w
Police grant 217–8w
Police Scientific Development Branch 218w

Duncan Smith, Mr Iain
Debates etc.
EC integration, Voting methods (29.01.97) 272–3, 276, 282
Questions
AIDS 722w
Business questions 1151–2

***Duncan Smith, Mr Iain**—continued*
Cancer, Medical research 642w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Cash limits 426w
Heart diseases, Medical research 642w
Immigrant detainees 367–8
Parkinson's disease 600w
Taxation, Scotland 1004–5

Dundee
Local government finance 623w

Dunn, Mr Bob
Debates etc.
Revenue support grant, Kent County Council (05.02.97) 941–9

Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Questions
Airlines 360w
Armed forces housing 32–3w
Boeing 737, Air safety 359–60w
Business questions 1147
Coastguard Agency 572–3w
Coordination and Presentation of Government Policy Ministerial Committee 119w
Educational finance, Cheshire County Council 349
Lorries, Axle weights 128–9w, 391w
Morocco, Prisoners 227w
NHS trusts, Cheshire 761w
Railtrack, Railway maintenance 393w
Railway travel, Crewe 358–9w
Solicitors, Fees and charges 674

Dykes, Mr Hugh
Debates etc.
Horserace Totalisator Board Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (07.02.97) 1251–3, 1259, 1278–82
Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill, 2R (31.01.97) 586–7, 596–7, 605
Questions
Army in Northern Ireland 496
Departmental coordination, Economic policy 7–8
Greenbelt, Harrow 536w
Museums and galleries 586w
Northern Ireland government 368w
Personal pensions 143

Dyslexia
Prisoners 737–9w

Eagle, Ms Angela
Debates etc.
Police grant (29.01.97) 456, 459, 463, 473–5
Questions
Holiday leave, EC countries 229–30w
Kilns 132–3w

Ealing
Unemployment 482w

Ear disorders
Wales 43w
War pensions 633–6w

Early retirement
Teachers 75w, 257w, 343–6, 468w, 520w, 591w
Treasury 759w

Earnings top-up
558–9w

East Lancashire
Defective housing 783–4

East Lancashire Training and Enterprise Council
619w

East Midlands
Local government finance (29.01.97) 480–8

Eastham, Mr Ken
Questions
Educational finance, Manchester 358

EC action
Animal welfare 1130
Buses 569–70w
VAT 237w

EC Commission
see European Commission

EC Cons Doc 9466/96
237w

EC countries
British residents abroad 141w
Excise duties 235–6w
Foreign investment 562w
Holiday leave 229–30w
Overseas investment 512w
Smuggling 235w

EC Draft 5641/96
135w

EC Draft 7050/96
(04.02.97) 908

EC Draft 12684/96
135w

EC enlargement
Common fisheries policy 715w

EC environmental policy
135w

EC external relations
Burma 744w

EC Finance Council
334–5w

EC Framework programme
414w

EC grants and loans
19–20w, 279–80w, 324w
Belgium 571w
Environment protection 133–4w
Fishing vessels 288w
Northern Ireland 499w
Research 152–4w
Science and technology research 509–10w
Scotland 622w
Training 152–4w
Twin towns 220w

EC integration
16–7w, 27w
Voting methods (29.01.97) 269–90

EC internal trade
Sheep 406–7w

EC law
131–2w
Computer privacy 456w
Genetically modified organisms 515–6w
Metrication 560–1w
Scotland 1000
VAT 6
Water pollution 13w
Water treatment 136w
Working hours 169w, 522w

EC overseas countries and territories
Rice 407w

EC Social Charter
663, 669, 1142
Foreign investment in UK 1139
Publications 609–10w
Tourist industry 662–4, 667–9

Economic analysis
35w

Economic and monetary union
(29.01.97) 269–90, 567w
Economic policy 798–9
Manifestos 502–4
Publicity 28w

Economic growth
Competition 23w

Economic policy
8–9
Departmental coordination 7–8
Economic and monetary union 798–9

Economic situation
Departmental coordination 624w
Glasgow 625w
Performance standards 144–5w
Scotland 624w

Education
Ethics 750w
Expenditure 337–8w
Opposition days (05.02.97) 1068–115
Public expenditure 473–4w
Rwanda 15

Education and Employment Select Committee
(03.02.97) 772

Education and Library Boards (Northern Ireland) Order 1997
Questions
370w

Education Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
Rep (27.01.97) 73–123
Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 157–261
Questions
257w

Education vouchers
Pre-school education 76w, 83w, 256w, 465–6w, 519w, 990
Scotland 990, 997
Wales 519w

Educational assessment
Mathematics 257w

Educational finance
83–6w, 353, 750–8w
Birmingham 705–6w
Cheshire County Council 348–9
Flintshire 591w
Lancashire 347–8, 358, 746–7w
Lancashire County Council 348
Local authority powers 349
Manchester 358
Northern Ireland 492, 727–9w
Northumberland 747w
Staffordshire 352
Wales 521w, 664w

Educational policy
343
Finance 745–6w
Northern Ireland 491

Educational qualifications
Children in care 97w
Northern Ireland 501w

Educational standards
86–92w, 151–2, 350
Southend-on-Sea 462–4w

Efficiency scrutinies
Government research establishments 230–2w, 274–5w
Public Health Laboratory Service 275w
Royal Ulster Constabulary 368w

Elderly
National Lottery 150w

Elections
Fraud 490–1

Electoral register
Scotland 689–93w

Electricity generation
Alternative energy 694–6w
Combined heat and power 510w

Electricity interconnectors
Northern Ireland 372w, 993–4

Electricity supply industry
Privatisation 626w
Scotland 626w
Wales 411w

Electronic mail
USA 171w

Electronic warfare
487w

Elletson, Mr Harold
Questions
Council housing, Service charges 537–8w
Farm incomes 408w

Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Debates etc.
Business questions (30.01.97) 535
Food Safety Council (30.01.97) 525
Local government finance (03.02.97) 686
Questions
Bellwin scheme, North Devon 538–9w

Emigration
Nurses 277w

Employment
European communities 146–8w
Scotland 333w
Statistics 332w

Employment agencies
Aberdeen College of Education 1003

Employment discrimination
Germany 25–6w
Public Accounts Commission 17

Employment level
7

Employment opportunities
136, 347, 354
Combined heat and power 510w

Employment policy
Finance 745–6w

Employment protection
Armed forces 203w
Contracts for services 1–2

Employment Rights Act 1996
Questions
203w

Employment schemes
Lancashire 338w
North Yorkshire 468–9w
York 338w

Energy
VAT 149

Energy consumption
Wales 663w

Energy prices
33–4w

Engineering Construction Industry Training Board
Industrial training board levies (03.02.97) 772

Engineering industries
(29.01.97) 331–40

English Heritage
Church buildings 489w
Offices 488w

English language
Merchant seamen 394w

English Tourist Board
Holiday accommodation 19w

Ennis, Mr Jeff
Questions
Bus services, Passengers 391w

Entry clearances
505–6w, 660w

Environment
Disclosure of information 388w, 531w, 538w

Environment and Heritage Service
see Northern Ireland Environment and Heritage Service

Environment protection
Board of Trade 233w
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 122w
Dept for Education and Employment 97w
Dept of Health 117w
Dept of National Heritage 378w
Dept of Social Security 104w
Dept of the Environment 14w
Dept of Transport 130w
Deputy Prime Minister 122w
EC grants and loans 133–4w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 319–20w
Home Office 452w
Industry 139–40w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 50w
Ministry of Defence 31w
Northern Ireland 304–6w
Northern Ireland Office 174–6w
Scottish Office 628–30w
Treasury 238w

Environmental health
Consultants 760–1w

Environmental impact assessment
Petroleum exploration licences 228w

Environmentally sensitive areas
Wales 157–8w

Equal opportunities
558w
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 734–5w
Dept for Education and Employment 748w
Dept of the Environment 676w
Dept of Transport 734w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 744–5w
Treasury 731w

Erskine bridge
Accidents 249w

Essex
Fire services 788–9, (05.02.97) 981–8

Etherington, Bill
Questions
British Fluoridation Society 163w
British Fluoridation Society, Government grants 162–3w
Fluoridation, Water supply 163w, 398w

Ethics
Animal breeding 513–4w
Education 750w

Ethnic minorities
1139–40
Career development loans 264–5w
Northern Ireland 500–1w

European Central Bank
6, 10

European Commission
540w
General elections 27w

European communities
Employment 146–8w

European Council
Cardiff 160w, 411w

European Court of Human Rights
505w, 539–43w
Gaskin, Graham 345w
Judgments 345w, 540–2w

European fighter aircraft
484w

European Movement
UK contributions 503–4w

European Parliament constituencies
551w

European Social Fund
153w

Evans, Mr David
Questions
Council tax, Scotland 623w
Council tax capping 531w

Evans, Mr John
Debates etc.
Ford Motor Company, Halewood (05.02.97) 920
Questions
Income support, St Helens 637w
Unemployed, Take-up of employment 257w

Evans, Mr Jonathan, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 252–3
Questions
Acid rain, Wales 616w
Assisted places scheme, Wales 157w, 289w, 520w
Beaches, Wales 411w
Beef, Wales 522w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 156w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Wales 587–8w
Community care, Wales 518w
Council house sales, Wales 408–10w
Countryside stewardship scheme, Wales 158w
Deafness, Clwyd 156–7w
Defective housing, Wales 290w
Departmental publications, Welsh Office 40w
Domestic energy conservation, Wales 366w
Education vouchers, Pre-school education 519w
Educational finance, Flintshire 591w
Educational finance, Wales 521w, 664w
Environmentally sensitive areas, Wales 157–8w
Fowl pest, Wales 517w
Higher education, Wales 294w
Homework, Wales 616w
Interpreters, Clwyd 289w
Mental health community care, Wales 43–4w

Evans, Mr Jonathan*—*continued
"North Wales School Performance Information Booklet" 158w
Postgraduate students, Wales 291w
Public sector housing, Wales 408w
Pupil referral units, Wales 617w
Residential care, Wales 589w
Severn Trent Water 589w
Special education, Wales 38–9w
Special education, Ynys Mon 39–40w
Special schools, Wales 592w
Student grants, Wales 292–3w
Student loans, Wales 292w
Student numbers, Wales 293w
Suckler cow premiums, Wales 519–20w
Teachers, Early retirement 520w, 591w
Teachers, North Wales 615–6w
Training and enterprise councils, Wales 367w

Evans, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Air Force (06.02.97) 1162, 1173
Education (05.02.97) 1071, 1085, 1099–100
Sex Offenders Bill, 2R (27.01.97) 30
Questions
Bombings, Manchester 735w
Civil servants, Political impartiality 120w
Cyprus, Overseas aid 11–2
Defence contracts, Lancashire 349–50w
Defence contracts, North West region 483w
East Lancashire Training and Enterprise Council 619w
Educational finance, Lancashire 746–7w
Employment schemes, Lancashire 338w
General Certificate of Secondary Education, Lancashire 263w
Government research establishments, Efficiency scrutinies 230–2w
Hawk aircraft 439w
Higher education, Lancashire 394–5w
"Rural England White Paper" 716–7w
Social security abuse 187w
Sports Council 583–6w
Tourist industry, EC Social Charter 662–3
Wind power 25w
World Cup 586–7w

Evans, Mr Roger, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Social Security
Debates etc.
Cold weather payments, Scotland (29.01.97) 306–7, 311–4
Questions
Benefits Agency district offices 743–4w
Cold weather payments 139–40, 146–7, 295–7w, 496–8w
Cold weather payments, Expenditure 187w
Cold weather payments, Leeds 140
Cold weather payments, Republic of Ireland 147
Cold weather payments, West Yorkshire 140
Community care grants, Southall 578–9w
Council tax benefits 711–2w
Disability appeal tribunals, Newport Gwent 362–3w
Earnings top-up 558–9w
Environment protection, Dept of Social Security 104w
Family credit, Social security benefits disqualification 105–6w
Funeral payments 297w
Habitual residence test, Expenditure 105w
Hostels, Heating 140
Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (General) Amendment Regulations 1997 191w

Evans, Mr Roger*—*continued
Housing benefits 362w
Housing benefits, Scotland 300w
Housing benefits, Service charges 294–5w
Housing benefits, Young people 103–4w
Housing insulation 140–1
Income support 744w
Income support, Children 188–9w
Income support, Mortgages 429–30w
Income support, St Helens 637w
Income support, Young people 104w
Independent Tribunal Service 576w
Jobseeker's allowance 299–300w, 713–4w
Jobseeker's allowance, Alyn and Deeside 743w
Jobseeker's allowance, Expenditure 105w
Jobseeker's allowance, Non-teaching staff 579w
Jobseeker's allowance, Share fishermen 430w
Means tested benefits, Social security recipients 189–90w
Project Prime 106w
Project Prime, Yorkshire and Humberside 106w
Rent allowances, Single people 710–2w
Revenue support grant, Income support 105w
Social Fund, Expenditure 103w
Social security benefits, Political refugees 192–3w, 300w
Social Security Benefits Agency, Private sector 300–1w
Social security finance 146, 189w
Social security recipients 635–8w, 710w
Social services, Contracts for services 192w
Unemployment 146
War pensions 299w

Evening Standard
Contempt of court 315–6w

Evennett, Mr David
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep (27.01.97) 96
Police Property Bill, 3R (07.02.97) 1289–92
Questions
Air pollution, Bexley 137w
Air pollution, South East London 785–6
Nature conservation, Agriculture 717w
Refuse derived fuel, Belvedere 233w
Tourism, Bexley 251–2w

Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Debates etc.
Cold weather payments, Scotland (29.01.97) 305, 307–11, 313
Food Safety Council (30.01.97) 526
Sex Offenders Bill, 2R (27.01.97) 71
Questions
Child Support Agency, Fees and charges 187–8w
Cold weather payments 146–7
Fishing vessels, Government grants 717w
Keith bypass 624w

Exchange rate mechanism
35–6w, 731w

Excise duties
EC countries 235–6w
Motor vehicles 130–1w

Executry Practioners (Scotland) Regulations 1997
Debates etc.
(29.01.97) 478

Exhaust emissions
786

Export controls
160w

Export licensing
Birds 352w
Iraq 418w

Export of live animals
406w, 1131
Animal welfare 405–6w
Pigs 720w

Export promotion
325w
Per capita costs 324–5w

Exports
Beef 49w, 71w, 716w, 1131–3
Birds 316w
Scotland 626w
Yorkshire and Humberside 169w

Exservicemen
Military decorations 30–1w
Nuclear weapons tests 620w

Extra contractual referrals
Mental patients 164w

Extradition
McAliskey, Roisin 452–3w
Northern Ireland 176w
O'Callaghan, Sean 552w
Republic of Ireland 176w

Eye tests
Optical charges 115w
Pensioners 163w
Scotland 580w

Fabricant, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Engineering industries (29.01.97) 331–6

Falcons
Scotland 627w

Family benefits
Social security reform 141–2

Family credit
Social security benefits disqualification 105–6w

Farm incomes
408w
Northern Ireland 652w

Farmers
Bureaucracy 716w

Farms
Flintshire 366w
Negative equity 656w
Northern Ireland 656w
Ostriches 405w

Faroe Islands
Fish 288–9w

Faulds, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Air Force (06.02.97) 1159
Official Report, Points of order (04.02.97) 801, 802–3
Questions
Business questions 1146–7
Cyprus, Military balance 12
Land pollution 530–1w
Widdecombe, Ann 368

Fenner, Dame Peggy
Debates etc.
Revenue support grant, Kent County Council (05.02.97) 942, 946, 957–8
Questions
Food Safety Council 357–8w
Immigrant detainees, Hunger strikes 362

Fertilisers (Amendment) Regulations 1995
Questions
Tilbury 355w

Field, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
Ford Motor Company, Halewood (05.02.97) 922
Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.02.97) 809–15
Questions
Church and state 18
Dentists, Manpower 600w
Pensioners, Low incomes 143

Film industry
491w
National Lottery 488w

Finance Bill 1996/97
Questions
678–9w

Financial institutions
Jersey 33w

Fines
Parking offences 54w

Fire services
Essex 788–9, (05.02.97) 981–8

Firearms (Amendment) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
Business questions (30.01.97) 540
Questions
1000–1, 1143–6, 1148

Fireworks
Law reform 694w

Fish
Faroe Islands 288–9w
Imports 288–9w

Fisher, Mr Mark
Questions
Art education 662
Arts Council of England, Government grants 314–6w, 742w
Arts Forum 583w
Football pools, Tax yields 421w

Fisheries
715w
Scotland 625w

Fishing
Northern Ireland 655–6w
Research 12w
Scotland 69w

Fishing quotas
1136

Fishing vessels
EC grants and loans 288w
Government grants 717w
Spain 288w
Water safety 704w

Flintshire
Dual carriageways 157w
Educational finance 591w
Farms 366w

Floating debt
Public sector borrowing requirement 420–1w

Flood control
Coastal erosion 1126–7
Research 1126
Scotland (27.01.97) 123–4
Tollesbury 1126

Flood Prevention and Land Drainage (Scotland) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R* and money res* (27.01.97) 123–4

Flood Prevention and Land Drainage (Scotland) Bill 1996/97—continued
Order relating to Com (05.02.97) 1116

Fluoridation
Northern Ireland 303w
Water supply 163w, 398w

Flynn, Paul
Debates etc.
Business questions (30.01.97) 541
Food Safety Council (30.01.97) 532
House of Commons procedure, Points of order (27.01.97) 21
Local government finance, Wales (04.02.97) 863
Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.02.97) 844, 846–7
Questions
Admiralty House 526w
Admiralty House, Operating costs 735w
Air freight transport, Hazardous materials 128w
Alzheimer's disease, Wales 759w
Animal experiments, Genetic engineering 287w
Animal experiments, Licensing 216–7w
Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 1w
Chequers 524w
Chevening 425w, 660–2w
Children, Departmental responsibilities 161w
Children, Ministerial duties 28w
Children in care 117–8w
Church finance 19–20
Disability appeal tribunals 107w
Disability appeal tribunals, Newport Gwent 362–3w
Dorneywood 421w, 681w, 731w
Driving, Drug side effects 703w
Drug labelling 723–4w
Drug side effects, Antidepressants 723w
Drug side effects, Road safety 722–3w
Drugs, Deregulation initiative 114w
Drugs, Labelling 762w
Drugs, Overseas aid 119w
Drugs, Retail trade 724w
Educational finance, Wales 664w
Educational qualifications, Children in care 97w
Food, Genetic engineering 719w
Foreign investment in UK 512–3w, 736–8w
Fowl pest 403–4w
Fowl pest, Scotland 630w
Fowl pest, Wales 517w
Housing, Children in care 16w
Independent Tribunal Service 576w
Maize, Genetic engineering 719–20w
Members' staff 523w
Mental health community care, Wales 43–4w
Mental illness, Northern Ireland 746w
National Lottery 488w
1 Carlton Gardens 425–6w, 659w
Ostriches, Farms 405w
Palace of Westminster, Security 458w
Royal yacht 200–2w, 345–7w, 685w
Schizophrenia 763w
Schizophrenia, Drugs 761–2w
State earnings related pension scheme 143–4
UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 118w
Xenotransplantation 114w
Xenotransplantation Interim Regulatory Authority 279w

Food
Carcinogens 353w
Genetic engineering 719w

Food—continued
Genetically modified organisms 1127–9
Safety standards 574w
Urban areas 286w, 356w

Food hygiene
357–8w, (30.01.97) 523–32, 574w, 1134–5
Meat 373–4w

Food industry
Improvement notices 357w
Inspections 356–7w
Pendle 357w

Food labelling
717w
Meat products 356w

Food poisoning
108–10w
Scotland 65–8w, 176w, 626w

Food Safety Council
357–8w, 761w, 1127–8, 1134, 1137
Ministerial statements (30.01.97) 523–32

Football
657–8w
Public order policing 125w
Sportsgrounds 669–70
Touting 124w

Football pools
Tax yields 421w

Football Trust
491w

Forced labour
China 504w

Ford Motor Company
Halewood (05.02.97) 919–40
Redundancy 797–8

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Arms to Iraq Inquiry 659–60w, 663w
Cash limits 426w
Computers 662w
Environment protection 319–20w
Equal opportunities 744–5w
Publicity 610–2w
Scholarships 27w

Foreign investment
EC countries 562w

Foreign investment in UK
501, 512–3w, 736–8w, 1141
EC Social Charter 1139
Glasgow 176–7w
Nissan 5–6
Wales 158–9w

Foreign relations
Burma 225w

Forestry
Scotland 582w

Forestry Commission
Land acquisition 179–80w

Forests
Access to countryside 240–1w

Forman, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Business questions (30.01.97) 539
Education (05.02.97) 1071
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 159–61, 164–5, 167
Food Safety Council (30.01.97) 529
Human Tissue (Amendment) Bill, 2R adjourned (07.02.97) 1299–301, 1306
Questions
Income tax 237w
Office of Public Service, Cash limits 386–7w
Universities, Research 355

Former ministers
Redundancy pay 525w

***Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael**, Secretary of State for Scotland*
Debates etc.
Members' conduct, Points of order (05.02.97) 1069
NHS (05.02.97) 1067
Questions
A80, Road construction 999, 1005–6
Administration of justice, Scotland 622w
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, Local government finance 1001
Council of Ministers, Scottish Office 622w
Crown Office for Scotland, Cash limits 376–7w
Devolution, Scotland 622w
Education vouchers, Scotland 997
Food hygiene, Meat 373–4w
Government research establishments, Scotland 250–1w
Income tax, Scotland 998
Local government finance, Glasgow 996–8, 1001–2
Local government finance, Scotland 625w, 1002–3
Project work, Scotland 1005
Public expenditure, Scotland 996
Public finance, Scotland 998–9
Scottish Office, Cash limits 374–6w
Scottish Office, Redundancy 1006
Special islands needs allowance, Argyll and Bute 1002
Suckler cow premiums, Scotland 689w
Taxation, Scotland 997, 1004–5
Unemployment, Glasgow 1004
Unemployment, Scotland 1004, 1006
Urban development corporations, Scotland 630w
Youth unemployment 1006–7

Forsythe, Mr Clifford
Debates etc.
Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.02.97) 813–4, 853–4
Questions
Local authority powers 489–90
PSV operators licences, Northern Ireland 312w

***Forth, Mr Eric**, Minister of State, Dept for Education and Employment*
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep (27.01.97) 74–5, 80–5, 87, 90, 118
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 167–9, 177–9, 184, 200–3, 233–5, 246–7
Higher education, Educational finance (05.02.97) 1120–4
Questions
Access funds 267w
Employment opportunities 347
Employment schemes, Lancashire 338w
Grant maintained schools, Kent 339–40w
Hard core unemployed 261–2w
Higher education, Lancashire 394–5w
Higher Education National Committee of Inquiry 558w
Job centres 704w
Job centres, Advertising 259w
Jobseeker's allowance 342, 346–7
Jobseeker's allowance, Part-time employment 557–8w
Jobseeker's allowance, Young people 97–8w
Medical education, Cost per student 395w
Medical education, Staff-student ratios 265–6w
Medical students, Student numbers 266w
Medical students, Student wastage 266w

***Forth, Mr Eric**—continued*
Nurses' training, Staff-student ratios 265–6w
Nursing and Healthcare Employment Service 395–6w
Pupil referral units 558w
Religious education, Teacher training 618w
Ridings School, Teachers 555w
School discipline 257w
Student grants 260w
Student loans, Take-up 267w
Student wastage 462w
Teachers, Northamptonshire 75–6w
Teaching methods 260w
Temporary employment 256–7w
Unemployed, Take-up of employment 257w
Unemployment benefits, Social security claims 260w

Fossil fuel levy
425w
Scotland 330w

Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Questions
Computers, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 674–5w
Computers, Dept of Health 725w
Computers, Dept of National Heritage 658w
Computers, Dept of the Environment 677w
Computers, Dept of Trade and Industry 696–7w
Computers, Dept of Transport 703w
Computers, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 662w
Computers, Home Office 673w
Computers, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 719w
Computers, Northern Ireland Office 729–30w
Computers, Treasury 733w
Computers, Welsh Office 664w
Paymaster-General. Privatisation 235w
Social security abuse, North East region 3
Social services, Contracts for services 192w

Foster, Mr Don
Debates etc.
Education (05.02.97) 1068–74, 1078, 1085
Education Bill, Rep (27.01.97) 101–2, 107
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 163–4, 180–6, 189, 191–3, 229–30, 260–1
Questions
Dept for Education and Employment, Publicity 556w
Education, Expenditure 337–8w
Teachers, Early retirement 344–5

Foulkes, Mr George
Questions
Beef, Exports 716w
Benefits Agency Medical Service, Scotland 638–9w
Community hospitals, Ayrshire 685–7w
Fishing vessels, Water safety 704w
Non-departmental public bodies, Public appointments 532w
Overseas aid, International organisations 702w
Private finance initiative, Scotland 687–8w
Rwanda, Arms trade 13

Foundation for Sports and Arts
19w

Fowl pest
403–4w
Scotland 630w

***Fowl pest**—continued*
Wales 517w

Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Questions
Millennium Exhibition 665

***Fox, Dr Liam**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*
Questions
Aid financed trade 126w
Angola, Overseas aid 17
British residents abroad, EC countries 141w
Central Africa, Overseas aid 14–5
China, Forced labour 504w
Crete, Rape 504w
Cyprus, Military balance 12
Cyprus, Overseas aid 11–2
Cyprus, Peace negotiations 12
Development aid, Fraud 15
EC integration 16–7w
Entry clearances 505–6w, 660w
Environment protection, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 319–20w
Global Environmental Facility 459w
Indonesia, Overseas aid 126w
Indonesia, Police 341w
Indonesia, Police training 17w
Morocco, Prisoners 227w
Overseas aid 15–6
Overseas aid, Deserts 16w
Overseas aid, International organisations 702w
Overseas aid, Non-governmental organisations 254–5w
Overseas Development Administration, Cash limits 377–8w
Pakistan, Immigration applications 663w
Rwanda, Arms trade 13
Rwanda, Education 15
Rwanda, Health education 16w
Rwanda, Industrial development 13
Rwanda, International aid from international bodies 12–3
Rwanda, Overseas aid 555w
Tanzania, Bilateral aid 13–4
Visas, Fees and charges 226–7w, 611w
Zahoorul, Syed, Arrests 745w

Fraud
Development aid 15
Elections 490–1
Legal aid scheme 385–6w
Schools 263w

***Freeman, Rt Hon Roger**, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster*
Questions
Admiralty House 526w
Admiralty House, Operating costs 735w
Computers in government departments, Millennium 121–2w
Coordination and Presentation of Government Policy Ministerial Committee 527w
Departmental coordination 6
Deregulation initiative 120w
Deregulation initiative, Child safety 120–1w
EC law 131–2w
Employment level 7
Environment protection, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 122w
European Central Bank 6
Former ministers, Redundancy pay 525w
HMSO, Privatisation 736w
Intelligence services, Cash limits 735w
Legislation, Members' speeches 469w
Magistrates, Bolton 120w
Millennium Exhibition, Finance 121w

Freeman, Rt Hon Roger—continued
Office of Public Service, Cash limits 386–7w
Parit Commissioner for Administration, Cash limits 387w
Public Appointments Unit 674w
Public expenditure 4
Royal yacht 3–5

French, Mr Douglas
Questions
Parent plus 188w
Unit trusts, Stamp duties 678–9w

Fringe benefits
National insurance contributions 104w

Fry, Sir Peter
Debates etc.
Local government finance (03.02.97) 684, 694, 698, 713–7
Questions
Income support, Mortgages 430w

Fuels
VAT 238w

Fulwood Hospital
Property transfer 399–400w

Funeral payments
297w

Further education
151w, 258w
Cost per student 258w
Finance 338w, 356–7, 396–7w, 460w, 748–9w
Lancashire 394–5w
Staff-student ratios 258w
Student numbers 338w, 460w, 468w, 748–9w

Further education colleges
Finance 468w, 705w

Further Education Funding Council for England
264w, 396–7w

Further education teachers
Redundancy 397w

Fyfe, Maria
Debates etc.
Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill, Rep and 3R (29.01.97) 377–8, 385
Poverty, Scotland (05.02.97) 967–8
Questions
Agricultural surpluses 715w
Army in Northern Ireland 494–5
Assisted places scheme, Scotland 249w
Dental services, Scotland 330w
Economic situation, Glasgow 625w
Greater Glasgow Health Board, Redundancy 685w
Urban development grants, Glasgow 989–90

Galbraith, Mr Sam
Questions
Alcoholic drinks 324w

Gale, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Dangerous Dogs (Amendment) Bill, Points of order (31.01.97) 646
Revenue support grant, Kent County Council (05.02.97) 944–6, 949, 953
Questions
Air freight transport 650w
Air freight transport, Charter flights 569–70w
Channel ferries, Shipping safety 796
Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 458w, 605w
EC grants and loans, Belgium 571w

Gallie, Mr Phil
Debates etc.
Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill, Rep and 3R (29.01.97) 373, 377–9, 383, 420, 437, 454
NHS (05.02.97) 1016, 1024, 1030, 1038, 1049, 1053, 1055, 1058
Questions
A80, Road construction 1005–6
Army in Northern Ireland, Prisoners 498–9
Crown Office for Scotland, Cash limits 376–7w
Government research establishments, Scotland 250–1w
Health services finance, Scotland 992–3
Hunger strikes 367
Retirement pensions 145
Scottish Office, Cash limits 374–6w

Galloway, Mr George
Questions
Local government finance, Glasgow 996–7

Gambling
6–7w

Games
Expenditure 276w

Gapes, Mr Mike
Debates etc.
Holocaust (Denial) Bill, 1R (29.01.97) 370–2
Questions
Aid financed trade 126w
Class sizes 256w
Great Eastern Railway, Performance standards 702–3w
Local government expenditure, Redbridge 532w
Overseas aid, Non-governmental organisations 254–5w
Railway timetables 569w
Social security finance 146

Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Questions
Building Research Establishment, Privatisation 139w

Garnier, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Civil Procedure Bill (HL) 2R and money res* (30.01.97) 552–4
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Waste disposal 1136
Child benefit 351
Council of Ministers 320–3w

Gaskin, Graham
540w
European Court of Human Rights 345w

GCE A level
Grant maintained schools 267–8w
Northern Ireland 654w

General Certificate of Secondary Education
76–84w, 460–2w
Lancashire 263w

General Chiropractic Council
113w

General elections
10, 148–50
European Commission 27w

General practitioners
597w, 639w, 644w
Training 721w

Genetic engineering
604–5w

Genetic engineering—continued
Animal experiments 287w
Food 719w
Maize 719–20w

Genetically modified organisms
EC law 515–6w
Food 1127–9

George, Mr Bruce
Debates etc.
Great Barr Hall (06.02.97) 1237–41

Geriatric patients
Health services 274w

Germany
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 714w
County courts 26w
Employment discrimination 25–6w
Labour costs 1140

Gerrard, Mr Neil
Questions
VAT 11

Gibraltar
502
Sea pollution 647w

Gibson, Mark
Parole 745w

Gill, Mr Christopher
Debates etc.
Local government finance (03.02.97) 746–8
Local government finance, Wales (04.02.97) 859–60, 863
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Compensation 575w

Gillan, Mrs Cheryl, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep (27.01.97) 94, 105–6, 110, 114, 116–8
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 181–2, 187, 189–92, 210–1
Questions
Assisted places scheme 73–5w, 556–7w
Assisted places scheme, Portsmouth 706w
Disabled workers 341
Education, Ethics 750w
Educational finance, Birmingham 705–6w
Educational finance, Lancashire 358
Educational finance, Manchester 358
Educational qualifications, Children in care 97w
Educational standards 86–92w
Educational standards, Southend-on-Sea 462–4w
Equal opportunities 558w
Equal opportunities, Dept for Education and Employment 748w
General Certificate of Secondary Education 76–84w, 460–2w
General Certificate of Secondary Education, Lancashire 263w
Grant maintained schools 357–8
Handicapped pupils 747w
Handicapped pupils, School admission 747–8w
Hawksworth Hall School, Professional misconduct 460w
Incapacity benefit 341
Liskeard School, Schools Renewal Challenge Fund 96–7w
Mathematics, Educational assessment 257w
Private education, Inspections 97w
Quantock School 705w

Gillan, Mrs Cheryl—continued
School buildings, Sheffield 264w
Schools and parents 255–6w
Special schools, Cheltenham 618w
Teachers 345
Teachers, Early retirement 75w, 257w, 343–6, 468w
Teachers, Pay 93–6w
Technology colleges 154–5w, 463–5w

Glasgow
Bus services 359w
Economic situation 625w
Foreign investment in UK 176–7w
Government grants to local authorities 989, 1004
Local government expenditure 989–90
Local government finance 996–8, 1001–2
Unemployment 1004
Urban development grants 989–90

Glen Parva Youth Custody Centre
Health services 739–40w

Global Environmental Facility
459w

Godman, Mr Norman A
Debates etc.
Cold weather payments, Scotland (29.01.97) 298
Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill, Rep and 3R (29.01.97) 377, 397–8, 406, 409
Northern Ireland Parades and Marches Review (30.01.97) 522
Questions
Industrial fishing 1135
Residential care, Scotland 621w
Social policy, Northern Ireland 368w

Golding, Mrs Llin
Debates etc.
Sex Offenders Bill, 2R (27.01.97) 41, 48
Questions
Food hygiene 1134–5

Gordon, Ms Mildred
Questions
Domestic energy conservation 10w
Domestic energy conservation, Northern Ireland 371–2w
Domestic energy conservation, Scotland 327w
Domestic energy conservation, Wales 366w

Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Debates etc.
Fire services, Essex (05.02.97) 982, 984

Government Actuary
Cash limits 422w

Government buildings
Northern Ireland Dept of Education 602w
Treasury 37–8w

Government contracts
Home Office 550–1w

"Government Expenditure and Revenue Wales"
365w

Government grants to local authorities
Glasgow 989, 1004
Manchester 223w
Scotland 183–4w

Government grants to voluntary organisations
Dept of Health 644w
Dept of National Heritage 657–8w

Government information services
Computers 2–3

Government Office for the South West
Administrative costs 534w
Expenditure 533w

Government research establishments
Efficiency scrutinies 230–2w, 274–5w
Scotland 250–1w

Government shareholding
Public utilities 421w

GP fundholders
640w
Information technology 62w
Scotland 62w, 580–1w, 627–8w

Grampian Enterprise
178w

Grampian Health Board
Tropical diseases 64w

Grant, Sir Anthony
Debates etc.
Local government finance (03.02.97) 677
Questions
Business questions 1145–6

Grant maintained schools
357–8
GCE A level 267–8w
Kent 155–6w, 339–40w

Great Barr Hall
(06.02.97) 1237–44

Great Eastern Railway
Performance standards 702–3w

Greater Glasgow Health Board
Redundancy 685w

Greater London
Community health services 721w
Crime 544w
Detection rates 544w
Greenbelt 792–3
Hospital beds 109w

Greece
Animal welfare 1130–1
Trade promotion 228–9w

Greenbelt
Greater London 792–3
Harrow 536w
Housing construction 792–3
Opencast mining 793

Greenway, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 218–9, 222–3
Horserace Totalisator Board Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (07.02.97) 1246
Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill, 2R (31.01.97) 589, 599–602
Questions
Angola, Overseas aid 17
Animal welfare, Greece 1130–1
British Academy of Sport 491w
Business questions 1151
Child benefit 191w
Church property, Security 47w
Drinking and driving, Christmas 123w
Legal aid 502w
Noise Act 1996 537w
Official engagements 345w, 524w
Poultry, Slaughterhouses 717–8w
Privy Council, Cash limits 377w
Royal yacht 10–1
School choice 148
School population, Northern Ireland 368w
Schools and parents 256w
Sports facilities 658
Teachers, Early retirement 345–6
Unemployment 1142
Unemployment, Ealing 482w

Greenway, Mr John
Debates etc.
Air Force (06.02.97) 1159
Food Safety Council (30.01.97) 526
Horserace Totalisator Board Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (07.02.97) 1245–50, 1256–7, 1263, 1267–9, 1271–5, 1280
Questions
Beef, Exports 1132–3
Directors, Disclosure of information 696w
Electricity generation, Alternative energy 694–6w
Local government expenditure, North Yorkshire 532w
Securities and Investments Board, Stamp duties 732w

Griffiths, Mr Nigel
Questions
Companies House 167–8w
Food poisoning, Scotland 176w
Pensioners, Income support 189w

Griffiths, Mr Win
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep (27.01.97) 109
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 170, 249–51, 253
Local government finance, Wales (04.02.97) 896–8
Questions
Tanzania, Bilateral aid 13–4

Grimsby
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 631–2w

Grocott, Mr Bruce
Questions
Cold weather payments 496–8w

Gulf war syndrome
200w, 682w

Gummer, Rt Hon John, Secretary of State for the Environment
Debates etc.
Local government finance (03.02.97) 676–91, 694–5, 697–8, 700, 761–2
Questions
Agenda 21 135w
Air pollution 531w, 785
Air pollution, South East London 785–6
Air pollution control 786
Coal mine closures, Water pollution 675w
Dept of the Environment, Cash limits 388–90w
EC environmental policy 135w
Environment, Disclosure of information 531w, 538w
Exhaust emissions 786
Greenbelt, Harrow 536w
Housing construction 781–2
Housing stock 782
Industry, Environment protection 139–40w
Interest rates 782
Local government revenue 11w
Non-departmental public bodies, Public appointments 532w
Non-domestic rates 790
Packaging 222–3w
Packaging, Wastes 530w
Pollution control 135–6w
Small businesses, Uniform business rate 789–90
UN Environment Programme 535–6w
UN Special Session on the Environment 533w
United Kingdom NIREX, Rock characterisation facility 532w
Water supply industry, Competition 138–9w

Gunnell, Mr John
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep (27.01.97) 95, 111, 115–6
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 199–201, 216, 220–1
Questions
Council housing, Housing stock 790–1
Deputy Prime Minister, Ministerial policy advisors 120w
Hospitals, Private finance initiative 472w
Overseas trade, Iraq 610w
Social Security Contributions Agency, Contracts for services 103w
Social Security Contributions Agency, Inquiries 102–3w

Gypsies
Weston-super-Mare (28.01.97) 262–8

Habitual residence test
Expenditure 105w

***Hague, Rt Hon William**, Secretary of State for Wales*
Debates etc.
Local government finance, Wales (04.02.97) 858–65, 867–9
Questions
Baglan Hospital 158w
Cardiff Airport 42w
Cardiff Bay barrage, Birds 41w
Company liquidations, Wales 517w
Computers, Welsh Office 664w, 758w
Ear disorders, Wales 43w
European Council, Cardiff 411w
Farms, Flintshire 366w
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 158–9w
"Government Expenditure and Revenue Wales" 365w
Health authorities, Wales 43w
Local government finance, Wales 44–6w, 159–60w, 517–8w
Marshall Food Group 591–2w
Ministers, Conferences 588–9w
NHS trusts, Finance 365w
Public houses, Machen 40w
Publicity, Welsh Office 588w
Regional selective assistance, Wales 291w
Surgery, Statistics 759w
Training and enterprise councils, Wales 290–2w
Treasury, Early retirement 759w
Unemployment, Wales 38w
University of Wales College of Cardiff, Meningitis 592–3w
Vehicle number plates, Welsh Office 38w
Welsh language 591w
Welsh language, Primary education 46w
Welsh Office, Cash limits 411–2w
Welsh Office, Information Technology 757–8w
Welsh Office, Public expenditure 518w
Working hours, EC law 522w

Hain, Mr Peter
Questions
A465, Road accidents 290w
Capital 478–9w
Economic policy, Economic and monetary union 798–9
Employment, European communities 146–8w
National income 479w
Part-time employment 354
Research finance 614–5w
Skilled workers, Productivity 566w

Halewood
Ford Motor Company (05.02.97) 919–40

Hall, Mr Mike
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 223
Local government finance (03.02.97) 717
Questions
Accident and emergency departments 401w
National Savings Agency 565–6w

Hammersmith bridge
Repairs and maintenance 650–1w

Hampson, Dr Keith
Questions
Student wastage 462w

Handicapped
Neurology (29.01.97) 322–30
Prisoners 216w

Handicapped pupils
747w
School admission 747–8w

***Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy**, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*
Questions
Arms to Iraq Inquiry, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 659–60w, 663w
Burma, Association of South East Asian Nations 225w
Burma, EC external relations 744w
Burma, Foreign relations 225w
Burma, Overseas investment 543w
Choephel, Ngawang, Political prisoners 504w
Computers, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 662w
Equal opportunities, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 744–5w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Cash limits 426w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Scholarships 27w
Hong Kong, Visas 226w
Indonesia, Arms trade 419–20w
Indonesia, Overseas aid 27w
Indonesia, Public order policing 506w
Iraq, Prisoners of war 227w
Japan, Prisoners of war 660w
Publicity, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 610–2w

Hannam, Sir John
Debates etc.
Transplant surgery, Kidneys (29.01.97) 315–8

Hanson, Mr David
Questions
Carbon monoxide, Death 641w
Interpreters, Clwyd 289w
Millennium Exhibition 659w
Solvent abuse, Butane gas 598w
Tenant eviction, Civil proceedings 342w

Hard core unemployed
261–2w
Northern Ireland 371w

Hardy, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Food Safety Council (30.01.97) 529–30
Local government finance (03.02.97) 688, 729, 757, 759–60, 764
Questions
Cold weather payments 297w
Cultural heritage, Church buildings 378w
Greenbelt, Opencast mining 793
Mine safety 224w
Weather forecasting, Equipment 209w

Hargreaves, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Ford Motor Company, Halewood (05.02.97) 927, 929–30

Harman, Ms Harriet
Debates etc.
Oral question time intervention (28.01.97) 144
Questions
Benefits Agency district offices 743–4w
Dept of Social Security, Contracts for services 578w, 632–4w
Job centres 704w
Social security benefits, Expenditure 142

Harris, Mr David
Questions
Shipbuilding intervention fund 233w

Harrow
Greenbelt 536w

Harvey, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Education (05.02.97) 1074
Questions
Insolvency service, Pay 168–9w
International Labour Organisation 151–2w
Legal aid, Immigrants 343w
Office of Telecommunications, Performance standards 227w
Out of town shopping centres, Rural areas 171w
Overseas investment, Income 228w

Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Questions
Employment opportunities 354

Hawk aircraft
439w
Arms trade 621w
Indonesia 621w

Hawkins, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep (27.01.97) 82–3
Questions
Legal aid scheme 502w
Radon gas, Pollution monitoring 137–8w
Youth unemployment 350–1

Hawksley, Mr Warren
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep (27.01.97) 100, 105
Questions
European Council, Cardiff 160w

Hawksworth Hall School
Professional misconduct 460w

Hayes, Mr Jerry
Debates etc.
Local government finance (03.02.97) 682
Questions
Gibraltar 502

Hazardous materials
Air freight transport 128w

Headteachers
795–6

***Heald, Mr Oliver**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Social Security*
Debates etc.
Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.02.97) 809–11, 813–9, 825, 834–6, 841, 844–7, 855–7
Questions
National insurance benefits 191–2w
National insurance contributions 363–4w, 579w

Heald, Mr Oliver—continued
National insurance contributions, Fringe benefits 104w
National insurance contributions, Tax avoidance 364w
Occupational pensions 142–3
Pensioners, Christmas bonus 189w
Pensioners, Low incomes 143
Pensioners, Personal savings 187w
Personal pensions 143
Retirement pensions 637–8w
Social security abuse 187w
Social security abuse, Telephone services 102w, 497w, 577w, 709–10w
Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill 1996/97, Disclosure of information 107–8w
Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill 1996/97, Human rights 106w
Social security benefits, Advisory services 426–7w
Social Security Benefits Agency, Computers 105w
Social security claims, Personal records 494w
Social Security Contributions Agency, Contracts for services 103w
Social Security Contributions Agency, Inquiries 102–3w
Social Security Contributions Agency, Performance standards 103w
State earnings related pension scheme 143–4
War pensions 364w
War pensions, Ear disorders 633–6w
War pensions, Personal records 192w
War Pensions Agency 429w
War Pensions Agency, Administrative costs 712–3w

Health authorities
Wales 43w

Health education
Burundi 16w
Rwanda 16w
Solvent abuse 721w

Health hazards
Aspartame 597–8w
Riot control weapons 619w

Health service staff
Leeds Health Authority 471–2w
Manpower 344w, 366w, 372w, 402w
Northern Ireland 372w
Scotland 327w
Wales 366w
West Yorkshire Health Authority 471–2w

Health services
Geriatric patients 274w
Glen Parva Youth Custody Centre 739–40w
North West region 501–2
Weather 343w

Health services finance
Scotland 992–3

Heart diseases
Hospital waiting lists 273w
Medical research 642w
Medical treatments 642w, 763w
Scotland 624w

Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David,
Debates etc.
EC integration, Voting methods (29.01.97) 273
Questions
Business questions 1148

Heating
Hostels 140

Hedges and ditches
Scotland 377w

Hedley Lomas (Ireland)
Damages 406w

Helicopters
Cowarth Park School 486–7w
RAF Valley 683w
Schools 487w

Henderson, Mr Doug
Questions
Immigrant detainees 362–3, 383w
Political refugees, Immigrant detainees 380–3w
Political refugees, Immigration applications 383w

Hendron, Dr Joe
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland Parades and Marches Review (30.01.97) 521
Questions
Elections, Fraud 490
Kane, Patrick, Criminal appeals 500w
Taking and driving away, Belfast 368–9w

Hendry, Mr Charles
Debates etc.
Local government finance (03.02.97) 701
Questions
Export promotion 325w
National Lottery, Historic buildings 488w
Prisoners' transport 740w
Standard spending assessments 531w
Training and enterprise councils, Finance 466–8w

Heppell, Mr John
Debates etc.
Local government finance, East Midlands (29.01.97) 482
Questions
Food Safety Council 1137
Medical rehabilitation 110w

Hereditary diseases
167w

Hertfordshire
Local government reform 448w

Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael, First Secretary of State and Deputy Prime Minister
Questions
Arms to Iraq Inquiry, Deputy Prime Minister 675w
Bombings, Manchester 735w
Business, Deregulation 1–2
Business Interchange Panel 469–70w
Civil servants, Political impartiality 9–10
Coordination and Presentation of Government Policy Ministerial Committee 526–7w
Departmental coordination 5
Deputy Prime Minister, Ministerial policy advisors 120w
EC grants and loans 279–80w
Environment protection, Deputy Prime Minister 122w
European Central Bank 10
General elections 10
Nissan, Foreign investment in UK 5–6
Royal yacht 6, 10–1
Small businesses, Deregulation 2
VAT 11

Hess, Rudolf
Death registration 348w, 680w

Hicks, Sir Robert
Questions
Liskeard School, Schools Renewal Challenge Fund 96–7w

Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Questions
National Audit Office, Civil service manpower 16
Non-departmental public bodies 16–7
Public Accounts Commission, Employment discrimination 17

Higher education
350
Finance (05.02.97) 1117–24
Lancashire 394–5w
Wales 294w

Higher Education National Committee of Inquiry
558w

Highland Health Board
995
Social services finance 995

Highlands and Islands Enterprise
373w

Hill, Mr Keith
Questions
Dept of Health, Government grants to voluntary organisations 644w
Dept of National Heritage, Government grants to voluntary organisations 657–8w
Equal opportunities, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 734–5w
Equal opportunities, Dept for Education and Employment 748w
Equal opportunities, Dept of the Environment 676w
Equal opportunities, Dept of Transport 734w
Equal opportunities, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 744–5w
Equal opportunities, Treasury 731w

Hill livestock allowances
573–4w
Northern Ireland 413–4w

Hinchliffe, Mr David
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 220–3
Local government finance (03.02.97) 719
Questions
Breast cancer, Screening 164w
Children, Migration 115w
Employment, Statistics 332w
Forestry, Scotland 582w
Insurance premium tax, Tax yields 423–4w
Parking offences, Fines 54w
Police, Courts 125w
Sheriffs 503w
War pensions 199w

Historic buildings
National Lottery 488w

Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England
see English Heritage

HIV infection
722w

HM Inspectorate of Prisons
554w
Publications 741w

HM Prison Service
see Prison Service

HMSO
Privatisation 736w

Hodge, Ms Margaret
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep (27.01.97) 87, 104, 108–12
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 208–11
Questions
Social security benefits, Expenditure 188w

Hoey, Miss Kate
Questions
Police stations, Lambeth 313w
Police stations, Metropolitan Police 124w
Stalking, Northern Ireland 499–500
Tourists, Northern Ireland 369w

Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Debates etc.
Food Safety Council, Ministerial statements (30.01.97) 523–32
Questions
Beef, Exports 716w, 1131–3
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 1132
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 1132
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Germany 714w
Common agricultural policy 715–6w
Farm incomes 408w
Food hygiene 1134–5
Food Safety Council 357–8w, 1134
Horticulture Research International 287–8w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food, Cash limits 407–8w
National Farmers' Union, Ministerial speeches 1133
Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee 1134
Veterinary Laboratories Agency 287w

Hogg, Mr Norman
Questions
A80, Road construction 999
Road construction, Scotland 624w

Holiday accommodation
English Tourist Board 19w

Holiday and travel insurance
Tax rates and bands 234–5w
Tax yields 234w

Holiday leave
EC countries 229–30w

Holocaust Denial Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
1R (29.01.97) 370–2

Home Office
Arms to Iraq Inquiry 741–2w
Cash limits 384w
Computers 673w
Consultants 550–1w
Environment protection 452w
Government contracts 550–1w
Legal costs 378–80w
Publicity 664–5w
Sustainable development 455–6w

Home Robertson, Mr John
Debates etc.
Food Safety Council (30.01.97) 528
Questions
Algrade Trust 446w
Armed forces, Smoking 197–8w, 526w
Electricity interconnectors, Northern Ireland 993

Homelessness
784–5

Homework
267w, 342–3
Wales 616w

Homicide
Life imprisonment 212w
Northern Ireland 173w

Homosexuality
Royal Ulster Constabulary 308–9w

Hong Kong
British citizenship 456w, 552–3w, 1138–40
Right of abode 8w
Visas 226w

Hood, Mr Jimmy
Questions
Falcons, Scotland 627w
Medical examinations, Fees and charges 709–10w
Public order offences, Alcoholic drinks 689w

Hoon, Mr Geoffrey
Questions
Computers in government departments, Millennium 508w

Horam, Mr John, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Health
Debates etc.
Human Tissue (Amendment) Bill, 2R adjourned (07.02.97) 1310–3
Transplant surgery, Kidneys (29.01.97) 318–21
West Middlesex University Hospital (03.02.97) 777–80
Questions
Accident and emergency departments 401w, 593w, 597w
Accident and emergency departments, Patients 597w
AIDS 268–9w, 722w
AIDS, Death 269w
AIDS, Motor neurone disease 268w
Aspartame, Health hazards 597–8w
Breast cancer, Screening 164w
Breasts, Plastic surgery 165–6w
Cancer, Digestive system disorders 344w
Cancer, Hospital waiting lists 343w
Cancer, Medical research 642w
Cancer, Screening 724–5w
Chief Medical Officer 593–4w
Community health services, Greater London 721w
Computers, Dept of Health 725w
Cottage hospitals 594w
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia 110–2w
Dept of Health, Consultants 596w
Environment protection, Dept of Health 117w
Food poisoning 108–10w
Food Safety Council 761w
Fulwood Hospital, Property transfer 399–400w
Games, Expenditure 276w
Government research establishments, Efficiency scrutinies 274–5w
Health services, Weather 343w
Heart diseases, Hospital waiting lists 273w
Heart diseases, Medical research 642w
Heart diseases, Medical treatments 763w
Hereditary diseases 167w
Hospital beds 277–8w
Hospital nurses, Temporary employment 277w
Hospital waiting lists 402w
Hospital waiting lists, Leeds 343–4w
Hospital wards 594w

Horam, Mr John—continued
Hospitals, Private finance initiative 270–4w, 472w
Insulin 115w
Intensive care, Children 276–7w
Intensive care, Leeds 471w
Intensive care, Northern and Yorkshire region 470w
Long stay patients, Northern and Yorkshire region 164w
Meningitis 269w, 725–6w, 763w
Meningitis, Research finance 270w
Meningitis, Vaccination 118w
Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus 343w
NHS 116w
NHS, Contracts for services 273w
NHS and private practice, West Yorkshire 471w
NHS finance 470–1w, 722w
NHS finance, Buckinghamshire Health Authority 278w
Nurses, Child patients 760w
Nurses, Emigration 277w
Nurses' training, Student numbers 117w
Paediatrics, Intensive care 164–5w
Parkinson's disease 600w
Prostate gland, Cancer 721–2w
Prosthetics 166–7w
Public Health Laboratory Service 594w
Public Health Laboratory Service, Efficiency scrutinies 275w
Publicity, Dept of Health 470w
Royal Hospitals NHS Trust, Private finance initiative 599w
St Thomas' Hospital, Private finance initiative 402w
Silicone, Poisoning 166w
South Manchester Health Authority, Orthopaedics 275–6w
Surgery 275w
Surgery, Hospital admissions 645w
Tuberculosis, London boroughs 599–600w
Xenotransplantation 114w
Xenotransplantation Interim Regulatory Authority 279w

Hormone treatments
Dairy farming 574w

Horserace Totalisator Board Bill (HL) 1996/97
Debates etc.
Rep and 3R (07.02.97) 1245–86

Horticulture Research International
287–8w

Hospital admissions
Surgery 645w

Hospital beds
277–8w
Greater London 109w
Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust 109w

Hospital consultants
Accident and emergency departments 399w
Vacancies 595–6w

Hospital doctors
761w
Working hours 761w

Hospital finance
Borders Health Board 992

Hospital nurses
Temporary employment 277w

Hospital patients
Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust 109w

Hospital waiting lists
402w

Hospital waiting lists—continued
Cancer 343w
Heart diseases 273w
Leeds 343–4w
Scotland 441–2w, 581w

Hospital wards
150–1, 594w
Wales 615w

Hospitals
Private finance initiative 270–4w, 420w, 472w

Hostels
Heating 140

Hounslow
Local government finance 676w

House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975
Questions
674w

House of Commons procedure
Speaker's rulings and statements (27.01.97) 21–2

House of Commons questions
373w

House of Commons voting methods
Devolution 991, 996

Housing
527w
Children in care 16w
Expenditure 528–9w
Local government expenditure 250w
Planning permission 534–5w
Rural areas (04.02.97) 910–8
Scotland 250w, (04.02.97) 910–8

Housing Act 1996
Questions
537–8w

Housing and elderly
Defective housing 784

Housing associations
Housing starts 530w

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (General) Amendment Regulations 1997
Questions
191w

Housing benefits
362w, 711–2w
Scotland 300w
Service charges 294–5w
Social security abuse 138
Young people 103–4w

Housing construction
781–2
Belfast 173w
Greenbelt 792–3

Housing insulation
140–1

Housing starts
Council housing 530w
Housing associations 530w
Social rented housing 529w

Housing stock
782
Council housing 790–1, 793–4

Howard, Rt Hon Michael, Secretary of State for the Home Department
Questions
Arms to Iraq Inquiry, Home Office 741–2w
British citizenship, Hong Kong 552–3w
Computers, Home Office 673w

Howard, Rt Hon Michael—continued
Consultants, Home Office 550–1w
Environment protection, Home Office 452w
Home Office, Cash limits 384w
Police Scientific Development Branch 218w
Publicity, Home Office 664–5w
Sustainable development, Home Office 455–6w
Whitemoor Prison, Prisoner escapes 449w

Howarth, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Handicapped, Neurology (29.01.97) 322–7
Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.02.97) 816, 829–32, 835–6, 857
Questions
Benefits Agency Medical Service 106–7w
Incapacity benefit 293–4w, 341, 497–8w, 577w
Invalidity benefits 577w
Jobsecker's allowance, Part-time employment 557–8w
Social security abuse, Telephone services 577w, 709–10w
Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill 1996/97 137
Social security recipients 635–8w, 710w
Tourist industry 669

Howarth, Mr George
Debates etc.
Ford Motor Company, Halewood (05.02.97) 929
Questions
Health services, Glen Parva Youth Custody Centre 739–40w
HM Inspectorate of Prisons, Publications 741w
Prison governors, Training 545–6w, 549–50w
Prisoners, Drug abuse 210–2w, 216w
Prisoners, Dyslexia 737–9w
Prisoners, Handicapped 216w
Prisoners, Suicide 546–50w

Howells, Dr Kim
Questions
Monopolies and Mergers Commission 325w
Post offices 560w

Hoyle, Mr Doug
Debates etc.
Ford Motor Company, Halewood (05.02.97) 940
Questions
Food Safety Council 1134
HM Inspectorate of Prisons 554w
Risley Prison, Women 449w
Training and enterprise councils, Finance 266–7w

Hughes, Mr Kevin
Debates etc.
Human Tissue (Amendment) Bill, 2R adjourned (07.02.97) 1306–8
Sex Offenders Bill, 2R (27.01.97) 25
Questions
Animal breeding, Ethics 513–4w
By elections, Wirral South 1141–2
Radio broadcasting licences, Doncaster 490–1w

Hughes, Mr Robert
Questions
Aberdeen College of Education, Manpower 1003

Hughes, Mr Robert G
Debates etc.
Horserace Totalisator Board Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (07.02.97) 1255–7, 1263, 1266, 1277–9
Human Tissue (Amendment) Bill, 2R adjourned (07.02.97) 1301–4
Local government finance (03.02.97) 680–1, 695–6, 699, 704, 720, 728–33
Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.02.97) 812, 843–5
Questions
Employment opportunities 136

Hughes, Mr Roy
Debates etc.
Local government finance, Wales (04.02.97) 882–5
Severn bridge, Road construction (05.02.97) 976
Questions
Community care, Wales 518w
Social security finance 189w

Hughes, Mr Simon
Debates etc.
Alcoholism, Rehabilitation (31.01.97) 648–52
Business questions (30.01.97) 536
NHS (05.02.97) 1053–4, 9999
Questions
Church and state 18–9
Civil servants 119w
Doctors' and Dentists' Pay Review Body 643w
Nutrition and health 717w
Prescription drugs, Expenditure 644w
Schools, Inner city areas 258–9w
Surgery, Hospital admissions 645w
Surgery, Scotland 627w
Surgery, Wales 617w

Human rights
Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill 1996/97 106w
Tibet 504w

Human Tissue (Amendment) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R adjourned (07.02.97) 1295–313

Hume, Mr John
Questions
Army in Northern Ireland, Inquiries 505–6

Hunger strikes
365–7
Bullingdon Prison 218–9w
Immigrant detainees 359–62, 365, 368, 673w

Hunt, Sir John
Questions
School admission, Bromley 263–4w

Hunter, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland Parades and Marches Review (30.01.97) 517
Questions
Northern Ireland government, Northern Ireland 497–8

Hutton, Mr John
Debates etc.
Sex Offenders Bill, 2R (27.01.97) 62–5
Questions
Auxiliary Oiler Replenishment Vessels, Defence procurement 199w
Civil servants, Political impartiality 9–10
Secure accommodation 125w
Submarines, Defence procurement 199w

Hydrocarbon oil duties
238w

Hypothermia
34–5w

Identity cards
313w

Illsley, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Local government finance (03.02.97) 678, 741
Questions
Jobseeker's allowance, Northern Ireland 494

Immigrant detainees
1–4w, 6w, 362–8, 383w, 453–5w
Birmingham Prison 4w, 212–4w
Hunger strikes 359–62, 365, 368, 673w
Political refugees 380–3w, 553w
Rochester Prison 359–62, 365, 368, 673w
Women 213–4w

Immigrants
Legal aid 343w

Immigration applications
Pakistan 663w
Political refugees 383w

Imperial College Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R* (28.01.97) 135

Import of live animals
417w, 562w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 1125
Veterinary services 1125–6

Imports
Coal 510–1w
Fish 288–9w
Organic food 356w

Improvement notices
Food industry 357w

Incapacity benefit
187w, 293–4w, 341, 497–8w, 577w
Northern Ireland 305–8w

Income support
744w
Children 188–9w
Mortgages 429–30w
Pensioners 144–6, 189w
Revenue support grant 105w
St Helens 637w
Young people 104w

Income tax
237–8w
Scotland 998
Tax rates and bands 142–3w
Taxpayers 613–4w

Income tax on investment incomes
Tax allowances 335w

Independent Qualified Conveyancers (Scotland) Regulations 1997
Debates etc.
(29.01.97) 478

Independent Tribunal Service
576w

Indonesia
Arms trade 419–20w
Hawk aircraft 621w
Overseas aid 27w, 126w
Police 341w
Police training 17w
Public order policing 506w

Industrial development
Rwanda 13

Industrial fishing
1135

Industrial research
Government assistance 417w

Industrial training
Young people 350

Industrial training board levies
Construction Industry Training Board (03.02.97) 772
Engineering Construction Industry Training Board (03.02.97) 772

Industrial Training Levy (Construction Board) Order 1997
Debates etc.
(03.02.97) 772

Industrial Training Levy (Engineering Construction Board) Order 1997
Debates etc.
(03.02.97) 772

Industry
Environment protection 139–40w

Inflation
145–6w

Information technology
25w
GP fundholders 62w
Welsh Office 757–8w

Ingram, Mr Adam
Debates etc.
Ford Motor Company, Halewood (05.02.97) 935–7
Questions
Dept of Trade and Industry, Research finance 697w
Partners in Technology 224w
Partners in Technology, Building Research Establishment 224–5w
Research councils 416–8w

Inheritance tax
Tax allowances 234w

Injuries
Brain 622w

Inland Revenue
Cash limits 423w

Inland waterways
National Lottery 659–60

Inner city areas
Schools 258–9w

Insolvency service
Pay 168–9w

Insulin
115–6w

Insurance
Urban areas (05.02.97) 1009

Insurance premium tax
Tax yields 423–4w

Integrated administration and control system
286–7w

Integrated schools
Northern Ireland 369w

Intelligence services
Cash limits 735w

Intensive care
401w
Children 276–7w
Leeds 471w
Northern and Yorkshire region 470w
Paediatrics 164–5w
Pinderfields Hospital NHS Trust 471w

Interest rates
424w, 782

Intergovernmental Conference 1996
Animal welfare 1129

International aid from international bodies
Rwanda 12–3

International baccalaureate
Northern Ireland 654w

International conferences
Association of South East Asian Nations 226w

International Labour Organisation
151–2w

International organisations
Overseas aid 702w

Interpreters
Clwyd 289w

Intimidation of witnesses
Northern Ireland 499

Invalidity benefits
577w

Iraq
Arms trade 349w
Chemical weapons 682w
Export licensing 418w
Overseas trade 610w
Prisoners of war 227w

Iraq-Kuwait conflict
Armed forces 206w

Islam
Dead bodies 551–2w, 603w

Jack, Rt Hon Michael, Financial Secretary to the Treasury
Questions
Building workers 334w
Capital gains tax 144w
Company cars 479–80w
Company cars, Tax allowances 334w, 425w
Company cars, Tax yields 480–1w
Energy prices 33–4w
Income tax 237–8w
Income tax, Tax rates and bands 142–3w
Income tax, Taxpayers 613–4w
Income tax on investment incomes, Tax allowances 335w
Inheritance tax, Tax allowances 234w
Inland Revenue, Cash limits 423w
Mortgage relief 144w, 239w
National income 680w
Oil revenues 678w
Pay incentives 481–2w
Pensioners, Tax rates and bands 143–4w
Personal equity plans, Tax allowances 142w
Personal tax allowances 142w, 678w
Private finance initiative 679w
Privatisation, Income 731–2w
Profit sharing, Costs 611–2w
Profit sharing, Pay 732–3w
Public utilities, Government shareholding 421w
Public utilities, Privatisation 422w
Railway fares 481w
Self-assessment of tax, Compliance cost assessments 679w
Tax evasion 679w
Taxation 35w
Taxation, Travel allowances 614w
Taxation, Wales 614w
Taxpayers, National insurance contributions 335w
Treasury, Government buildings 37–8w

Jack, Rt Hon Michael—continued
Trusts, Capital gains tax 337w
Trusts, Taxation 337w
Unpaid taxes 336–7w
Venture capital trusts, Tax yields 142w

Jackson, Helen
Debates etc.
Members' correspondence, Points of order (06.02.97) 1155
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 514w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Northern Ireland 514–5w
Jobseeker's allowance 299–300w

Jackson, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Local government finance (03.02.97) 677

Jakarta
Aid financed trade 27w

Jamieson, Mr David
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep (27.01.97) 84–5, 94–102, 104, 117
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 178, 189, 220, 223
Questions
Activity Centres (Young Persons' Safety) Act 1995, Scotland 626w
Assisted places scheme, Staffordshire 352–3
Deregulation initiative, Child safety 120–1w
Naval bases, Plymouth 683w
Nursery schools, Inspections 263w
Private education, Inspections 97w
Quantock School 705w

Janner, Mr Greville
Questions
Public Accounts Commission, Employment discrimination 17
Unemployment 796

Japan
Prisoners of war 660w

Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Debates etc.
Horserace Totalisator Board Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (07.02.97) 1248, 1259, 1261–5
Human Tissue (Amendment) Bill, 2R adjourned (07.02.97) 1299, 1308–9
Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill, 2R (31.01.97) 582, 586, 621–2
Telecommunications technology, Planning permission (07.02.97) 1316–8
Questions
Church property, Valuation 47w
EC Social Charter 669
Integrated administration and control system 286–7w
Legal aid scheme 502w
Mental health services 593w
State earnings related pension scheme 144
Wild animals, Arable farming 574–5w

Jersey
Financial institutions 33w

Jessel, Mr Toby
Debates etc.
Local government finance (03.02.97) 748, 750–2
West Middlesex University Hospital (03.02.97) 776–7
Questions
Arts Council of England, National Lottery 490w

Jessel, Mr Toby—continued
Millennium Exhibition 665–6
Royal yacht 5

Job centres
704w
Advertising 259w

Jobseeker's allowance
299–300w, 342, 346–7, 713–4w
Alyn and Deeside 743w
Expenditure 105w
Non-teaching staff 579w
Northern Ireland 494
Part-time employment 557–8w
Share fishermen 430w
Young people 97–8w

Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Questions
China, Forced labour 504w
Motor vehicles, Excise duties 130–1w

Johnston, Sir Russell
Questions
Lyme disease, Scotland 446w

Joint Service Command and Staff College
Armed forces training 525–6w

Jones, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Local government finance, Wales (04.02.97) 896
Police grant (29.01.97) 468–70
Questions
Aerospace industry, Government assistance 169w
Aerospace industry, Mergers 508w
Apprentices, Manufacturing industries 151w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 156w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Wales 587–8w
Cold weather payments 139–40
Community charge, Non-payment 411w, 590w
Council house sales, Wales 408–10w
Deaf, Wales 663–4w
Deafness, Clwyd 156–7w
Defective housing, Wales 290w
Departmental coordination 5
Dual carriageways, Flintshire 157w
Educational finance, Flintshire 591w
Exservicemen, Military decorations 30–1w
Farms, Flintshire 366w
Homework, Wales 616w
Hospital wards, Wales 615w
Jobseeker's allowance, Alyn and Deeside 743w
Local government functions, Wales 663w
Lone parents, Wales 615w
Ministers, Conferences 588–9w
Pensioners, Population 331w
Public sector housing, Wales 408w
Residential care, Wales 589w
Social security benefits, Advisory services 426–7w
Teachers, Early retirement 257w, 591w
Teachers, North Wales 615–6w

Jones, Mr Gwilym, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office
Debates etc.
Local government finance, Wales (04.02.97) 872, 899–901
Questions
A465, Road accidents 290w
Alzheimer's disease, Wales 759w
Ambulance services, Wales 159w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Wales 156w

Jones, Mr Gwilym—continued
Community charge, Non-payment 411w, 590w
Cottage hospitals, Wales 366w
Deaf, Wales 663–4w
Dental services, Children 157w
Dental services, Conwy 521w
Dentists, Wales 591w
Drug abuse, Wales 517w
Dual carriageways, Flintshire 157w
Electricity supply industry, Wales 411w
Energy consumption, Wales 663w
Health service staff, Manpower 366w
Hospital wards, Wales 615w
Local government functions, Wales 663w
Lone parents, Wales 615w
Medical rehabilitation, Wales 615w
Meningitis, Wales 42w
Nurses, Wales 40–1w
Nurses' training, Wales 40w
Planning appeals, Performance standards 616w
Planning appeals, Wales 518w
Planning appeals, Welsh Office 591w
Railtrack, Cardiff 616–7w
Rhuddlan bypass 521w
Road traffic, Wales 590w
Surgery, Wales 617w
Tourism, Wales 591w
University of Wales College of Cardiff, Meningitis 42w
Wheelchairs, Wales 364–5w

Jones, Mr Ieuan Wyn
Questions
Countryside stewardship scheme, Wales 158w
Environmentally sensitive areas, Wales 157–8w
"North Wales School Performance Information Booklet" 158w
Special education, Wales 38–9w
Special education, Ynys Mon 39–40w

Jones, Mr Jon Owen
Questions
Access funds 267w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Wales 156w
Combined Cadet Force 210w
Higher education, Wales 294w
Meningitis 725–6w, 763w
Meningitis, Vaccination 118w
Meningitis, Wales 42w
Planning appeals, Performance standards 616w
Planning appeals, Welsh Office 591w
Postgraduate students, Wales 291w
Railtrack, Cardiff 616–7w
Self-assessment of tax, Compliance cost assessments 679w
Student grants, Wales 292–3w
Student loans, Take-up 267w
Student loans, Wales 292w
Student numbers, Wales 293w
University of Wales College of Cardiff, Meningitis 42w

Jones, Dr Lynne
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 232, 241
Questions
Birmingham Prison, Immigrant detainees 4w, 212–4w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Costs 1136
Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty 31w
Deportation 5–6w
Immigrant detainees 2–4w, 6w, 453–5w
Immigrant detainees, Women 213–4w

Jones, Dr Lynne—continued
Lasers, Defence equipment 30w
Mental health community care 163w
Mental patients, Extra contractual referrals 164w
Mentally disturbed offenders, NHS finance 163–4w
Selly Oak hospital 1137–8

Jones, Mr Martyn David
Questions
Agriculture, Negative equity 720w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Research 281w
Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy Order 1996 280w
Church Commissioners, Tenant farmers 351–2w
Economic situation, Performance standards 144–5w
Farms, Negative equity 656w
Food, Carcinogens 353w
Food, Urban areas 286w, 356w
Further Education Funding Council for England 264w
Meat Products and Spreadable Fish Products Regulations 1984 285–6w
Oils and fats 355w
Public Health Laboratory Service, Efficiency scrutinies 275w
Specified Bovine Material (No 3) Order 1996 284w, 353–4w
Vegetables, Nitrates 355w

Jones, Mr Nigel
Questions
Special schools, Cheltenham 618w

Jones, Mr Robert B, Minister of State, Dept of the Environment
Debates etc.
Gypsies, Weston Super Mare (28.01.97) 265–8
Questions
Areas of outstanding natural beauty, Sussex 788
British Waterways Board, Government grants 533w
Building Research Establishment, Privatisation 139w
City challenge, Stockton 782–3
Greenbelt, Greater London 792–3
Greenbelt, Opencast mining 793
Landlord and tenant 316w
Partners in Technology 224w
Partners in Technology, Building Research Establishment 224–5w
Planning permission 225w, 534–5w
Swansea Canal 533w
Tipping of waste 788

Jowell, Ms Tessa
Debates etc.
NHS (05.02.97) 1039–45
Questions
Business travel, NHS Executive 279w
Health service staff, Manpower 402w

Jubilee line
Building workers 569w

Judges
671–2

Judgments
European Court of Human Rights 345w, 540–2w
Sports facilities 742–3w
Thames Ditton Lawn Tennis Club 742–3w

Judicial review
Dept of the Environment 676w

Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R (31.01.97) 575–636

Kane, Patrick
Criminal appeals 500w, 602w

Keen, Mr Alan
Questions
Local government finance, Hounslow 676w

Keith bypass
624w

Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Debates etc.
Education (05.02.97) 1076, 1080
Education Bill, Rep (27.01.97) 104–5
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 166, 185–6, 190, 198, 219, 231–2
NHS (05.02.97) 1034
Questions
Housing and elderly, Defective housing 784
Lancaster University, Research 356

Kennedy, Mr Charles
Debates etc.
Cold weather payments, Scotland (29.01.97) 294, 298, 300, 303–4
EC integration, Voting methods (29.01.97) 273
NHS (05.02.97) 1027, 1029, 1052–7
Scotland, Housing (04.02.97) 916
Questions
Census of population, Languages 473w
Skye bridge, Private finance initiative 152
Social services finance, Highland Health Board 995

Kennedy, Mrs Jane
Debates etc.
Business questions (30.01.97) 539
Ford Motor Company, Halewood (05.02.97) 926–8
Horserace Totalisator Board Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (07.02.97) 1254–5, 1281–2
Offences against children, Public petitions (27.01.97) 124
Police Property Bill, 3R (07.02.97) 1293–4
Questions
Business questions 1151
Social security abuse, Housing benefits 138

Kent
Grant maintained schools 155–6w, 339–40w
Local government finance 791–2, 795
Local government services 791–2
Revenue support grant (05.02.97) 941–63

Kent County Council
Local government borrowing 137w

Key, Mr Robert
Questions
Armed forces catering services, Contracts 206–8w, 485–6w
Armed forces catering services, Contracts for services 684w
Army, Museums and galleries 32w, 193–4w
Booker Foodservice 486w
Coordination and Presentation of Government Policy Ministerial Committee 522w, 526–7w
National Army Museum 32w
Royal Signals, Museums and galleries 32w

Khabra, Mr Piara S
Questions
Petroleum exploration licences, Environmental impact assessment 228w

Kidneys
Transplant surgery (29.01.97) 315–21

Kilfoyle, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep (27.01.97) 75, 83–91, 102–3, 105
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 157–60, 162, 169–72, 182–3, 186–9, 191, 197–9, 201–4, 208, 224–5
Ford Motor Company, Halewood (05.02.97) 923–4
Questions
Teachers, Early retirement 345

Kilns
132–3w

King, Rt Hon Tom
Debates etc.
Local government finance (03.02.97) 683
Northern Ireland Parades and Marches Review (30.01.97) 516

King's College London Bill (HL) 1994/95
Debates etc.
3R order read (28.01.97) 135, (04.02.97) 781

Kirkhope, Mr Timothy, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office
Debates etc.
Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill, 2R (31.01.97) 586–9, 597, 606, 615, 626–34
Sex Offenders Bill, 2R (27.01.97) 70–2
Questions
Birmingham Prison, Immigrant detainees 4w
British citizenship, Hong Kong 456w
Deportation 5–6w
Extradition, Republic of Ireland 176w
Gambling 6–7w
Home Office, Legal costs 378–80w
Immigrant detainees 1–4w, 6w, 383w, 453–5w
Immigrant detainees, Hunger strikes 673w
McNamee, Danny 384w
O'Callaghan, Sean, Extradition 552w
Political refugees 451w
Political refugees, Immigrant detainees 380–3w, 553w
Political refugees, Immigration applications 383w
Right of abode, Hong Kong 8w

Kirkwood, Mr Archy
Questions
Average earnings 335–6w
Hospital finance, Borders Health Board 992
Social security abuse, Telephone services 102w

Knight, Mrs Angela, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Economic Secretary) to the Treasury
Questions
Abortion 333–4w
AIDS, Death 331–2w
Average earnings 335–6w
Bank of England 145w
Capital 478–9w
Census of population, Languages 473w
Computers, Treasury 733w
Drug abuse, Young people 37w
Economic situation, Performance standards 144–5w

Knight, Mrs Angela*—*continued
Employment, European communities 146–8w
Employment, Scotland 333w
Employment, Statistics 332w
Equal opportunities, Treasury 731w
Exchange rate mechanism 731w
Financial institutions, Jersey 33w
Government Actuary, Cash limits 422w
Hess, Rudolf, Death registration 680w
Hypothermia 34–5w
Inflation 145–6w
Lone parents, Unemployment 474–8w
Manufacturing industries, Capital 566–7w
Monetary policy 613w
National income 479w
National Savings Agency 565–6w
Office for National Statistics, Cash limits 422–3w
Pensioners, Population 331w
Personal pensions, Compensation 732w
Public expenditure, Education 473–4w
Research finance 614–5w
Securities and Investments Board, Stamp duties 732w
Skilled workers, Productivity 566w
"Social Trends", Costs 613–4w
Sustainable development, Treasury 330–1w
Unemployment 36–7w, 563–4w
Unemployment, Chorley 36w
Unemployment, Ealing 482w
Unit trusts, Stamp duties 678–9w
Youth unemployment, York 479w

Knight, Rt Hon Greg, Minister for Industry and Energy
Debates etc.
Ford Motor Company, Halewood (05.02.97) 936–40
Questions
Aerospace industry, Government assistance 169w
Aerospace industry, Mergers 508w
EC grants and loans 324w
Foreign investment, EC countries 562w
Foreign investment in UK 512–3w, 736–8w
Shipbuilding intervention fund 233w
Trade 512w

Knight, Dame Jill
Questions
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Efficiency scrutinies 368w

Knox, Sir David
Questions
Cost per pupil, Staffordshire 352
EC grants and loans, Scotland 622w
Occupational pensions 142–3

Kynoch, Mr George, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office
Debates etc.
Poverty, Scotland (05.02.97) 968–72
Questions
Council tax, Scotland 328–9w, 623w
Council tax capping, Scotland 184w
Disabled workers, Blind 623w
EC grants and loans, Scotland 622w
Economic situation, Departmental coordination 624w
Economic situation, Glasgow 625w
Education vouchers, Pre-school education 990
Electricity interconnectors, Northern Ireland 993–4
Electricity supply industry, Privatisation 626w

Kynoch, Mr George*—*continued
Environment protection, Scottish Office 628–30w
Exports, Scotland 626w
Foreign investment in UK, Glasgow 176–7w
Forestry, Scotland 582w
Forestry Commission, Land acquisition 179–80w
Forests, Access to countryside 240–1w
Fossil fuel levy, Scotland 330w
Government grants to local authorities, Glasgow 989
Government grants to local authorities, Scotland 183–4w
Grampian Enterprise 178w
Highlands and Islands Enterprise 373w
Local government expenditure, Glasgow 989–90
Local government expenditure, Scotland 621w
Local government finance, Dundee 623w
Local government finance, Scotland 69–70w, 582w, 625w
Local government functions, Scotland 581–2w
Local government revenue, Scotland 181–2w, 184w
Non-domestic rates, Scotland 442–5w, 688–9w
Scottish Enterprise, Contracts 179w
Scottish Enterprise, Contracts for services 178–9w
Scottish Enterprise, Disclosure of information 242w
Scottish Enterprise, Public relations 178w
Small businesses, Scotland 181w
UK contributions to EC budget, Scotland 445w
Urban development grants, Glasgow 989–90
Water and sewerage companies, Scotland 580w
Water authorities, Scotland 184–6w
West Dunbartonshire Council, Government grants 182–3w, 326–7w

Labelling
Ammonium nitrate 418w
Drugs 762w

Labour costs
Germany 1140
NHS 114w

Labour Party
Public expenditure 798
Scotland 1000

Lait, Mrs Jacqui, An Assistant Whip
Debates etc.
Air Force (06.02.97) 1236

Lambeth
Police stations 313w

Lancashire
Defence contracts 349–50w
Dental health 598–9w
Educational finance 347–8, 358, 746–7w
Employment schemes 338w
Further education 394–5w
General Certificate of Secondary Education 263w
Higher education 394–5w

Lancashire County Council
Educational finance 348

Lancaster University
Research 356

Land acquisition
Forestry Commission 179–80w

Land drainage
Scotland (27.01.97) 123–4

Land pollution
530–1w
Dogs 239–40w

Land Registration Bill (HL) 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R* and rem stages * (07.02.97) 1316

Landlord and tenant
316w

Lang, Rt Hon Ian, President of the Board of Trade
Questions
Dept of Trade and Industry, Cash limits 414–6w
Dept of Trade and Industry, Official hospitality 23w
Export licensing, Iraq 418w
Government research establishments, Efficiency scrutinies 231–2w
Overseas investment, Income 228w
Young people, Working conditions 736w

Languages
Census of population 473w

Languages education
Scotland 329w

Lasers
Defence equipment 30w

Law Officers' Dept
see Attorney General

Law reform
Fireworks 694w

Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Debates etc.
Civil Procedure Bill (HL) 2R and money res* (30.01.97) 551, 556–8
Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill, 2R (31.01.97) 612–6, 632
Oral question time intervention (29.01.97) 368
Sex Offenders Bill, 2R (27.01.97) 65–7
Questions
British citizenship, Hong Kong 552–3w
Business questions 1148–9
Crime prevention 544w
Immigrant detainees 366
Judges 671–2
National Lottery, Charities 667

Leeds
Cold weather payments 140
Hospital waiting lists 343–4w
Intensive care 471w

Leeds Health Authority
Health service staff 471–2w

Legal aid
254w, 502w
Immigrants 343w

Legal aid scheme
502w
Costs 673–4
Fraud 385–6w

Legal costs
Clegg, Lee 203w
Home Office 378–80w

Legg, Mr Barry
Questions
War pensions 297–9w

Leicestershire
Transport 359w

Leigh, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 240–5, 247
Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill, 2R (31.01.97) 616–21, 632–3

Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 1125
Dept of Trade and Industry, Cash limits 414–6w
Labour costs, Germany 1140

Lester, Rt Hon Jim
Questions
Immigrant detainees 363–4

Lestor, Miss Joan
Questions
Bentley, Derek 160–1w

Lever Park Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R order read (29.01.97) 340, (04.02.97) 781

Lewis, Mr Terry
Questions
Road tax 390–1w

Lewisham
National Lottery 17–8w, 252w
Tickets 252w

Liability
Local government staff 532w

Liddell, Helen
Questions
Aberdeen College of Education, Employment agencies 1003
Assisted places scheme, Scotland 242–8w

Lidington, Mr David
Questions
NHS finance, Buckinghamshire Health Authority 278w
Regional government, South East region 530w
Standard spending assessments, Buckinghamshire 221w

Life expectancy
402w

Life imprisonment
Homicide 212w
Northern Ireland 745–6w
Scotland 624w

Lilley, Rt Hon Peter, Secretary of State for Social Security
Questions
Retirement pensions 147–8
Social security abuse 136–7
Social security abuse, Telephone services 137
Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill 1996/97 137
Social security benefits, Expenditure 141–2
Social security reform, Family benefits 141–2
War pensions 297–9w

Liskeard School
Schools Renewal Challenge Fund 96–7w

Litter
Belfast 304w

Liverpool
Social security abuse 138

Livestock
Northern Ireland 370w

Lloyd, Mr Tony
Questions
Revenue support grant, Income support 105w
Revenue support grant, Manchester 13w, 530w

Llwyd, Mr Elfyn
Debates etc.
Local government finance, Wales (04.02.97) 874, 879–80, 885–9
Police grant (29.01.97) 466–8
Questions
Acid rain, Wales 616w
Armed forces recruitment, Publicity 484w
Beaches, Wales 411w
Company liquidations, Wales 517w
County courts 672–3
Dentists, Wales 591w
Drug abuse, Research 605w
Drug abuse, Wales 517w
English Heritage, Offices 488w
Medical rehabilitation, Wales 615w
Organophosphorous pesticides 403w
Planning appeals, Wales 518w
Taxation, Wales 614w
Tourism, Wales 591w
Welsh language 591w

Local authority powers
489–90
Educational finance 349

Local education authorities
Administrative costs 264w

Local government borrowing
Kent County Council 137w

Local government elections
759w
Northern Ireland 489

Local government expenditure
Glasgow 989–90
Housing 250w
North Yorkshire 532w
Redbridge 532w
Scotland 621w

Local government finance
317–8w, (03.02.97) 676–771, 794
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities 1001
Dundee 623w
East Midlands (29.01.97) 480–8
Glasgow 996–8, 1001–2
Hounslow 676w
Kent 791–2, 795
Northern Ireland 727w
Private finance initiative 11w
Scotland 69–70w, 582w, 625w, 1001–3
Wales 44–6w, 159–60w, 517–8w, (04.02.97) 858–908
Wolverhampton 794

Local government functions
Scotland 581–2w
Wales 663w

Local government pensions
535w

Local government property
448w

Local government reform
Hertfordshire 448w
Rutland 448w

Local government revenue
11w, 447w, 531w
Council house sales 791
Scotland 181–2w, 184w

Local government services
Contracts for services 787–8

Local government services—continued
Kent 791–2

Local government staff
Liability 532w

Lockerbie
Bombings 70–1w, 524–5w

London boroughs
Tuberculosis 599–600w

London Marathon
606w

Lone parents
Unemployment 474–8w
Wales 615w

Long stay patients
Northern and Yorkshire region 164w

Lord Chancellor's Dept
Departmental publications 9w

Lorries
Axle weights 128–9w, 391w

Lorry drivers
Prosecutions 129–30w

Low flying
Military aircraft 194–5w

Low incomes
Pensioners 143

Loyden, Mr Eddie
Debates etc.
Ford Motor Company, Halewood (05.02.97) 934–5
Questions
Ford Motor Company, Redundancy 797–8
Shipbuilding 151

Luff, Mr Peter
Questions
Animal welfare 1131
Business questions 1153–4
Inland waterways, National Lottery 659–60
Local government reform, Hertfordshire 448w
Public expenditure, Scotland 996
Young people, Working conditions 736w

Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas, Attorney-General
Questions
Arms to Iraq Inquiry, Attorney General 701w
Crown Prosecution Service, Complaints against police 764w
Whitemoor Prison, Prisoner escapes 315–6w

Lyme disease
Scotland 446w

Lynne, Liz,
Questions
Homework 267w

M6
Costs 645–6w

M74
55w

McAliskey, Roisin
Extradition 452–3w

McAllion, Mr John
Debates etc.
Cold weather payments, Scotland (29.01.97) 300–3
Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill, Rep and 3R (29.01.97) 379–81, 407–9
Poverty, Scotland (05.02.97) 964–8
Questions
Legislation, Scotland 999–1000

McAllion, Mr John—continued
Local government finance, Dundee 623w
Nuclear safety 561w

McCartney, Mr Ian
Questions
Nursing and Healthcare Employment Service 395–6w

McCartney, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland Parades and Marches Review (30.01.97) 517–8
Questions
Action for Community Employment, Northern Ireland 50–2w, 370–1w, 493–4
Complaints against police, Northern Ireland 52–3w
Crimes of violence, Northern Ireland 497–8w
Disability living allowance, Northern Ireland 305–8w
Environment protection, Northern Ireland 304–6w
Extradition, Republic of Ireland 176w
Housing construction, Belfast 173w
Litter, Belfast 304w
Northern Ireland government 301–2w
Official hospitality, Northern Ireland 651–2w
Police Authority for Northern Ireland 52w
Public bodies, Northern Ireland 651w
Road accidents, Northern Ireland 307–8w
Road safety education, Northern Ireland 303–4w
Smokeless fuels, Northern Ireland 307w
Special schools, Northern Ireland 171–2w
Taking and driving away, Northern Ireland 172–4w

McCrea, Rev William
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Northern Ireland 500

Macdonald, Mr Calum
Questions
Fisheries, Scotland 625w
National Lottery 583w
Working hours, EC law 169w

McDonnell Douglas
Boeing 508w

McFall, Mr John
Debates etc.
Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill, Rep and 3R (29.01.97) 377, 379, 381–4, 398, 410–1, 418–20, 422–3, 432, 436–7
Questions
Youth unemployment 1006–7

McGrady, Mr Eddie
Questions
Local government finance, Northern Ireland 727w
Northern Ireland education and library boards 309w
Rock characterisation facility, United Kingdom NIREX 448w

MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Questions
Railway transport, Privatisation 796–7

Machen
Public houses 40w

McKelvey, Mr William
Debates etc.
Cold weather payments, Scotland (29.01.97) 299–300
Poverty, Scotland (05.02.97) 966

Mackinlay, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Business questions (30.01.97) 540
Education Bill, Rep (27.01.97) 114
Fire services, Essex (05.02.97) 981–4, 987
Oral question time intervention (06.02.97) 1140
Revenue support grant, Kent County Council (05.02.97) 955–6
Questions
Ammonium nitrate, Labelling 418w
Ammonium nitrate, Tilbury 317w, 355w, 359w
Art works, Palace of Westminster 351w
Business questions 1154
EC integration 16–7w
Former ministers, Redundancy pay 525w
Housing construction 781–2
Local government elections, Northern Ireland 489
Plastic arts, Palace of Westminster 351w
Police powers, Surveillance 380w
UK membership of EC 27–8w

Maclean, Rt Hon David, Minister of State, Home Office
Debates etc.
Horserace Totalisator Board Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (07.02.97) 1267–71
Police Property Bill, 3R (07.02.97) 1288–91, 1294
Sex Offenders Bill, 2R (27.01.97) 23–33, 37, 47, 52, 59
Witness Prosecution Bill, 2R (31.01.97) 642–5
Questions
Crime, Greater London 544w
Crime prevention 544w
Crime prevention, Expenditure 314w
Drinking and driving, Christmas 123w, 219w
Home Office, Legal costs 380w
Lorry drivers, Prosecutions 129–30w
Magistrates' courts 254w
Metropolitan Police, Personnel management 552w
Metropolitan Police, Police stations 124w
National Criminal Intelligence Service, Police discipline 545w
North East Regional Crime Squad, Criminal investigation 545w
Police, Courts 125w
Police, Finance 666–74w
Police, Manpower 125w
Police, Wales 667–8w
Police cautions 123w
Police grant 217–8w
Police pensions, Wales 673w
Police powers, Surveillance 380w
Police stations, Access to buildings 552w
Police stations, Lambeth 313w
Policewomen, Wales 124–5w
Public order policing, Football 125w
Secure accommodation 125w
Touting, Football 124w
Young offenders, Administration of justice 313–4w

McLeish, Mr Henry
Debates etc.
Cold weather payments, Scotland (29.01.97) 304–7
Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill, Rep and 3R (04.02.97) 807–9, 819–20, 853–5
Questions
Housing insulation 140–1

Maclennan, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
NHS (05.02.97) 1015, 1048–52

Maclennan, Mr Robert—continued
Questions
Family credit, Social security benefits disqualification 105–6w
Foundation for Sports and Arts 19w
Highland Health Board 995
Jobseeker's allowance, Share fishermen 430w
Non-departmental public bodies 16–7
Scottish Land Court, Crofting 71–2w

McMaster, Mr Gordon
Debates etc.
Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill, Rep and 3R (29.01.97) 374
Questions
Local government finance, Scotland 625w

McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Questions
Horticulture Research International 287–8w
Veterinary Laboratories Agency 287w

McNamara, Mr Kevin
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland Parades and Marches Review (30.01.97) 519
Official Report, Points of order (04.02.97) 801
Prisoners' escapes, Points of order (27.01.97) 21
Questions
Kane, Patrick, Criminal appeals 602w
McNamee, Danny 451–2w
O'Callaghan, Sean, Extradition 552w
Prison accommodation 553–4w
Prison accommodation, Category A prisoners 451w
Whitemoor Prison, Prisoner escapes 315–6w, 449–50w, 740w

McNamee, Danny
384w, 451–2w, 603w

MacShane, Mr Denis
Debates etc.
Civil proceedings, Points of order (03.02.97) 675
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 231
Questions
Airport tax 797
Association of South East Asian Nations, International conferences 226w
Burma, Association of South East Asian Nations 225w
Burma, EC external relations 744w
Burma, Foreign relations 225w
EC Framework programme 414w
EC grants and loans 19–20w, 279–80w, 324w
EC integration 27w
Environment protection, EC grants and loans 133–4w
European Social Fund 153w
Hong Kong, Visas 226w
Pesca initiative 48w
Profit sharing, Pay 732–3w
Right of abode, Hong Kong 8w
Science and technology research, EC grants and loans 509–10w
Training, EC grants and loans 152–4w
Twin towns, EC grants and loans 220w

McWilliam, Mr John
Debates etc.
Air Force (06.02.97) 1163, 1176, 1181, 1198

Madden, Mr Max
Questions
Entry clearances 505–6w, 660w
Islam, Dead bodies 551–2w, 603w

Madden, Mr Max—continued
Pakistan, Immigration applications 663w
Zahoorul, Syed, Arrests 745w

Maddock, Diana,
Questions
Equal opportunities 558w
Immigrant detainees 364

Madel, Sir David
Debates etc.
Local government finance (03.02.97) 706–9
Questions
Educational standards 350

Magheramorne
Tipping of waste 53–4w

Maginnis, Mr Ken
Debates etc.
Intervention during Ministerial statement (30.01.97) 518
Northern Ireland Parades and Marches Review (30.01.97) 520–1
Questions
Crimes of violence, Northern Ireland 499

Magistrates
Bolton 120w

Magistrates' courts
254w, 523–4w
Bolton 672
Wales 9w

Magistrates' courts committees
Coventry 502–3w

Mahon, Mrs Alice
Debates etc.
Local government finance (03.02.97) 694
NHS (05.02.97) 1021, 1027
Questions
Prodigy prescribing system 594–5w
Urban Regeneration Grants, Ovenden 351

Maintenance
Children 428–9w

Maitland, Lady Olga
Debates etc.
Air Force (06.02.97) 1174, 1188, 1216–21
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 219, 245–6
Horserace Totalisator Board Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (07.02.97) 1247, 1253–4, 1276–7
Human Tissue (Amendment) Bill, 2R adjourned (07.02.97) 1309–10

Maize
Genetic engineering 719–20w

Major, Rt Hon John, Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service
Questions
Airport tax 797
Army in Northern Ireland, Inquiries 505–6
Bentley, Derek 160–1w
Bombings, Lockerbie 524–5w
British citizenship, Hong Kong 1138–40
By elections, Wirral South 795, 1141–2
Cabinet Office, Cash limits 373w
Channel ferries, Shipping safety 796
Chequers 524w
Children, Departmental responsibilities 161w
Currency movements 797
Defence contracts 487w
Devolution 150
Economic policy, Economic and monetary union 798–9
Educational standards 151–2
European Council, Cardiff 160w

Major, Rt Hon John—continued
European Court of Human Rights, Judgments 345w
Export controls 160w
Ford Motor Company, Redundancy 797–8
Foreign investment in UK 1141
Foreign investment in UK, EC Social Charter 1139
General elections 148–50
Gibraltar 502
Headteachers 795–6
Health services, North West region 501–2
Hospital wards 150–1
Labour costs, Germany 1140
Labour Party, Public expenditure 798
Local government finance, Kent 795
Manifestos 505
Manifestos, Economic and monetary union 502–4
Manifestos, Public finance 149
National debt 1138–9
Northern Ireland government 504–5
Official engagements 161w, 345w, 524w, 698w, 701w
Pay Review Bodies 698–701w
Railway transport, Privatisation 796–7
St Benedict's Hospice Sunderland 1140–1
School choice 148, 151
Selly Oak hospital 1137–8
Shipbuilding 151
Skye bridge, Private finance initiative 152
Travelling expenses, Prime Minister 609w
UK membership of EC 504
Unemployment 796, 1142
VAT, Energy 149
VAT, Severn bridge 149–50

Malaria
Drug side effects 760w

Mallon, Mr Seamus
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland Parades and Marches Review (30.01.97) 515
Questions
Educational finance, Northern Ireland 727–9w
Northern Ireland government, Northern Ireland 496–7
Power failures, Newry and Mourne 173–4w
Social security recipients, Northern Ireland 727–8w

Malone, Mr Gerald, Minister of State, Dept of Health
Debates etc.
NHS (05.02.97) 1020–9, 1042
Questions
British Fluoridation Society 163w
British Fluoridation Society, Government grants 162–3w
Business travel, NHS Executive 279w
Cannabis 107w
Dental charges 116–7w
Dental health, Bolton 399w
Dental health, Children 161–2w, 598–9w
Dental services 161w, 399w, 643w
Dental services, Children 639w
Dental services, Consent to medical treatment 161w
Dentists, Manpower 472–3w, 600w
Dentists, Pay 162w
Dentists, Training 112w
Doctors 641w
Doctors, Manpower 165–6w
Doctors' and Dentists' Pay Review Body 643w
Drug labelling 723–4w
Drug side effects, Antidepressants 723w
Drug side effects, Road safety 722–3w

Malone, Mr Gerald—continued
Drugs, Deregulation initiative 114w
Drugs, Labelling 762w
Drugs, Overseas aid 119w
Drugs, Retail trade 724w
Environmental health, Consultants 760–1w
Eye tests, Optical charges 115w
Eye tests, Pensioners 163w
Fluoridation, Water supply 163w, 398w
General practitioners 597w, 639w, 644w
General practitioners, Training 721w
GP fundholders 640w
Health service staff, Manpower 344w, 402w
Hospital consultants, Accident and emergency departments 399w
Hospital consultants, Vacancies 595–6w
Hospital doctors 761w
Hospital doctors, Working hours 761w
Insulin 115–6w
Malaria, Drug side effects 760w
NHS, Labour costs 114w
NHS trusts, Cheshire 761w
Nurses' training 279w
Nurses' training, Student wastage 278w
Pharmaceutical price regulation scheme 641–2w
Prescription charges 116w
Prescription drugs, Expenditure 644w
Primary health care, Private health services 165w
Prodigy prescribing system 594–5w
Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust, Accident and emergency departments 109w
Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust, Hospital beds 109w
Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust, Hospital patients 109w
St Bartholomew's Hospital 640w
Schizophrenia, Drugs 761–2w
Toothpaste, Consumption 398w
West Yorkshire Health Authority, Health service staff 471–2w

Manchester
Bombings 223w, 735w
Educational finance 358
Government grants to local authorities 223w
Revenue support grant 13w, 223w, 530w
Social security claims 13w

Manifestos
505
Economic and monetary union 502–4
Public finance 149

Mans, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
Air Force (06.02.97) 1169, 1173, 1180, 1192–7, 1231–2
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 235
Questions
Intelligence services, Cash limits 735w
National Lottery, Cultural heritage 657

Manufacturing industries
Apprentices 151w
Capital 566–7w

Marek, Dr John
Debates etc.
Business questions (30.01.97) 537–8

Marland, Mr Paul
Questions
VAT, Severn bridge 149–50

Marlow, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep (27.01.97) 101

Marlow, Mr Tony—continued
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 200–1, 228–9, 234
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Waste disposal 718w
Economic and monetary union, Publicity 28w
General elections 10
Political refugees 451w

Marshall, Mr David
Questions
Foreign investment in UK, Glasgow 176–7w
M6, Costs 645–6w
Parkhead Hospital, Suicide 374w
Unemployment, Glasgow 1004

Marshall, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Local government finance (03.02.97) 705–6

Marshall, Mr John
Debates etc.
Business questions (30.01.97) 537
Education (05.02.97) 1071, 1074, 1086, 1091–3
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 217, 229
Human Tissue (Amendment) Bill, 2R adjourned (07.02.97) 1295–9, 1311–2
Local government finance (03.02.97) 678–9
Questions
Animal quarantine 513w
Cyprus, Peace negotiations 12
Economic growth, Competition 23w
Employment level 7
English Heritage, Church buildings 489w
Foreign investment in UK 501
GCE A level, Grant maintained schools 267–8w
Interest rates 782
Legal aid 254w
Legal aid scheme, Costs 673–4
Public expenditure, Education 473–4w
Public Record Office, Cash limits 384–5w
Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust, Accident and emergency departments 109w
Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust, Hospital beds 109w
Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust, Hospital patients 109w
Social security abuse, Telephone services 137, 497w
Social security benefits, Political refugees 192–3w
Tourist industry, EC Social Charter 664
Unemployment, Scotland 1004
Water supply industry, Competition 138–9w

Marshall Food Group
591–2w

Martin, Mr David
Questions
Assisted places scheme 556–7w
Assisted places scheme, Portsmouth 706w

Martin, Mr Michael J
Questions
Disabled workers, Blind 623w
Local government finance, Glasgow 997–8
Members' facilities, Child care 458w
Palace of Westminster, Security 458w
Scottish Grand Committee 706–7w

Martlew, Mr Eric
Questions
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia 110–2w
M74 55w
Poultry, Animal welfare 716w

Mathematics
Educational assessment 257w

Mawhinney, Dr Brian S
Questions
Coordination and Presentation of Government Policy Ministerial Committee 527w

Maxton, Mr John
Debates etc.
Education (05.02.97) 1076–7, 1086, 1088–91, 1101, 1106
Questions
Local government finance, Glasgow 1001–2

Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland Parades and Marches Review, Ministerial statements (30.01.97) 507–22
Questions
Army in Northern Ireland 494–6
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 500
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Northern Ireland 500–1
Devolution, Northern Ireland 490
Elections, Fraud 490–1
Local authority powers 489–90
Local government elections, Northern Ireland 489
Northern Ireland government 368w, 370w, 495–8
Northern Ireland government, Northern Ireland 496–8
Northern Ireland Office, Cash limits 412–3w

Meacher, Mr Michael
Questions
Agenda 21 135w
Air pollution control 786
Coal mine closures, Water pollution 675w
EC environmental policy 135w
Industry, Environment protection 139–40w
Offshore fixed platforms 697w
Pollution control 135–6w
Radioactive waste disposal, Sellafield 677w
Sea pollution, Gibraltar 647w
UN Environment Programme 535–6w
UN Special Session on the Environment 533w
United Kingdom NIREX, Rock characterisation facility 532w

Meale, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Local government finance, East Midlands (29.01.97) 482

Means tested benefits
135–6
Social security recipients 189–90w

Meat
Food hygiene 373–4w

Meat products
Food labelling 356w

Meat Products and Spreadable Fish Products Regulations 1984
Questions
285–6w

Medical Devices Regulations 1994
Questions
166–7w

Medical education
Cost per student 395w
Staff-student ratios 265–6w

Medical examinations
Aircrew 570–1w
Fees and charges 709–10w

Medical rehabilitation
110w
Scotland 622w
Wales 615w

Medical research
Cancer 642w
Heart diseases 642w

Medical students
Student numbers 266w
Student wastage 266w

Medical treatments
Cancer 642w
Heart diseases 642w, 763w

Mellor, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Sex Offenders Bill, 2R (27.01.97) 28, 39–45

Members' conduct
Speaker's rulings and statements (28.01.97) 153–4

Members' correspondence
253w

Members' facilities
Child care 458w

Members' speeches
Legislation 469w

Members' staff
523w

Meningitis
269w, 725–6w, 763w
Research finance 270w
University of Wales College of Cardiff 42w, 592–3w
Vaccination 118w
Wales 42w

Mental health community care
163w
Wales 43–4w

Mental Health (Joint Commissioning Consortia) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
1R (05.02.97) 1009

Mental health services
112w, 593w
Sheltered housing 362w

Mental illness
(05.02.97) 1009
Northern Ireland 746w

Mental illness specific grant
Scotland 622w

Mental patients
108w
Extra contractual referrals 164w

Mentally disturbed offenders
NHS finance 163–4w

Merchant, Mr Piers
Debates etc.
Horserace Totalisator Board Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (07.02.97) 1257–60
Human Tissue (Amendment) Bill, 2R adjourned (07.02.97) 1298

Merchant, Mr Piers—continued
Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill, 2R (31.01.97) 602–6
Police Property Bill, 3R (07.02.97) 1287–8, 1290
Witness Prosecution Bill, 2R (31.01.97) 640
Questions
Dept of Health, Cash limits 400w
Solvent abuse 400–1w

Merchant seamen
English language 394w

Merchant Shipping Regulations 1988
Questions
127w

Mergers
Aerospace industry 508w

Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus
343w

Metrication
EC law 560–1w

Metropolitan Police
Personnel management 552w
Police stations 124w

Michael, Mr Alun
Debates etc.
Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill, 2R (31.01.97) 582, 587, 590, 593–4, 596–7,614, 622–6, 632
Police grant (29.01.97) 455, 457–8, 460–6, 472, 475–7
Sex Offenders Bill, 2R (27.01.97) 28, 33–9
Witness Prosecution Bill, 2R (31.01.97) 640–1
Questions
Police, Finance 666–74w

Michie, Mr Bill
Questions
Housing 527w
School buildings, Sheffield 264w

Michie, Mrs Ray
Questions
Chemists' shops, Rural areas 374w
Digital broadcasting 150w
Food hygiene, Meat 373–4w
Special islands needs allowance, Argyll and Bute 1002

Mid Glamorgan
Probation 603–4w

Migration
Children 115w

Milburn, Mr Alan
Questions
Dept of the Environment, Public appointments 677w
Lone parents, Unemployment 477–8w
Manufacturing industries, Capital 566–7w
Oil revenues 678w
Public Appointments Unit 674w
Tax evasion 679w
Taxation, Travel allowances 614w

Military aircraft
Air accidents 619–20w
Duke of York 198–9w, 438w
Low flying 194–5w
Wales 194–5w

Military alliances
Nuclear weapons policy 29w

Military balance
Cyprus 11–2

Military decorations
Exservicemen 30–1w

Millennium
Computers in government departments 121–2w, 508w

Millennium Exhibition
253w, 314w, 490w, 659w, 664–6
Finance 121w

Miller, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Ford Motor Company, Halewood (05.02.97) 924–5
Questions
Civil servants 119w
County courts 673
Inland waterways, National Lottery 660
VAT, Energy 149

Milton Keynes
NHS finance 278w

Mine accidents
693w

Mine safety
224w

Mineral resources
Planning permission 10–1w

Ministerial and Other Pensions and Salaries Act 1991
Questions
525w

Ministerial duties
Children 28w

Ministerial policy advisors
Deputy Prime Minister 120w

Ministerial speeches
National Farmers' Union 1133

Ministerial statements
Food Safety Council (30.01.97) 523–32
Northern Ireland Parades and Marches Review (30.01.97) 507–22

Ministers
Conferences 588–9w

Ministers' domestic visits
Ministry of Defence 197w

Ministers' visits abroad
Ministry of Defence 197w
United Arab Emirates 620w

Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food
Cash limits 407–8w
Computers 719w
Environment protection 50w
Publicity 720–1w
Sustainable development 185–6w

Ministry of Defence
Advertising 685w
Arms to Iraq Inquiry 684–5w
Cash limits 432w
Environment protection 31w
Ministers' domestic visits 197w
Ministers' visits abroad 197w
Sustainable development 199w

Mitchell, Mr Andrew, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Social Security
Questions
Child benefit 191w
Child Support Agency 187w, 576w
Child Support Agency, Administrative delays 427–8w
Child Support Agency, Fees and charges 187–8w

Mitchell, Mr Andrew—continued
Child Support Agency, Private sector 188w
Employment opportunities 136
Maintenance, Children 428–9w
Means tested benefits 135–6
Parent plus 188w

Mitchell, Mr Austin
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Grimsby 631–2w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Waste disposal 718–9w
Common fisheries policy 715w
European Commission, General elections 27w
European Movement, UK contributions 503–4w
Germany, County courts 26w
Germany, Employment discrimination 25–6w
Millennium Exhibition 664–5
National income, Stability pact 146w
Pensioners, Income support 144–5
Public defenders 502w

Moate, Sir Roger
Debates etc.
NHS (05.02.97) 1053
Revenue support grant, Kent County Council (05.02.97) 945, 949, 951, 953
Questions
Local government services, Kent 792
Regional planning and development, South East region 220w
School choice 151

Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Questions
Northern Ireland health and social services boards, Finance 369w

Monetary policy
613w

Monopolies and Mergers Commission
325w

Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Debates etc.
Cold weather payments, Scotland (29.01.97) 297–300
Questions
NHS finance, Scotland 991
Taxation, Scotland 997

Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Questions
Manifestos, Public finance 149

Morgan, Mr Rhodri
Debates etc.
Local government finance, Wales (04.02.97) 868
Questions
Business questions 1152–3
Cardiff Bay barrage 35w
Cardiff Bay barrage, Birds 41w
Economic analysis 35w
European Council, Cardiff 160w
Health authorities, Wales 43w
Hess, Rudolf, Death registration 348w, 680w
Millennium Exhibition, Finance 121w
Surgery, Statistics 759w
Treasury, Early retirement 759w
Welsh Office, Computers 758w
Welsh Office, Information Technology 757–8w

Morley, Mr Elliot
Questions
Animal quarantine, Codes of practice 405w
Badgers, A30 137w
Birds, Export licensing 352w
Birds, Exports 316w
Deer, Devon 407w
Export of live animals 406w, 1131
Export of live animals, Animal welfare 405–6w
Export of live animals, Pigs 720w
Hedley Lomas (Ireland), Damages 406w
MV Cap Afrique 506w
Sheep, EC internal trade 406–7w
Veterinary Investigation Service, Animal welfare 352w

Morocco
Prisoners 227w

Morris, Rt Hon Alfred
Debates etc.
Witness Prosecution Bill, 2R (31.01.97) 643
Questions
Chemical weapons, Iraq 682w
Food hygiene 574w
Government grants to local authorities, Manchester 223w
Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (General) Amendment Regulations 1997 191w
Iraq, Prisoners of war 227w
Revenue support grant, Manchester 223w
South Manchester Health Authority, Orthopaedics 275–6w
Surgery 275w
Visas, Fees and charges 226–7w, 611w
War pensions, Ear disorders 633–6w

Morris, Ms Estelle,
Debates etc.
Education (05.02.97) 1081–6, 1091
Education Bill, Rep (27.01.97) 79, 91–4, 106, 118–9
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 176–7, 179–80
Questions
Homework 343

Morris, Rt Hon John
Questions
Baglan Hospital 158w
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 158–9w
Magistrates' courts 254w
Police cautions 123w

Mortgage relief
144w, 239w

Mortgages
Income support 429–30w

***Moss, Mr Malcolm**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office*
Questions
Action for Community Employment, Northern Ireland 50–2w
Disability living allowance, Northern Ireland 305–8w
Domestic energy conservation, Northern Ireland 371–2w
Environment protection, Northern Ireland 304–6w
Environment protection, Northern Ireland Office 174–6w
Fluoridation, Northern Ireland 303w
Health service staff, Manpower 372w
Housing construction, Belfast 173w
Litter, Belfast 304w
Nature reserves, Northern Ireland 501–2w

***Moss, Mr Malcolm**—continued*
Northern Ireland Environment and Heritage Service, Consultants 653–4w
Northern Ireland health and social services boards, Finance 369w
Northern Ireland Water Service Agency 309–10w
Planning permission, Newtownards 654–5w
PSV operators licences, Northern Ireland 312w
Public Entertainments Licences (Drug Misuse) Bill 1996/97, Northern Ireland 53w
Road safety, Ballygowan 654w
Road safety education, Northern Ireland 303–4w
Road works, Northern Ireland 369–70w
Shellfish, Northern Ireland 311–2w
Smokeless fuels, Northern Ireland 307w
Social security recipients, Northern Ireland 727–8w
Tipping of waste, Magheramorne 53–4w
Water supply, Donaghadee 652–3w
Water treatment, Northern Ireland 302–3w

Motor neurone disease
AIDS 268w
Death 331–2w

Motor vehicles
Excise duties 130–1w

Motorways
Road accidents 646–8w

Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland Parades and Marches Review (30.01.97) 510–1
Questions
Assisted prison visits scheme, Northern Ireland 726–8w
Northern Ireland government 498

Mull of Kintyre
Air accidents 439–40w

Mullin, Mr Chris
Questions
Choephel, Ngawang, Political prisoners 504w
North East Regional Crime Squad, Criminal investigation 545w

Multiannual guidance programme
717w

Multimedia
Bournemouth University 32w

Multiple occupation
527–8w

Museums and galleries
586w
Army 32w, 193–4w
Royal Signals 32w
Scotland 249–50w

MV Cap Afrique
406w, 506w, 720w

MV Marchioness
Shipping accidents 6w

National Army Museum
32w

National Audit Office
Civil service manpower 16

National Criminal Intelligence Service
Police discipline 545w

National debt
239w, 1138–9

National Farmers' Union
Ministerial speeches 1133

National Health Service (Primary Care) Bill (HL) 1996/97
Questions
165w

National income
479w, 680w
Public sector borrowing requirement 420w
Stability pact 146w

National insurance benefits
191–2w

National insurance contributions
363–4w, 579w
Fringe benefits 104w
Tax avoidance 364w
Taxpayers 335w

National Insurance Contributions Unit
see Social Security Contributions Agency

National Lottery
488w, 583w
Animal welfare 667
Arts Council of England 490w
Capital investment 145w
Charities 667
Church buildings 489–90w
Cultural heritage 657–8
Elderly 150w
Film industry 488w
Historic buildings 488w
Inland waterways 659–60
Lewisham 17–8w, 252w
Newsagents 149–50w
Sports facilities 658
Tax yields 421w
Voluntary organisations 489w
Yorkshire and Humberside 659w

National Savings Agency
565–6w

Nature conservation
Agriculture 717w
Birds 13–4w

Nature reserves
Northern Ireland 501–2w

Naval bases
Plymouth 683w

Nazi war crimes
(29.01.97) 370–2

Negative equity
Agriculture 720w
Farms 656w

***Nelson, Mr Anthony**, Minister for Trade*
Questions
Aid financed trade, Jakarta 27w
Ammonium nitrate, Labelling 418w
Antidumping duties, Cotton 232–3w
Arms trade, United Arab Emirates 697–8w
Export promotion 325w
Export promotion, Per capita costs 324–5w
Import of live animals 417w, 562w
Overseas trade, Iraq 610w
Trade fairs 323–4w
Trade promotion, Greece 228–9w

Nelson and Colne College
Redundancy 468w

Neubert, Sir Michael
Questions
Pensioners, Personal savings 187w
Theatre, Arts grants 491–2w

Neurology
Handicapped (29.01.97) 322–30

New parliamentary building
Construction 458–9w

Newport Gwent
Disability appeal tribunals 362–3w

Newry and Mourne
Power failures 173–4w

Newsagents
National Lottery 149–50w

Newton, Rt Hon Tony, Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons
Debates etc.
Business statements (30.01.97) 533–41
Questions
Business questions 1145–54
Business statements 1143–5
Coordination and Presentation of Government Policy Ministerial Committee 522w
House of Commons questions 373w
Members' staff 523w
Privy Council, Cash limits 377w

Newtownards
Planning permission 654–5w
Road works 654w

NHS
116w
Audit 580w
Contracts for services 273w
Labour costs 114w
Opposition days (05.02.97) 1012–66
Scotland 580w

NHS and private practice
West Yorkshire 471w

NHS Executive
Business travel 279w

NHS finance
470–1w, 722w
Buckinghamshire Health Authority 278w
Mentally disturbed offenders 163–4w
Milton Keynes 278w
Scotland 625–6w, 991

NHS trusts
Cheshire 761w
Directors 581w
Finance 365w
Scotland 326w, 330w, 581w
Wales 43w, 365w

Nicholls, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
EC integration, Voting methods (29.01.97) 275, 285–6
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 216, 225
Questions
Animal welfare 1130
Dept of Transport, Cash limits 391–3w
Educational standards 151–2
Railway industry, Performance standards 393w
Teachers 345

Nicholson, Mr David
Questions
AIDS 268–9w
AIDS, Death 269w
Beef, Exports 1133
Home Office, Cash limits 384w
Homelessness 784–5
Meningitis 269w
Meningitis, Research finance 270w
Speed limits, Cameras 130w
VAT 34w

Nicholson, Miss Emma
Questions
Rwanda, Education 15

NIREX
see United Kingdom NIREX

Nissan
Foreign investment in UK 5–6

Nitrates
Vegetables 355w

Noise Act 1996
Questions
537w

Nolan Committee
see Committee on Standards in Public Life

Non-departmental public bodies
16–7
Contracts for services 72w
Public appointments 532w
Scotland 72w
Scottish Office 177w

Non-domestic rates
790
Northern Ireland 493
Scotland 442–5w, 688–9w

Non-governmental organisations
Overseas aid 254–5w

Non-teaching staff
Jobseeker's allowance 579w

Norfolk
Social security abuse 136–7

Normanton
Courts 503w

North Devon
Bellwin scheme 538–9w

North East region
Social security abuse 3

North East Regional Crime Squad
Criminal investigation 545w

North of England Assembly of Local Authorities
Finance 787

North Review
see Northern Ireland Parades and Marches Review

North Wales
Teachers 615–6w

"North Wales School Performance Information Booklet"
158w

North West region
Defence contracts 483w
Health services 501–2

North Yorkshire
Employment schemes 468–9w
Local government expenditure 532w

Northamptonshire
Teachers 75–6w

Northern and Yorkshire region
Intensive care 470w
Long stay patients 164w
Paediatrics 164–5w

Northern Ireland
500–1
Action for Community Employment 50–2w, 370–1w, 493–4
Assisted prison visits scheme 726–8w
Beef premiums 601–2w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 500–1, 514–5w, 652w
Civil disorder 651w

Northern Ireland—continued
Complaints against police 52–3w
Crimes of violence 497–8w, 499, 499w
Criminal damage 310w
Criminal injuries compensation 310w
Devolution 490
Disability living allowance 305–8w
Domestic energy conservation 371–2w
EC grants and loans 499w
Educational finance 492, 727–9w
Educational policy 491
Educational qualifications 501w
Electricity interconnectors 372w, 993–4
Environment protection 304–6w
Ethnic minorities 500–1w
Extradition 176w
Farm incomes 652w
Farms 656w
Fishing 655–6w
Fluoridation 303w
GCE A level 654w
Hard core unemployed 371w
Health service staff 372w
Hill livestock allowances 413–4w
Homicide 173w
Incapacity benefit 305–8w
Integrated schools 369w
International baccalaureate 654w
Intimidation of witnesses 499
Jobseeker's allowance 494
Life imprisonment 745–6w
Livestock 370w
Local government elections 489
Local government finance 727w
Mental illness 746w
Nature reserves 501–2w
Non-domestic rates 493
Northern Ireland government 496–8
Official hospitality 651–2w
Polling stations 652w
PSV operators licences 312w
Public bodies 651w
Public Entertainments Licences (Drug Misuse) Bill 1996/97 53w
Racial attacks 500–1w
Road accidents 307–8w
Road safety education 303–4w
Road traffic control (27.01.97) 124
Road works 369–70w
School admission 491–2
School population 368w
Secondary education 491
Security 367w
Shellfish 311–2w
Smokeless fuels 307w
Social policy 368w
Social security recipients 727–8w
Special schools 171–2w
Stalking 499–500
Suckler cow premiums 656w
Taking and driving away 172–4w
Terrorism 367–8w
Tourists 369w
Travelling people 500–1w
Unemployment 492–3
Waste disposal 653–4w
Water treatment 302–3w

Northern Ireland Audit Office
Public bodies 412w

Northern Ireland Dept of Education
Government buildings 602w

Northern Ireland education and library boards
309w

Northern Ireland Environment and Heritage Service
Consultants 53–4w, 653–4w

Northern Ireland government
301–2w, 368w, 370w, 492–8, 504–5
Northern Ireland 496–8

Northern Ireland Grand Committee
(04.02.97) 803

Northern Ireland health and social services boards
Finance 369w

Northern Ireland Office
Andersen Consulting 500w
Cash limits 412–3w
Computers 729–30w
Environment protection 174–6w
Publicity 601w

Northern Ireland Parades and Marches Review
Ministerial statements (30.01.97) 507–22

Northern Ireland Police Authority
see Police Authority for Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland Water Service Agency
309–10w

Northumberland
Educational finance 747w

Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive
see United Kingdom NIREX

Nuclear power
196w

Nuclear safety
561w

Nuclear weapons policy
28–9w
Military alliances 29w
USA 195w

Nuclear weapons tests
Exservicemen 620w

Nursery schools
Inspections 263w

Nurses
Child patients 760w
Emigration 277w
Wales 40–1w

Nurses' training
279w
Staff-student ratios 265–6w
Student numbers 117w
Student wastage 278w
Wales 40w

Nursing and Healthcare Employment Service
395–6w

Nutrition and health
717w

O'Brien, Mr Mike
Questions
Birmingham relief road 571–2w
Opencast mining, Warwickshire 536w
West Coast railway line 647w

O'Brien, Mr William
Debates etc.
Local government finance (03.02.97) 676
Questions
Church of England, Turnbull Commission 47–8w
Courts, Normanton 503w

Obscenity Bill (HL) 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R order read (07.02.97) 1317

O'Callaghan, Sean
Extradition 552w

Occupational Pension Schemes (Winding Up) Regulations 1996
Debates etc.
(04.02.97) 803

Occupational pensions
142–3

Offences against children
Public petitions (27.01.97) 124

Office for National Statistics
Cash limits 422–3w

Office of HM Paymaster General
see Paymaster-General

Office of Public Service
Arms to Iraq Inquiry 675w
Cash limits 386–7w

Office of Telecommunications
Performance standards 227w

Offices
English Heritage 488w

Official engagements
161w, 345w, 524w, 698w, 701w

Official hospitality
Dept of Trade and Industry 23w
Northern Ireland 651–2w

Official Report
Speaker's rulings and statements (04.02.97) 801

Official residences
421w, 425–6w, 659–62w
Prime Minister 524w

Offshore fixed platforms
697w

Offshore structures
Decommissioning 326w
Scotland 326w

OFTEL
see Office of Telecommunications

O'Hara, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Ford Motor Company, Halewood (05.02.97) 919–26, 939

Oil revenues
678w

Oils and fats
355w

Olner, Mr Bill
Questions
Air pollution 531w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Waste disposal 1125
Warwickshire 789

1 Carlton Gardens
425–6w, 659w

O'Neill, Mr Martin
Debates etc.
Air Force (06.02.97) 1186–92, 1228–9, 1235

Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Questions
Sheep dipping, Scotland 688w

Open University
357

Opencast mining
Greenbelt 793
Warwickshire 536w

Oppenheim, Mr Phillip, Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury
Questions
Customs and Excise, Cash limits 422w

Oppenheim, Mr Phillip—continued
Customs and Excise, Right of Search 235w
EC Finance Council 334–5w
Environment protection, Treasury 238w
Excise duties, EC countries 235–6w
Football pools, Tax yields 421w
Fossil fuel levy 425w
Holiday and travel insurance, Tax rates and bands 234–5w
Holiday and travel insurance, Tax yields 234w
Hydrocarbon oil duties 238w
Insurance premium tax, Tax yields 423–4w
Paymaster-General, Privatisation 235w
Smuggling, EC countries 235w
Tobacco duties 236–7w
VAT 34w, 237w
VAT, EC action 237w
VAT, Fuels 238w

Opposition days
Education (05.02.97) 1068–115
NHS (05.02.97) 1012–66

Optical charges
Eye tests 115w

Organ donors
(07.02.97) 1295–313

Organic farming
356w

Organic food
Imports 356w

Organophosphorous pesticides
403w

Orthopaedics
South Manchester Health Authority 275–6w

Ostriches
Farms 405w

Out of school childcare grant scheme
618w

Out of town shopping centres
Rural areas 171w

Ovenden
Urban Regeneration Grants 351

Overseas aid
15–6
Angola 17
Central Africa 14–5
Cyprus 11–2
Deserts 16w
Drugs 119w
Indonesia 27w, 126w
International organisations 702w
Non-governmental organisations 254–5w
Police training 140–1w
Rwanda 555w

Overseas Development Administration
Cash limits 377–8w
Publicity 610–2w

Overseas investment
Burma 543w
EC countries 512w
Income 228w

Overseas trade
Iraq 610w

Packaging
222–3w
Wastes 530w

Paediatrics
Intensive care 164–5w
Northern and Yorkshire region 164–5w

Paedophilia
Prison sentences 215–6w

***Page, Mr Richard**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Questions
Brent Spar 508–9w
Business Link 562–3w
Coal, Imports 510–1w
Coal mining, Productivity 511–2w
Combined heat and power, Electricity generation 510w
Combined heat and power, Employment opportunities 510w
Electricity generation, Alternative energy 694–6w
Environment protection, Board of Trade 233w
Exports, Yorkshire and Humberside 169w
Mine accidents 693w
Nuclear safety 561w
Offshore fixed platforms 697w
Petroleum exploration licences, Environmental impact assessment 228w
Post offices 560w
Post offices, Wales 559w
Radioactive waste disposal, Sellafield 677w
Refuse derived fuel, Belvedere 233w
Regional planning and development, Government grants 693–4w
Small businesses, Rural development areas 610w
Wind power 25w

***Paice, Mr James**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Education and Employment*
Questions
Apprentices, Manufacturing industries 151w
Black Country Careers Services 341w
Career development loans 340–1w
Career development loans, Ethnic minorities 264–5w
Child benefit 351
East Lancashire Training and Enterprise Council 619w
Educational standards 350
Employment opportunities 354
Employment schemes, North Yorkshire 468–9w
Employment schemes, York 338w
European Social Fund 153w
Further education 151w, 258w
Further education, Cost per student 258w
Further education, Finance 338w, 396–7w, 460w, 748–9w
Further education, Staff-student ratios 258w
Further education colleges, Finance 468w, 705w
Further Education Funding Council for England 264w
Further education teachers, Redundancy 397w
GCE A level, Grant maintained schools 267–8w
International Labour Organisation 151–2w
Nelson and Colne College, Redundancy 468w
Out of school childcare grant scheme 618w
Part-time employment 255w, 353–4
Scouts and guides, Government grants 750w
Sight and Sound 151w
Student numbers, Further education 468w
Training, EC grants and loans 152–4w
Training, Young people 349–50

***Paice, Mr James**—continued*
Training and enterprise councils, Chambers of commerce training and enterprise 339w
Training and enterprise councils, Finance 266–7w, 466–8w
Unemployment 354–5
Urban Regeneration Grants, Ovenden 351
Young people, Industrial training 350
Youth unemployment 350–2

Paisley, Rev Ian
Debates etc.
NHS (05.02.97) 1045–7
Northern Ireland Parades and Marches Review (30.01.97) 513–4
Questions
Northern Ireland government 495–6

Pakistan
Immigration applications 663w

Palace of Westminster
Art works 351w
Plastic arts 351w
Security 458w

Parent plus
188w

Parkhead Hospital
Suicide 374w

Parking offences
Fines 54w

Parkinson's disease
600w

Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration
Cash limits 387w

Parole
Gibson, Mark 745w

Partners in Technology
224w
Building Research Establishment 224–5w

Part-time employment
255w, 353–4
Jobseeker's allowance 557–8w

Passengers
Bus services 391w

Paternity leave
350–1

Patients
Accident and emergency departments 597w

Patnick, Sir Irvine
Debates etc.
Local government finance (03.02.97) 681, 721–5
Questions
Crime, Greater London 544w
Exports, Yorkshire and Humberside 169w
Fulwood Hospital, Property transfer 399–400w
Identity cards 313w
National Lottery, Church buildings 489–90w
Security, Northern Ireland 367w
Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee 1134

***Pawsey, Mr James**
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep (27.01.97) 80–4, 86, 95–100
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 199, 214–20, 224, 235–7
Questions
Educational policy 343
Educational policy, Finance 745–6w

***Pawsey, Mr James**—continued*
Social security recipients, Young people 190w
Teaching methods 260w

Pay incentives
481–2w

Pay Review Bodies
698–701w

Paymaster-General
Privatisation 235w

Peace negotiations
Cyprus 12

Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 242–3
Questions
Cold weather payments, Leeds 140
National Lottery, Yorkshire and Humberside 659w
Schools and parents 255–6w

Pearson, Mr Ian
Questions
Black Country Careers Services 341w
Employment opportunities 347
General Certificate of Secondary Education 460–2w
Profit sharing, Costs 611–2w
Regional planning and development, Government grants 693–4w
Trade fairs 323–4w

Pendle
Food industry 357w

Pendry, Mr Tom
Questions
British Academy of Sport 19w, 314w
English Tourist Board, Holiday accommodation 19w
Football 657–8w
London Marathon 606w
Public order policing, Football 125w
Royal parks, Expenditure 606w
Sports 607w
Sportsgrounds, Safety standards 18w
Tourism, Consultants 20–4w
Touting, Football 124w

Pensioners
Christmas bonus 189w
Domestic energy conservation 534w
Eye tests 163w
Income support 144–6, 189w
Low incomes 143
Personal savings 187w
Population 331w
Tax rates and bands 143–4w
Wales 331w

Pensions
Clergy 46w

Pensions appeal tribunals
608–9w

Personal equity plans
Tax allowances 142w

Personal pensions
143
Compensation 732w
Residential care 112–3w

Personal records
Social security claims 494w
War pensions 192w

Personal savings
Pensioners 187w

Personal tax allowances
142w, 678w

Personnel management
Metropolitan Police 552w

Perth and Kinross
Social services 1007–8

Pesca initiative
48w

Pesticides
(28.01.97) 261

Petroleum exploration licences
Environmental impact assessment 228w

Pharmaceutical price regulation scheme
641–2w

Pickthall, Mr Colin
Questions
Arts, Student grants 18w
Genetically modified organisms, Food 1127
Insulin 115–6w
Lancashire County Council, Educational finance 348
Personal pensions, Compensation 732w

Pigs
Export of live animals 720w

Pike, Mr Peter L
Debates etc.
Local government finance (03.02.97) 755–7
Questions
Deregulation initiative 120w
Education vouchers, Pre-school education 256w
Fireworks, Law reform 694w
Non-domestic rates 790
Overseas aid 15–6

Pinderfields Hospital NHS Trust
Intensive care 471w

Planning appeals
Performance standards 616w
Stockton 782–3
Wales 518w, 616w
Welsh Office 591w

Planning permission
225w, 534–5w
Administrative delays 781
Housing 534–5w
Mineral resources 10–1w
Newtownards 654–5w
Teesside Development Corporation 133w
Telecommunications technology 220–1w, (07.02.97) 1316–22

Plant Protection Products (Basic Conditions) Regulations 1997
Debates etc.
(28.01.97) 261

Plastic arts
Palace of Westminster 351w

Plastic surgery
Breasts 165–6w

Plastics
Recycling 136w

Playing fields
489w

Plymouth
Naval bases 683w

Poisoning
Silicone 166w

Police
Courts 125w
Finance 666–74w
Indonesia 341w
Manpower 125w

Police*—*continued
Wales 667–8w

Police Authority for Northern Ireland
52w

Police Bill (HL) 1996/97
Questions
1143–5, 1154

Police cautions
123w

Police Criminal Evidence Act 1984
Questions
764w

Police discipline
National Criminal Intelligence Service 545w

Police grant
217–8w, (29.01.97) 455–78

Police (Health and Safety) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R* (31.01.97) 646
Money res* (05.02.97) 1116
Order relating to Com (07.02.97) 1315

Police pensions
Wales 673w

Police powers
Surveillance 380w

Police (Property) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
Money res* (29.01.97) 478
Rem stages (07.02.97) 1287–94

Police Scientific Development Branch
218w

Police stations
Access to buildings 552w
Lambeth 313w
Metropolitan Police 124w

Police training
Indonesia 17w
Overseas aid 140–1w

Policewomen
Wales 124–5w

Political impartiality
Civil servants 9–10, 120w

Political prisoners
Choephel, Ngawang 504w

Political refugees
451w
Immigrant detainees 380–3w, 553w
Immigration applications 383w
Social security benefits 192–3w, 300w

Polling stations
Northern Ireland 652w

Pollution control
135–6w

Pollution monitoring
Radon gas 137–8w

Pope, Mr Greg
Questions
Playing fields 489w
Standard spending assessments, Council tax 786–7

Population
Pensioners 331w

Porter, Mr David
Questions
Woodhill prison 8w

Portillo, Rt Hon Michael, Secretary of State for Defence
Debates etc.
Air Force (06.02.97) 1163
Questions
Ministry of Defence, Cash limits 432w

Ports
Waste disposal 126–7w

Portsmouth
Assisted places scheme 706w

Post offices
560w
Wales 559w

Postgraduate students
Wales 291w

Potato Industry Development Council Order 1997
Debates etc.
(29.01.97) 478

Poultry
Animal welfare 716w
Slaughterhouses 717–8w

Poverty
Church finance 48w
Scotland (05.02.97) 964–72

Powell, Sir Ray
Questions
Art works, Palace of Westminster 351w
New parliamentary building, Construction 458–9w
Plastic arts, Palace of Westminster 351w

Powell, Mr William
Questions
British Academy of Sport 607w
Labour Party, Public expenditure 798
Teachers, Northamptonshire 75–6w

Power failures
Newry and Mourne 173–4w

Prentice, Mrs Bridget
Questions
Business questions 1152
Class sizes 256w
Education and Library Boards (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 370w
Football, Sportsgrounds 669–70
Lewisham, Tickets 252w
National Lottery, Lewisham 17–8w
National Lottery, Newsagents 149–50w
Trains, Bicycles 733–4w

Prentice, Mr Gordon
Debates etc.
Business questions (30.01.97) 539–40
Food Safety Council (30.01.97) 531–2
Handicapped, Neurology (29.01.97) 328
Local government finance (03.02.97) 748–50
NHS (05.02.97) 1022, 1028
Questions
Aircrew, Medical examinations 570–1w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 283–4w
Business questions 1153
Cannabis 107w
Castle Cement, Waste disposal 135w
Cattle, Animal breeding 186w
Defective housing, East Lancashire 783–4
Dental health, Children 598–9w
Dental services 161w, 399w, 643w
Dental services, Consent to medical treatment 161w
Dentists, Crimes of violence 210w
Dentists, Manpower 472–3w
Dentists, Pay 162w
Dentists, Training 112w

Prentice, Mr Gordon—continued
Duke of York, Military aircraft 198–9w, 438w
Economic and monetary union 567w
European fighter aircraft 484w
Food, Safety standards 574w
Food industry, Improvement notices 357w
Food industry, Inspections 356–7w
Food industry, Pendle 357w
Food labelling, Meat products 356w
Further education, Finance 396–7w
Further education colleges, Finance 468w, 705w
Further education teachers, Redundancy 397w
Gambling 6–7w
Helicopters, Cowarth Park School 486–7w
Helicopters, Schools 487w
Income tax, Tax rates and bands 143w
Income tax, Taxpayers 613–4w
Job centres, Advertising 259w
Judges 671
Livestock, Northern Ireland 370w
Local government pensions 535w
Nelson and Colne College, Redundancy 468w
Organic farming 356w
Organic food, Imports 356w
Overseas aid, Deserts 16w
Pay incentives 481–2w
Queen's flight 436w
Royal yacht 434–6w, 483w, 568w
Student numbers, Further education 468w
Trident, Expenditure 484w
Windsor Castle, Repairs and maintenance 607w

Pre-school education
Education vouchers 76w, 83w, 256w, 465–6w, 519w, 990

Prescott, Rt Hon John
Questions
Royal yacht 6

Prescription charges
116w

Prescription drugs
Expenditure 644w

Prestwick Airport
Air traffic control 506–7w

Primary education
Wales 46w
Welsh language 46w

Primary health care
Private health services 165w

Prime Minister
Official residences 524w
Travelling expenses 609w

Prison accommodation
553–4w
Category A prisoners 451w

Prison governors
Training 545–6w, 549–50w

Prison sentences
Paedophilia 215–6w

Prison Service
745w

Prisoner escapes
Whitemoor Prison 315–6w, 449–50w, 740w

Prisoners
Army in Northern Ireland 209–10w, 438w, 498–9
Childbirth 8–9w
Death 740–1w
Drug abuse 210–2w, 216w

Prisoners—continued
Dyslexia 737–9w
Handicapped 216w
Morocco 227w
Publications 554–5w
Restraint equipment 7w
Suicide 546–50w
Thomas, Geoffrey 449w, 554w

Prisoners of war
Iraq 227w
Japan 660w

Prisoners' transport
740w

Prisons
Violence 215w

Prisons Inspectorate
see HM Inspectorate of Prisons

Private education
Inspections 97w

Private finance initiative
679w
Darenth Park Hospital 7
Dept of Social Security 632–4w
Hospitals 270–4w, 420w, 472w
Local government finance 11w
Public expenditure 8
Royal Hospitals NHS Trust 599w
St Thomas' Hospital 402w
Scotland 687–8w
Skye bridge 152

Private health services
Primary health care 165w
Scotland 991

Private rented housing
Rents 529w

Private sector
Child Support Agency 188w
Social Security Benefits Agency 300–1w

Privatisation
560w
Building Research Establishment 139w
Electricity supply industry 626w
HMSO 736w
Income 731–2w
Paymaster-General 235w
Public utilities 422w
Railway transport 796–7

Privy Council
Cash limits 377w

Probation
Mid Glamorgan 603–4w

Prodigy prescribing system
594–5w

Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997
Questions
222–3w

Productivity
Coal mining 511–2w
Skilled workers 566w

Professional misconduct
Hawksworth Hall School 460w

Professions Supplementary to Medicine (Prosthetists and Orthotists Board) Order of Council 1997
Debates etc.
(30.01.97) 567

Profit sharing
Costs 611–2w
Pay 732–3w

Project Prime
106w

Project Prime—continued
Yorkshire and Humberside 106w

Project work
Scotland 1005

Property transfer
Council housing 317–9w
Fulwood Hospital 399–400w

Prosecutions
Lorry drivers 129–30w
Sea pollution 127w

Prostate gland
Cancer 721–2w

Prosthetics
166–7w

Prosthetists and Orthotists Board
(30.01.97) 567

Protection from Harassment Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
Business questions (30.01.97) 540
Questions
499–500

PSV operators licences
Northern Ireland 312w

Public Accounts Commission
Employment discrimination 17

Public Accounts Committee
Speaker's rulings and statements (05.02.97) 1009

Public appointments
Dept of the Environment 677w
Non-departmental public bodies 532w

Public Appointments Unit
674w

Public bodies
Committee on Standards in Public Life 412w
Northern Ireland 651w
Northern Ireland Audit Office 412w

Public defenders
502w

Public Entertainments Licences (Drug Misuse) Bill 1996/97
Questions
Northern Ireland 53w

Public expenditure
4, 568w
Education 473–4w
Labour Party 798
Legislation 999–1000
Private finance initiative 8
Scotland 991, 996
Unemployment 567–8w
Welsh Office 518w

Public finance
Manifestos 149
Scotland 998–9

Public Health Laboratory Service
594w
Efficiency scrutinies 275w

Public houses
Machen 40w

Public order offences
Alcoholic drinks 689w
Scotland 689w

Public order policing
Football 125w
Indonesia 506w

Public petitions
Bridges (29.01.97) 479
Offences against children (27.01.97) 124

Public petitions—continued
Respite care (04.02.97) 909

Public Record Office
Cash limits 384–5w

Public relations
Scottish Enterprise 178w

Public sector borrowing requirement
Floating debt 420–1w
National income 420w
Scotland 681–2w

Public sector debt
424w

Public sector housing
Wales 408w

Public Trust Office
342w

Public utilities
Government shareholding 421w
Privatisation 422w

Publications
EC Social Charter 609–10w
HM Inspectorate of Prisons 741w
Prisoners 554–5w

Publicity
Armed forces recruitment 484w
Dept for Education and Employment 555–6w
Dept of Health 470w
Dept of National Heritage 606w
Dept of Social Security 492–4w
Dept of the Environment 448w
Dept of Trade and Industry 560w
Dept of Transport 507w
Economic and monetary union 28w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 610–2w
Home Office 664–5w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 720–1w
Northern Ireland Office 601w
Overseas Development Administration 610–2w
Welsh Office 588w

Pupil referral units
558w
Wales 617w

Purchase, Mr Ken
Questions
Social security benefits, Expenditure 141

Pyramid selling
Albania 505w

Quantock School
705w

Queen's flight
435–8w, 620–1w, 682–3w

Quin, Ms Joyce
Debates etc.
EC integration, Voting methods (29.01.97) 270, 286–9

Racial attacks
Northern Ireland 500–1w

Radar
Defence procurement 684w

Radice, Mr Giles
Debates etc.
EC integration, Voting methods (29.01.97) 271, 282–5

Radio broadcasting licences
Doncaster 490–1w

Radioactive waste disposal
Sellafield 677w

Radon gas
Pollution monitoring 137–8w

RAF Personnel Management Agency
350–1w

RAF Valley
Helicopters 683w

Railtrack
Cardiff 616–7w
Railway maintenance 393w

Railway fares
360w, 481w

Railway industry
Performance standards 393w

Railway maintenance
Railtrack 393w

Railway timetables
569w

Railway transport
Privatisation 796–7

Railway travel
Crewe 358–9w

Randall, Mr Stuart
Debates etc.
EC integration, Voting methods (29.01.97) 269, 272, 287

Rape
Crete 504w

Rathbone, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Engineering industries (29.01.97) 331

Raynsford, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Wates houses, Southampton (27.01.97) 130–1
Questions
Council housing, Housing stock 793–4
Housing, Expenditure 528–9w
Local government revenue 531w
Millennium Exhibition 666
Multiple occupation 527–8w
Planning permission 534–5w
Private rented housing, Rents 529w
Rent allowances, Single people 710–2w
Rents to mortgages scheme 529w
Right to buy 529w
Social rented housing 530w
Social rented housing, Housing starts 529w
Technology colleges 463–5w

Recycling
Plastics 136w

Redbridge
Local government expenditure 532w

Redundancy
Air Force 203w
Armed forces 31w
Ford Motor Company 797–8
Further education teachers 397w
Greater Glasgow Health Board 685w
Nelson and Colne College 468w
Scottish Office 1006

Redundancy pay
Former ministers 525w

Refuse derived fuel
Belvedere 233w

Regional government
South East region 530w

Regional planning and development
Government grants 693–4w
South East region 220w

Regional selective assistance
Wales 291w

Registered social landlords
(30.01.97) 567

Rehabilitation centres
Alcoholism (31.01.97) 648–56

Reid, Dr John
Debates etc.
Air Force (06.02.97) 1163, 1178, 1198, 1202, 1222–7, 1232–3, 1235–6
Questions
Food poisoning, Scotland 626w

Religious education
Teacher training 618w

Rendel, Mr David
Debates etc.
Education (05.02.97) 1082
Horserace Totalisator Board Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (07.02.97) 1250–1, 1269
Local government finance (03.02.97) 679, 709–13
Questions
British Waterways Board, Government grants 533w
Class sizes 256w
Council tax capping 787
Local government elections 759w

Rendering industry
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 284w, 353–4w

Rent allowances
Single people 710–2w

Rent arrears
Council tenants 72–4w

Rents
Private rented housing 529w

Rents to mortgages scheme
529w

Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R order read (07.02.97) 1316

Republic of Ireland
Cold weather payments 147
Extradition 176w

Research councils
416–8w

Research finance
614–5w
Dept of Trade and Industry 697w
Meningitis 270w

Residential care
Personal pensions 112–3w
Scotland 621w
Wales 589w

Respite care
Public petitions (04.02.97) 909

Restraint equipment
Prisoners 7w

Retail trade
Drugs 724w

Retirement pensions
145, 147–8, 637–8w

Revenue support grant
Income support 105w
Kent (05.02.97) 941–63
Manchester 13w, 223w, 530w

Rhuddlan bypass
521w

Rice
EC overseas countries and territories 407w

Richards, Mr Rod,
Debates etc.
Local government finance, Wales (04.02.97) 868–9, 872, 875, 892, 894
Sex Offenders Bill, 2R (27.01.97) 26
Questions
Assisted places scheme, Wales 520w
Beef, Wales 522w
Dental services, Conwy 521w
Education vouchers, Pre-school education 519w
Educational finance, Wales 521w
Prisoners, Publications 554–5w
Rhuddlan bypass 521w
Special schools, Wales 592w
Teachers, Early retirement 468w, 520w
Welsh Office, Cash limits 411–2w
Working hours, EC law 522w

Riddick, Mr Graham
Questions
Immigrant detainees, Hunger strikes 368
NHS finance 722w
Northern Ireland government 368w

Ridings School
Teachers 555w

Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Questions
Chevening 425w, 660–2w
Commonwealth Institute, Government grants 323w
Dorneywood 681w
1 Carlton Gardens 425–6w, 659w

Right of abode
Hong Kong 8w

Right of Search
Customs and Excise 235w

Right to buy
529w

Riot control weapons
Health hazards 619w

Risley Prison
Women 449w

River Calder
Bridges (29.01.97) 479

Road accidents
A465 290w
Motorways 646–8w
Northern Ireland 307–8w

Road construction
A80 999, 1005–6
Scotland 67–9w, 624w
Severn bridge (05.02.97) 973–80
Wheelock 361–2w

Road finance
56–60w

Road safety
Ballygowan 654w
Drug side effects 722–3w

Road safety education
Northern Ireland 303–4w

Road tax
55w, 390–1w

Road traffic
Air pollution 54w
Wales 590w

Road traffic control
Northern Ireland (27.01.97) 124

Road Traffic Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997
Debates etc.
(27.01.97) 124

Road works
A74 645–6w
Newtownards 654w
Northern Ireland 369–70w

Robathan, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Sex Offenders Bill, 2R (27.01.97) 24, 60–2
Questions
Government research establishments, Efficiency scrutinies 274–5w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 367–8w

Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Debates etc.
Local government finance, Wales (04.02.97) 860, 873–6, 879–81
Sex Offenders Bill, 2R (27.01.97) 47–9
Questions
Assisted places scheme 73–5w
Assisted places scheme, Wales 157w, 289w
Local government finance, Wales 159–60w
Tourist industry, EC Social Charter 667–8

Robertson, Mr George
Debates etc.
Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill, Rep and 3R (29.01.97) 447–50
Oral question time intervention (05.02.97) 1004
Questions
Council tenants, Rent arrears 72–4w
Education vouchers, Pre-school education 990
Firearms (Amendment) Bill 1996/97 1000–1

Robertson, Mr Raymond S, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office
Debates etc.
Education (05.02.97) 1088, 1102, 1104–9
Scotland, Housing (04.02.97) 914–8
Questions
Aberdeen College of Education, Employment agencies 1003
Aberdeen College of Education, Manpower 1003
Activity Centres (Young Persons' Safety) Act 1995, Scotland 626w
Assisted places scheme, Scotland 242–9w
Beef, Exports 71w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Compensation 71w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 631w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Research 71w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Scotland 71w
Brent Spar 326w
Council tenants, Rent arrears 72–4w
Deregulation initiative, Scotland 999
Domestic energy conservation, Scotland 327w
EC law, Scotland 1000
Falcons, Scotland 627w
Firearms (Amendment) Bill 1996/97 1000–1
Fisheries, Scotland 625w
Fishing, Scotland 69w
Food poisoning, Scotland 176w
Fowl pest, Scotland 630w
Hedges and ditches, Scotland 377w
Housing, Local government expenditure 250w

Robertson, Mr Raymond S—continued
Labour Party, Scotland 1000
Legislation, Scotland 999–1000
Offshore structures, Decommissioning 326w
Rough sleepers initiative, Scotland 623w
Scottish Land Court, Crofting 71–2w
Self-governing schools, Scotland 64–5w
Sheep dipping, Scotland 688w
Speech impaired, Scotland 688w
Student grants, Scotland 630–1w
Weather, Scotland 627w
West Dunbartonshire Council, Government grants 182w

Robinson, Mr Peter D
Debates etc.
Air Force (06.02.97) 1159
Questions
Fluoridation, Northern Ireland 303w
Non-domestic rates, Northern Ireland 493
Water treatment, Northern Ireland 302–3w

Roche, Mrs Barbara
Questions
Business Link 562–3w
Dept of Trade and Industry, Official hospitality 23w
EC law 131–2w
Export promotion, Per capita costs 324–5w
Rural Development Commission 387–8w
Small businesses, Rural development areas 610w

Rochester Prison
Immigrant detainees 359–62, 365, 368, 673w

Rock characterisation facility
United Kingdom NIREX 448w, 532w

Roe, Mrs Marion
Questions
Foreign investment in UK, EC Social Charter 1139
Social security reform, Family benefits 141–2

Rogers, Mr Allan
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep (27.01.97) 106
Local government finance, Wales (04.02.97) 876–8, 881, 892

Rooker, Mr Jeff
Debates etc.
Business question time intervention (06.02.97) 1147
Written questions, Points of order (29.01.97) 369
Questions
Further education, Finance 749w
HMSO, Privatisation 736w
National debt 239w
Tripartite Commission for the Restitution of Monetary Gold 141w

Rooney, Mr Terry
Questions
Career development loans 340–1w
Child Support Agency, Private sector 188w
Hospital wards 150–1
Jobseeker's allowance 713–4w
Project Prime 106w
Project Prime, Yorkshire and Humberside 106w
Social Security Benefits Agency, Computers 105w
Social Security Benefits Agency, Private sector 300–1w
Social Security Contributions Agency, Performance standards 103w

Rooney, Mr Terry—continued
Training and enterprise councils, Chambers of commerce training and enterprise 339w
Training and enterprise councils, Wales 367w
War pensions, Personal records 192w

Ross, Mr Ernie
Debates etc.
Poverty, Scotland (05.02.97) 970
Questions
Hard core unemployed 261–2w
NHS finance, Scotland 626w
Project work, Scotland 1005

Ross, Mr William
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland Parades and Marches Review (30.01.97) 520
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 500
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 1132
Crimes of violence, Northern Ireland 499w
Criminal injuries compensation, Northern Ireland 310w
Public Entertainments Licences (Drug Misuse) Bill 1996/97, Northern Ireland 53w

Rough sleepers initiative
784–5
Scotland 623w

Rowe, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 216–7, 228
Revenue support grant, Kent County Council (05.02.97) 944–5, 950, 954
Questions
Development aid, Fraud 15
Economic policy 9
Local government finance, Kent 795

Rowlands, Mr Ted
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 251–2
Local government finance, Wales (04.02.97) 859, 870
Questions
Cold weather payments 297w
Dental services, Children 157w
Probation, Mid Glamorgan 603–4w
Pupil referral units 558w
Pupil referral units, Wales 617w
VAT, EC action 237w

Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust
Accident and emergency departments 109w
Hospital beds 109w
Hospital patients 109w

Royal Hospitals NHS Trust
Private finance initiative 599w

Royal National Institute for Deaf People
636w

Royal parks
Expenditure 606w

Royal Signals
Museums and galleries 32w

Royal train
647–9w

Royal Ulster Constabulary
Efficiency scrutinies 368w
Homosexuality 308–9w

Royal yacht
3–7, 9–11, 151, 200–3w, 345–7w, 432–6w, 483w, 568w, 685w

Ruddock, Ms Joan
Questions
Departmental publications, Lord Chancellor's Dept 9w
Departmental publications, Welsh Office 40w
Environment protection, Board of Trade 233w
Environment protection, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 122w
Environment protection, Dept for Education and Employment 97w
Environment protection, Dept of Health 117w
Environment protection, Dept of National Heritage 378w
Environment protection, Dept of Social Security 104w
Environment protection, Dept of the Environment 14w
Environment protection, Dept of Transport 130w
Environment protection, Deputy Prime Minister 122w
Environment protection, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 319–20w
Environment protection, Home Office 452w
Environment protection, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 50w
Environment protection, Ministry of Defence 31w
Environment protection, Northern Ireland Office 174–6w
Environment protection, Scottish Office 628–30w
Environment protection, Treasury 238w
Forests, Access to countryside 240–1w

Rural areas
Chemists' shops 374w
Housing (04.02.97) 910–8
Out of town shopping centres 171w

Rural development areas
Small businesses 610w

Rural Development Commission
387–8w

"Rural England White Paper"
716–7w

Rutland
Local government reform 448w

Rwanda
Arms trade 13
Education 15
Health education 16w
Industrial development 13
International aid from international bodies 12–3
Overseas aid 555w

Sackville, Mr Tom, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office
Debates etc.
Fire services, Essex (05.02.97) 985–8
Questions
Animal experiments, Licensing 216–7w
Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 1w
Computer privacy, EC law 456w
Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 458w, 605w
Drug abuse, Research 605w
European Parliament constituencies 551w
Genetic engineering 604–5w
Identity cards 313w
Islam, Dead bodies 551–2w, 603w

Sackville, Mr Tom—continued
MV Marchioness, Shipping accidents 6w
Probation, Mid Glamorgan 603–4w

SAFE programme
536w

Safety standards
Food 574w
Sportsgrounds 18w

Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Questions
Religious education, Teacher training 618w

St Bartholomew's Hospital
640w

St Benedict's Hospice Sunderland
1140–1

St Thomas' Hospital
Private finance initiative 402w

Salmond, Mr Alex
Debates etc.
Cold weather payments, Scotland (29.01.97) 312, 314
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 355w, 631w
Business questions 1149
Exports, Scotland 626w
Fossil fuel levy 425w
Fossil fuel levy, Scotland 330w
Languages education, Scotland 329w
Non-domestic rates, Scotland 442–5w
Privatisation 560w
Public finance, Scotland 998–9
Public sector borrowing requirement, Scotland 681–2w
Public utilities, Government shareholding 421w
Public utilities, Privatisation 422w
Royal yacht 200w, 202–3w
Speech impaired, Scotland 327–8w, 688w
Speech therapists, Scotland 328w
Student grants, Scotland 630–1w
UK contributions to EC budget, Scotland 445w

Sanitary protection
Waste disposal 13w

Satellites
543w, 561w

Schizophrenia
763w
Drugs 761–2w
Wales 759w

Scholarships
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 27w

School admission
Bromley 263–4w
Handicapped pupils 747–8w
Northern Ireland 491–2

School buildings
Sheffield 264w

School choice
148, 151

School discipline
257w

School leaving
95w

School population
99–102w, 394w, 557w
Northern Ireland 368w

Schools
(27.01.97) 73–123, (28.01.97) 157–261
Fraud 263w

Schools—continued
Helicopters 487w
Inner city areas 258–9w
Standard spending assessments 259–60w

Schools and parents
255–6w

Schools Renewal Challenge Fund
Liskeard School 96–7w

Science and technology research
EC grants and loans 509–10w

Scotland
Activity Centres (Young Persons' Safety) Act 1995 626w
Acute beds 62–4w
Administration of justice 622w
Assisted places scheme 242–9w
Benefits Agency Medical Service 638–9w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 71w
Cold weather payments (29.01.97) 291–314
Community charge 328–9w
Conveyancing (29.01.97) 478
Council tax 328–9w, 623w
Council tax capping 184w
Council tenants 72–4w
Crime (29.01.97) 373–454
Dental services 330w
Deregulation initiative 999
Devolution 622w
Disabled workers 623w
Dogs 239–40w
Domestic energy conservation 327w
EC grants and loans 622w
EC law 1000
Economic situation 624w
Education vouchers 990, 997
Electoral register 689–93w
Electricity supply industry 626w
Employment 333w
Exports 626w
Eye tests 580w
Falcons 627w
Fisheries 625w
Fishing 69w
Flood control (27.01.97) 123–4
Food poisoning 65–8w, 176w, 626w
Forestry 582w
Fossil fuel levy 330w
Fowl pest 630w
Government grants to local authorities 183–4w
Government research establishments 250–1w
GP fundholders 62w, 580–1w, 627–8w
Health service staff 327w
Health services finance 992–3
Heart diseases 624w
Hedges and ditches 377w
Hospital waiting lists 441–2w, 581w
Housing 250w, (04.02.97) 910–8
Housing benefits 300w
Income tax 998
Labour Party 1000
Land drainage (27.01.97) 123–4
Languages education 329w
Legislation 999–1000
Life imprisonment 624w
Local government expenditure 621w
Local government finance 69–70w, 582w, 625w, 1001–3
Local government functions 581–2w
Local government revenue 181–2w, 184w
Lyme disease 446w
Medical rehabilitation 622w
Mental illness specific grant 622w
Museums and galleries 249–50w
NHS 580w
NHS finance 625–6w, 991
NHS trusts 326w, 330w, 581w

Scotland—continued
Non-departmental public bodies 72w
Non-domestic rates 442–5w, 688–9w
Offshore structures 326w
Poverty (05.02.97) 964–72
Private finance initiative 687–8w
Private health services 991
Project work 1005
Public expenditure 991, 996
Public finance 998–9
Public order offences 689w
Public sector borrowing requirement 681–2w
Residential care 621w
Road construction 67–9w, 624w
Rough sleepers initiative 623w
Self-governing schools 64–5w
Sheep dipping 688w
Small businesses 181w
Speech impaired 327–8w, 688w
Speech therapists 328w
Student grants 630–1w
Suckler cow premiums 689w
Surgery 627w
Taxation 997, 1004–5
Tropical diseases 63–4w
UK contributions to EC budget 445w
Unemployment 1004, 1006
Urban development corporations 630w
Water and sewerage companies 580w
Water authorities 184–6w
Weather 627w
Wheelchairs 61–2w

Scott Inquiry
see Arms to Iraq Inquiry

Scottish Enterprise
Contracts 179w
Contracts for services 178–9w
Disclosure of information 242w
Public relations 178w

Scottish Grand Committee
706–8w
Business motions (19.06.97) 513

Scottish health boards
Consultants 61–2w

Scottish Land Court
Crofting 71–2w

Scottish Office
Cash limits 374–6w
Contracts 179w
Council of Ministers 622w
Environment protection 628–30w
Non-departmental public bodies 177w
Redundancy 1006

Scouts and guides
Government grants 750w

Scrabo High School
305w

Screening
Breast cancer 164w
Cancer 724–5w

Sea pollution
127w
Gibraltar 647w
Prosecutions 127w

Secondary education
259w
Northern Ireland 491

Secure accommodation
125w

Securities and Investments Board
Stamp duties 732w

Security
Church property 47w

Security—continued
Northern Ireland 367w
Palace of Westminster 458w

Sedgefield
Unemployment 36w

Selby
Subsidence (30.01.97) 568–74

Self-assessment of tax
Compliance cost assessments 679w

Self-governing schools
Scotland 64–5w

Sellafield
Radioactive waste disposal 677w

Selly Oak hospital
1137–8

Service charges
Council housing 537–8w
Housing benefits 294–5w

Set-aside land
Church Commissioners 48w

Severn bridge
Road construction (05.02.97) 973–80
VAT 149–50

Severn Trent Water
589w

Sex Offenders Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R (27.01.97) 23–72
Order relating to Com (31.01.97) 647

Sexual offences
(27.01.97) 23–72

Sexual Offences (Protected Material) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R* (31.01.97) 646
Money res* (05.02.97) 1116
Order relating to Com (07.02.97) 1317

Share fishermen
Jobseeker's allowance 430w

Share option scheme
Costs 611–2w

Shaw, Mr David
Debates etc.
Business questions (30.01.97) 539
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 157
Members' correspondence, Points of order (06.02.97) 1155–6
NHS (05.02.97) 1012
Oral questions, Points of order (30.01.97) 542
Revenue support grant, Kent County Council (05.02.97) 948, 950–2, 956, 961
Questions
Business Interchange Panel 469–70w
Business questions 1147–8
Devolution, Scotland 622w
Holiday and travel insurance, Tax rates and bands 234–5w
Holiday and travel insurance, Tax yields 234w
Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, Cash limits 387w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 367w
Unemployment 146

Sheep
EC internal trade 406–7w

Sheep dipping
Scotland 688w

Sheerman, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Sex Offenders Bill, 2R (27.01.97) 25–6, 45–7
Questions
Animal welfare, Consumer information 1129–30
Burma, Overseas investment 543w
Education, Ethics 750w
Further education 151w
Further education, Cost per student 258w
Further education, Staff-student ratios 258w
Geriatric patients, Health services 274w
Intensive care, Northern and Yorkshire region 470w
Paediatrics, Intensive care 164–5w
Planning permission, Telecommunications technology 220–1w
Tipping of waste 788
Universities, Pay 355–6

Sheffield
School buildings 264w

Sheffield Development Corporation (Area and Constitution) Order 1997
Debates etc.
(30.01.97) 567

Shellfish
Northern Ireland 311–2w

Sheltered housing
Mental health services 362w

***Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian**, Secretary of State for Education and Employment*
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 255–7
Questions
Educational policy 343
Further education, Finance 356–7
Homework 267w, 342–3
Lancaster University, Research 356
Open University 357
Universities, Pay 355–6
Universities, Research 355

Sheriffs
503w

Shipbuilding
151

Shipbuilding intervention fund
233w

Shipping accidents
MV Marchioness 6w

Shipping safety
Channel ferries 796

Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Questions
European Central Bank 6

Sight and Sound
151w

Sign language
Digital television (27.01.97) 124

Silicone
Poisoning 166w

Simpson, Mr Alan
Questions
AWE Aldermaston, Defence research 29w
Cold weather payments 295–7w
Cold weather payments, Expenditure 187w
Defence research, USA 29–30w, 195–6w
Domestic energy conservation 221–2w
Hypothermia 34–5w
Local government finance, Private finance initiative 11w

***Simpson, Mr Alan**—continued*
Mathematics, Educational assessment 257w
Nuclear power 196w
Nuclear weapons policy 28–9w
Nuclear weapons policy, Military alliances 29w
Nuclear weapons policy, USA 195w

Single people
Rent allowances 710–2w

Sir John's College Southsea
Assisted places scheme 706w

Skeet, Sir Trevor
Questions
Common agricultural policy 715–6w

Skilled workers
Productivity 566w

Skinner, Mr Dennis
Debates etc.
Business questions (30.01.97) 540–1
Food Safety Council (30.01.97) 530
NHS (05.02.97) 1013
Oral question time intervention (30.01.97) 501, (04.02.97) 798, (06.02.97) 1128, 1139
Questions
Business questions 1146
Jobseeker's allowance 346–7
National Lottery, Cultural heritage 657–8

Skye bridge
Private finance initiative 152

Slaughterhouses
Poultry 717–8w

Small businesses
Deregulation 2
Rural development areas 610w
Scotland 181w
Uniform business rate 789–90

Small shops
Uniform business rate 789

Smith, Mr Andrew
Questions
Channel tunnel, Inquiries 251w
Road traffic, Air pollution 54w

Smith, Mr Chris
Questions
Abortion 333–4w
Accident and emergency departments 597w
Accident and emergency departments, Patients 597w
Cancer, Digestive system disorders 344w
Community health services, Greater London 721w
Cottage hospitals 594w
Cottage hospitals, Wales 366w
Dental services, Children 639w
Dept of Health, Consultants 596w
Doctors 641w
Doctors, Manpower 165–6w
Environmental health, Consultants 760–1w
Food poisoning 108–10w
Food Safety Council 761w
General practitioners 597w, 639w, 644w
General practitioners, Training 721w
GP fundholders 640w
Health service staff, Manpower 344w, 366w, 372w
Health service staff, Scotland 327w
Health services, Weather 343w
Heart diseases, Hospital waiting lists 273w
Hospital consultants, Accident and emergency departments 399w
Hospital consultants, Vacancies 595–6w
Hospital waiting lists 402w

***Smith, Mr Chris**—continued*
Hospital wards 594w
Life expectancy 402w
NHS, Contracts for services 273w
Nurses, Child patients 760w
Primary health care, Private health services 165w
Private finance initiative, Hospitals 420w
Public Health Laboratory Service 594w
Royal Hospitals NHS Trust, Private finance initiative 599w
St Bartholomew's Hospital 640w
Tuberculosis, London boroughs 599–600w

Smith, Sir Dudley
Questions
Hunger strikes 365

Smith, Mr Llew
Debates etc.
EC integration, Voting methods (29.01.97) 274–5
Local government finance, Wales (04.02.97) 863, 880–2, 888
Questions
Coal, Imports 510–1w
Coal mining, Productivity 511–2w
Combined heat and power, Electricity generation 510w
Combined heat and power, Employment opportunities 510w
Electricity supply industry, Wales 411w
Energy consumption, Wales 663w
European Central Bank 10
Road traffic, Wales 590w
Royal yacht 483w
Severn Trent Water 589w

Smith, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Horserace Totalisator Board Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (07.02.97) 1249, 1253, 1255, 1258, 1260–3, 1265, 1270–2, 1274–6
Police Property Bill, 3R (07.02.97) 1287, 1289
Questions
Members' correspondence 253w

Smokeless fuels
Northern Ireland 307w

Smoking
Armed forces 197–8w, 526w

Smuggling
EC countries 235w

Smyth, Rev Martin
Debates etc.
NHS (05.02.97) 1014, 1029–32, 1037
Northern Ireland Parades and Marches Review (30.01.97) 518–9
Sex Offenders Bill, 2R (27.01.97) 29
Questions
Business questions 1149
Homicide, Northern Ireland 173w
School admission, Northern Ireland 491–2
Young people, Industrial training 350

***Soames, Mr Nicholas**, Minister of State for Defence*
Debates etc.
Air Force (06.02.97) 1157–71, 1176, 1217
Questions
Air accidents, Mull of Kintyre 439–40w
Air Force, Redundancy 203w
Armed forces, Disciplinary proceedings 196–7w, 206w
Armed forces, Employment protection 203w
Armed forces, Redundancy 31w
Armed forces, Smoking 197–8w, 526w
Armed forces cadets 203–6w

***Soames, Mr Nicholas**—continued*
Armed forces catering services, Contracts 206–8w, 485–6w
Armed forces catering services, Contracts for services 684w
Armed forces housing 32–3w
Armed forces recruitment, Age 348–9w
Armed forces recruitment, Armed forces officers 484–5w
Armed forces recruitment, Publicity 484w
Armed forces strength 203w
Arms trade, Iraq 349w
Army 683–4w
Army, Museums and galleries 32w, 193–4w
Army bases, Colchester 621w
Army in Northern Ireland 483–4w
Army in Northern Ireland, Prisoners 209–10w, 438w
Army strength 485w
Booker Foodservice 486w
Castlemartin Range, Compensation 438w
Chemical weapons, Iraq 682w
Clegg, Lee, Legal costs 203w
Combined Cadet Force 210w
Duke of York, Military aircraft 198–9w, 438w
Environment protection, Ministry of Defence 31w
Exservicemen, Military decorations 30–1w
Gulf war syndrome 200w
Helicopters, Cowarth Park School 486–7w
Helicopters, Schools 487w
Hess, Rudolf, Death registration 348w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Armed forces 206w
Joint Service Command and Staff College, Armed forces training 525–6w
Military aircraft, Air accidents 619–20w
Military aircraft, Low flying 194–5w
Ministers' domestic visits, Ministry of Defence 197w
Ministers' visits abroad, United Arab Emirates 620w
Ministry of Defence, Advertising 685w
National Army Museum 32w
Naval bases, Plymouth 683w
Nuclear weapons tests, Exservicemen 620w
Queen's flight 435–8w, 620–1w, 682–3w
RAF Personnel Management Agency 350–1w
RAF Valley, Helicopters 683w
Royal Signals, Museums and galleries 32w
Royal yacht 200–3w, 345–7w, 432–6w, 483w, 685w
Sustainable development, Ministry of Defence 199w
War pensions 199w
Warships 620w

"Social Chapter: British and European Approaches"
609–10w

Social Fund
Expenditure 103w

Social Landlords Discretionary Reduction of Service Charges (England) Directions 1997
Questions
537–8w

Social Landlords Mandatory Reduction of Service Charges (England) Directions 1997
Questions
537–8w

Social policy
Northern Ireland 368w

Social rented housing
530w

***Social rented housing**—continued*
Housing starts 529w

Social security abuse
136–7, 187w
Housing benefits 138
Liverpool 138
Norfolk 136–7
North East region 3
Telephone services 102w, 137, 497w, 577w, 709–10w

Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
Rep and 3R (04.02.97) 807–57
Questions
105w, 137–8
Disclosure of information 107–8w
Human rights 106w

Social security appeals
War pensions 608–9w

Social security benefits
Advisory services 426–7w
Expenditure 141–2, 188w
Political refugees 192–3w, 300w

Social Security Benefits Agency
Computers 105w
Private sector 300–1w

Social security benefits disqualification
Family credit 105–6w

Social security claims
Manchester 13w
Personal records 494w
Unemployment benefits 260w

Social Security Contributions Agency
Contracts for services 103w
Inquiries 102–3w
Performance standards 103w

Social security finance
146, 189w

Social security recipients
635–8w, 710w
Means tested benefits 189–90w
Northern Ireland 727–8w
Young people 190w

Social security reform
Family benefits 141–2

Social services
268w
Contracts for services 192w
Cost effectiveness 1007–8
Perth and Kinross 1007–8

Social services finance
Highland Health Board 995

"Social Trends"
Costs 613–4w

Soley, Mr Clive
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland Parades and Marches Review (30.01.97) 518
Questions
Air pollution 785
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Northern Ireland 500–1
Hammersmith bridge, Repairs and maintenance 650–1w

Solicitors
Fees and charges 674

Solvent abuse
400–1w
Butane gas 598w
Health education 721w

Somerset
Deer 407w

South East London
Air pollution 785–6

South East region
Regional government 530w
Regional planning and development 220w

South Manchester Health Authority
Orthopaedics 275–6w

Southall
Community care grants 578–9w

Southampton
Wates houses (27.01.97) 125–34

Southampton International Boat Show Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R* (29.01.97) 340

Southend-on-Sea
Educational standards 462–4w

Spain
Fishing vessels 288w

***Speaker and deputies**, For rulings and statements see separate heading Speaker's rulings and statements*
Debates etc.
Amendments and new clauses (27.01.97) 80, 91, (28.01.97) 176, 208, 214–5, 249–50, (29.01.97) 373, 395–6, 406, 416–8, 421, 425, 427–8, 436, (03.02.97) 676, (04.02.97) 807, 858, (05.02.97) 1012, 1068
Conduct of proceedings (27.01.97) 11, 80, 82–3, (28.01.97) 142, 152, 171, 191, 221, 256, 259, (29.01.97) 290, 300, 309, 314, 363, 366, 368, 379, 472, (30.01.97) 503–4, 514, 530–2, 537, 549–50, 552, (31.01.97) 593–4, 646, (03.02.97) 666, 698, 748, 757, 773, (04.02.97) 794, 802, 853, 868–9, 875, (05.02.97) 926, 942–3, 961, 972, 976, 980, 992–3, 1043, 1117, (06.02.97) 1139, 1174, 1218, 1235, 1238, (07.02.97) 1247, 1252–3, 1262, 1275–6
Disallowed questions (29.01.97) 366, 368, (04.02.97) 789
Non-procedural matters (29.01.97) 357
Orders and regulations motions (27.01.97) 124, (28.01.97) 261, (29.01.97) 478, (30.01.97) 567, (03.02.97) 772
Points of order (27.01.97) 21–2, 79, 84, 87, 94–5, 102, (28.01.97) 157, 189, 201, 203, 240, (29.01.97) 281, 314, 368–9, 372, 454, 477, 486, (30.01.97) 542, (31.01.97) 646, (03.02.97) 675, 701, 757, 766, 779, (04.02.97) 801–3, (05.02.97) 947, 953–6, 958, (06.02.97) 1155–6
Private Members' bill orders (07.02.97) 1314–5

Speaker's rulings and statements
House of Commons procedure (27.01.97) 21–2
Members' conduct (28.01.97) 153–4
Official Report (04.02.97) 801
Public Accounts Committee (05.02.97) 1009
Unparliamentary expressions (03.02.97) 697, 728

Spearing, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep (27.01.97) 92, 94, 98, 103, 111–5
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 161–2, 190, 192
Local government finance (03.02.97) 689
Questions
Council of Ministers 505w

Spearing, Mr Nigel—*continued*
Education vouchers, Pre-school education 76w, 83w
Exchange rate mechanism 35–6w
Metrication, EC law 560–1w
Millennium Exhibition 490w
MV Marchioness, Shipping accidents 6w
Rice, EC overseas countries and territories 407w
Royal yacht 433w
Rwanda, International aid from international bodies 12–3
School population 557w

Special education
Wales 38–9w
Ynys Mon 39–40w

Special islands needs allowance
Argyll and Bute 1002

Special schools
Cheltenham 618w
Northern Ireland 171–2w
Wales 592w

Specified Bovine Material (No 3) Order 1996
Questions
284w, 353–4w

Speech impaired
Scotland 327–8w, 688w

Speech therapists
Scotland 328w

Speed limits
Cameras 130w

Spellar, Mr John
Debates etc.
Air Force (06.02.97) 1170–80, 1211, 1218, 1220
Questions
Buses, EC action 569–70w
Jubilee line, Building workers 569w
Millennium Exhibition 253w, 314w

Spicer, Sir Michael
Questions
Business questions 1145

Spink, Dr Robert
Debates etc.
Fire services, Essex (05.02.97) 982, 986
Questions
Council housing management 793
Legal aid scheme, Costs 674
Solvent abuse, Health education 721w

Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee
1134

"Sport Raising the Game"
583–6w

Sports
607w

Sports Council
583–6w

Sports facilities
658
Judgments 742–3w
National Lottery 658

Sports sponsorship
315w

Sportsgrounds
Football 669–70
Safety standards 18w

Spring, Mr Richard
Questions
Fisheries 715w

Spring, Mr Richard—*continued*
Life imprisonment, Scotland 624w
School discipline 257w

Sproat, Mr Iain, Minister of State, Dept of National Heritage
Questions
Airport tax 659
Arts, Student grants 18w
Arts Council of England, Government grants 314–6w, 742w
British Academy of Sport 19w, 314w, 491w, 607w
Caravan sites 606–7w
Charities, Accounting 149w
Charities Act 1992 607w
Computers, Dept of National Heritage 658w
Cultural heritage 490w
Cultural heritage, Church buildings 378w
Dept of National Heritage, Government grants to voluntary organisations 657–8w
Digital broadcasting 150w
D'Oyly Carte 148–9w, 657w
EC grants and loans 19–20w
English Heritage, Church buildings 489w
English Heritage, Offices 488w
English Tourist Board, Holiday accommodation 19w
Environment protection, Dept of National Heritage 378w
Football 657–8w
Football, Sportsgrounds 669–70
Football Trust 491w
Foundation for Sports and Arts 19w
Lewisham, Tickets 252w
London Marathon 606w
Members' correspondence 253w
Museums and galleries 586w
National Lottery 583w
National Lottery, Animal welfare 667
National Lottery, Charities 667
National Lottery, Church buildings 489–90w
National Lottery, Cultural heritage 657–8
National Lottery, Elderly 150w
National Lottery, Historic buildings 488w
National Lottery, Lewisham 17–8w
National Lottery, Newsagents 149–50w
National Lottery, Sports facilities 658
National Lottery, Yorkshire and Humberside 659w
Playing fields 489w
Publicity, Dept of National Heritage 606w
Royal parks, Expenditure 606w
Sports 607w
Sports Council 583–6w
Sports facilities 658
Sports facilities, Judgments 742–3w
Sports sponsorship 315w
Sportsgrounds, Safety standards 18w
Sustainable development, Dept of National Heritage 252–3w
Theatre, Arts grants 491–2w
Tourism, Bexley 251–2w
Tourism, Consultants 20–4w
Windsor Castle, Repairs and maintenance 607w
World Cup 586–7w

Squire, Ms Rachel
Questions
Brain, Injuries 622w
Employment, Scotland 333w

Squire, Mr Robin, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Education and Employment
Debates etc.
Education (05.02.97) 1069, 1074–81, 1083–4, 1095

Squire, Mr Robin—*continued*
Questions
Assisted places scheme, Staffordshire 352–3
Class sizes 256w
Cost per pupil, Staffordshire 352
Dept for Education and Employment, Cash limits 397–8w
Dept for Education and Employment, Publicity 556w
Education, Expenditure 337–8w
Education vouchers, Pre-school education 76w, 83w, 256w, 465–6w
Educational finance 83–6w, 353, 750–8w
Educational finance, Cheshire 348–9
Educational finance, Lancashire 347–8, 746–7w
Educational finance, Local authority powers 349
Educational finance, Northumberland 747w
Educational policy, Finance 745–6w
Environment protection, Dept for Education and Employment 97w
Grant maintained schools, Kent 155–6w
Local education authorities, Administrative costs 264w
Nursery schools, Inspections 263w
Publicity, Dept for Education and Employment 555w
School admission, Bromley 263–4w
School leaving 95w
School population 99–102w, 394w, 557w
Schools, Fraud 263w
Schools, Inner city areas 258–9w
Schools, Standard spending assessments 259–60w
Secondary education 259w
Sustainable development, Dept for Education and Employment 459–60w

Stability pact
National income 146w

Staffordshire
Assisted places scheme 352–3
Cost per pupil 352
Educational finance 352

Staff-student ratios
Further education 258w
Medical education 265–6w
Nurses' training 265–6w

Stalking
Northern Ireland 499–500

Stamp duties
Securities and Investments Board 732w
Unit trusts 678–9w

Standard spending assessments
531w
Buckinghamshire 221w
Council tax 786–7
Schools 259–60w

Standards of Conduct in Public Office Standing Committee
see Committee on Standards in Public Life

Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Debates etc.
Revenue support grant, Kent County Council (05.02.97) 948, 952
Questions
County Councils 539w
Grant maintained schools, Kent 155–6w, 339–40w
Local government borrowing, Kent County Council 137w
Local government finance 317–8w

State earnings related pension scheme
143–4

Statistics
Employment 332w
Surgery 759w

Statute Law Balancing (Limit on Maximum Quantity) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
1R (04.02.97) 804–6

Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Questions
Acute beds, Borders General Hospital 993
Animal quarantine 186w
Council tax, Scotland 328–9w
Local government finance, Scotland 625w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Homosexuality 308–9w

Steen, Mr Anthony
Debates etc.
Statute law Balancing (Limit on Maximum Quantity) Bill, 1R (04.02.97) 804–6
Questions
Deregulation initiative 120w
Deregulation initiative, Scotland 999
D'Oyly Carte 148–9w
National Audit Office, Civil service manpower 16
Official engagements 698w

Steinberg, Mr Gerry
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 160, 163, 165, 226–8
Questions
Domestic energy conservation, Pensioners 534w
Hospitals, Private finance initiative 270–4w
Schools, Fraud 263w

Stephen, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Air Force (06.02.97) 1160
Horserace Totalisator Board Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (07.02.97) 1251, 1264–7
Police grant (29.01.97) 455, 459, 462, 465
Questions
Educational finance 353

Stewart, Mr Allan
Debates etc.
Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill, Rep and 3R (29.01.97) 431–2
Education (05.02.97) 1086–8
Questions
Electricity supply industry, Privatisation 626w
Local government expenditure, Glasgow 990
Non-domestic rates, Scotland 688–9w
Unemployment, Scotland 1006

Stockton
City challenge 782–3
Planning appeals 782–3

Strang, Dr Gavin
Debates etc.
Food Safety Council (30.01.97) 523–4
Questions
Forestry Commission, Land acquisition 179–80w
Genetically modified organisms, Food 1128–9
Hedges and ditches, Scotland 377w
National Farmers' Union, Ministerial speeches 1133

Straw, Mr Jack
Questions
Consultants, Home Office 550–1w

Streeter, Mr Gary, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office
Debates etc.
Civil Procedure Bill (HL) 2R and money res* (30.01.97) 543–50, 555, 565–6
Questions
Church buildings, Repairs and maintenance 673
County courts 672–3
County courts, Fees and charges 670
Courts, Fees and charges 670–1
Courts, Normanton 503w
Departmental publications, Lord Chancellor's Dept 9w
Judges 671–2
Legal aid 254w, 502w
Legal aid, Immigrants 343w
Legal aid scheme 502w
Legal aid scheme, Costs 673–4
Legal aid scheme, Fraud 385–6w
Magistrates' courts 523–4w
Magistrates' courts, Bolton 672
Magistrates' courts, Wales 9w
Magistrates' courts committees, Coventry 502–3w
Public defenders 502w
Public Record Office, Cash limits 384–5w
Public Trust Office 342w
Sheriffs 503w
Solicitors, Fees and charges 674
Tenant eviction, Civil proceedings 342w
War pensions, Social security appeals 608–9w

Student grants
260w
Arts 18w
Scotland 630–1w
Wales 291–3w

Student loans
Take-up 267w
Wales 292w

Student numbers
Further education 338w, 460w, 468w, 748–9w
Medical students 266w
Nurses' training 117w
Wales 293w

Student wastage
462w
Medical students 266w
Nurses' training 278w

Submarines
Defence procurement 199w

Subsidence
Coal mining (30.01.97) 568–74
Selby (30.01.97) 568–74

Suckler cow premiums
516w
Northern Ireland 656w
Scotland 689w
Wales 519–20w

Suicide
Parkhead Hospital 374w
Prisoners 546–50w

Sumberg, Mr David
Debates etc.
Local government finance (03.02.97) 702–5

Surgery
275w
Hospital admissions 645w
Scotland 627w
Statistics 759w
Wales 617w

Surveillance
Police powers 380w

Sussex
Areas of outstanding natural beauty 788

Sussex Downs Conservation Board
788

Sustainable development
Dept for Education and Employment 459–60w
Dept of National Heritage 252–3w
Dept of Social Security 494–5w
Dept of the Environment 134–5w
Dept of Transport 131w
Home Office 455–6w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 185–6w
Ministry of Defence 199w
Treasury 330–1w

Sutcliffe, Mr Gerry
Debates etc.
Business questions (30.01.97) 540
Questions
Clegg, Lee, Legal costs 203w
Health services, North West region 501–2
Housing stock 782
Merchant seamen, English language 394w
Technology colleges 154–5w
Termination of employment, British Railways Board 360w

Swansea Canal
533w

Sweeney, Mr Walter
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 231
Local government finance, Wales (04.02.97) 860–1, 869, 871, 878–80, 883
Police grant (29.01.97) 456
Questions
Educational finance 750–8w
Farmers, Bureaucracy 716w
Foreign investment in UK 1141
"Government Expenditure and Revenue Wales" 365w
Homework 342–3
University of Wales College of Cardiff, Meningitis 592–3w
Wheelchairs, Wales 364–5w

Sykes, Mr John
Questions
Common fisheries policy 49w
Fish, Imports 288–9w
Fishing vessels, EC grants and loans 288w

Take-up of employment
Unemployed 257w

Taking and driving away
Belfast 368–9w
Northern Ireland 172–4w

Tamar Bridge Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R* (28.01.97) 135

Tanzania
Bilateral aid 13–4

Tapsell, Sir Peter
Questions
Currency movements 797
Official engagements 161w, 524w, 701w

Tax allowances
Company cars 334w, 425w
Income tax on investment incomes 335w
Inheritance tax 234w
Personal equity plans 142w
Tax exempt special savings accounts 142w

Tax avoidance
National insurance contributions 364w

Tax evasion
679w

Tax exempt special savings accounts
Tax allowances 142w

Tax rates and bands
Holiday and travel insurance 234–5w
Income tax 142–3w
Pensioners 143–4w

Tax yields
Company cars 480–1w
Football pools 421w
Holiday and travel insurance 234w
Insurance premium tax 423–4w
National Lottery 421w
Venture capital trusts 142w

Taxation
35w
Scotland 997, 1004–5
Travel allowances 614w
Trusts 337w
Wales 614w

Taxpayers
Income tax 613–4w
National insurance contributions 335w

Taylor, Mrs Ann
Debates etc.
Bridges, Public petitions (29.01.97) 479
Business questions (30.01.97) 533–4
Questions
Business statements 1143–5

Taylor, Mr Ian, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Trade and Industry
Debates etc.
Engineering industries (29.01.97) 336–9
Questions
Computers in government departments, Millennium 508w
Dept of Trade and Industry, Research finance 697w
EC Framework programme 414w
Electronic mail, USA 171w
Government research establishments, Efficiency scrutinies 230–1w
Industrial research, Government assistance 417w
Information technology 25w
Office of Telecommunications, Performance standards 227w
Research councils 416–8w
Satellites 543w, 561w
Science and technology research, EC grants and loans 509–10w

Taylor, Rt Hon John D
Questions
Army in Northern Ireland 483–4w
Beef premiums, Northern Ireland 601–2w
Fishing, Northern Ireland 655–6w
GCE A level, Northern Ireland 654w
Gibson, Mark, Parole 745w
Hard core unemployed, Northern Ireland 371w
Life imprisonment, Northern Ireland 745–6w
Northern Ireland Dept of Education, Government buildings 602w
Planning permission, Newtownards 654–5w
Road safety, Ballygowan 654w
Road works, Northern Ireland 369–70w
Scrabo High School 305w
Water supply, Donaghadee 652–3w

Taylor, Mr John M, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Competition and Consumer Affairs
Debates etc.
Subsidence, Coal mining (30.01.97) 571–4
Questions
Alcoholic drinks 324w
Asbestos 24–5w
Bank of Credit and Commerce International, Company liquidations 170w
Companies House 167–8w
Computers, Dept of Trade and Industry 696–7w
Directors, Disclosure of information 696w
EC Social Charter, Publications 609–10w
Economic growth, Competition 23w
Fireworks, Law reform 694w
Holiday leave, EC countries 229–30w
Insolvency service, Pay 168–9w
Metrication, EC law 560–1w
Monopolies and Mergers Commission 325w
Privatisation 560w
Publicity, Dept of Trade and Industry 560w
Working hours, EC law 169w

Taylor, Mr Matthew
Questions
Brent Spar 326w, 508–9w
Environment, Disclosure of information 388w
Fishing, Research 12w
Mineral resources, Planning permission 10–1w
Offshore structures, Decommissioning 326w
Publicity, Dept for Education and Employment 555w
Publicity, Dept of Health 470w
Publicity, Dept of National Heritage 606w
Publicity, Dept of the Environment 448w
Publicity, Dept of Trade and Industry 560w
Publicity, Dept of Transport 507w
Publicity, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 610–2w
Publicity, Home Office 664–5w
Publicity, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 720–1w
Publicity, Northern Ireland Office 601w
Publicity, Welsh Office 588w
Sustainable development, Dept for Education and Employment 459–60w
Sustainable development, Dept of National Heritage 252–3w
Sustainable development, Dept of Social Security 494–5w
Sustainable development, Dept of the Environment 134–5w
Sustainable development, Dept of Transport 131w
Sustainable development, Home Office 455–6w
Sustainable development, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 185–6w
Sustainable development, Ministry of Defence 199w
Sustainable development, Treasury 330–1w

Taylor, Sir Teddy
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep (27.01.97) 102–8, 113
Fire services, Essex (05.02.97) 984–5
Local government finance (03.02.97) 735–8
Questions
Departmental coordination 6
Earnings top-up 558–9w

Taylor, Sir Teddy—continued
Educational standards, Southend-on-Sea 462–4w
NHS finance 470–1w
Pensioners, Christmas bonus 189w

Teacher training
Religious education 618w

Teachers
345
Clwyd 520w
Early retirement 75w, 257w, 343–6, 468w, 520w, 591w
North Wales 615–6w
Northamptonshire 75–6w
Pay 93–6w
Ridings School 555w
Wales 520w, 591w

Teaching methods
260w

Technology colleges
154–5w, 463–5w

Teesside Development Corporation
Planning permission 133w

Telecommunications technology
Planning permission 220–1w, (07.02.97) 1316–22

Telephone services
Social security abuse 102w, 137, 497w, 577w, 709–10w

Temporary employment
256–7w
Driving Standards Agency 703–4w
Hospital nurses 277w

Tenant eviction
Civil proceedings 342w

Tenant farmers
Church Commissioners 351–2w

Termination of employment
British Railways Board 360w

Terrorism
Northern Ireland 367–8w

Thames Ditton Lawn Tennis Club
Judgments 742–3w

Theatre
Arts grants 491–2w

Thomas, Geoffrey
Prisoners 449w, 554w

Thomason, Mr Roy
Debates etc.
Local government finance (03.02.97) 679–80

Thompson, Sir Donald
Debates etc.
Food Safety Council (30.01.97) 528
NHS (05.02.97) 1042
Questions
Airport tax 659
Food Safety Council 1127–8
Nissan, Foreign investment in UK 5–6
Social security abuse, Liverpool 138

Thompson, Mr Jack
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 229
Local government finance (03.02.97) 743–6, 758

Thompson, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill, 2R (31.01.97) 578
Questions
Animal welfare 714w

Thompson, Mr Patrick—continued
British residents abroad, EC countries 141w
Educational finance, Local authority powers 349

Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 160–3, 171
Ford Motor Company, Halewood (05.02.97) 935, 939–40

Thurnham, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Mental Health (Joint Commissioning Consortia) Bill, 1R (05.02.97) 1009
Revenue support grant, Kent County Council (05.02.97) 956, 958, 960
Sex Offenders Bill, 2R (27.01.97) 24, 31, 40, 49–52, 58
Questions
Business questions 1154
Dental health, Bolton 399w
Dental health, Children 161–2w
Disabled workers 341
Hostels, Heating 140
House of Commons questions 373w
Magistrates, Bolton 120w
Magistrates' courts, Bolton 672
Mental health services 112w
Millennium Exhibition 665
Paedophilia, Prison sentences 215–6w
Social services 268w
Toothpaste, Consumption 398w

Tibet
Human rights 504w

Tickets
Lewisham 252w

Tilbury
Ammonium nitrate 317w, 355w, 359w
Fertilisers (Amendment) Regulations 1995 355w

Timms, Mr Stephen
Questions
Central Africa, Overseas aid 14–5
Local government property 448w
Local government revenue 447w
Prestwick Airport, Air traffic control 506–7w
Private finance initiative 679w
St Thomas' Hospital, Private finance initiative 402w
Taxation 35w
Treasury, Government buildings 37–8w

Tipping, Mr Paddy
Debates etc.
Local government finance, East Midlands (29.01.97) 482, 485–6
Questions
Business questions 1154

Tipping of waste
788
Magheramorne 53–4w

Tobacco duties
236–7w

Tollesbury
Flood control 1126

Toothpaste
Consumption 398w

Touhig, Mr Don
Debates etc.
Local government finance, Wales (04.02.97) 889–91
Questions
Homelessness 784

Tourism
Bexley 251–2w
Consultants 20–4w
Wales 591w

Tourist industry
669
EC Social Charter 662–4, 667–9

Tourists
Northern Ireland 369w

Touting
Football 124w

Town Centres (Insurance and Restoration) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
1R (05.02.97) 1009

Townend, Mr John
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 232–3
Questions
Drinking and driving, Christmas 219w

Tracey, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Local government finance (03.02.97) 683
Questions
Business questions 1152

Trade
512w

Trade fairs
323–4w

Trade promotion
Greece 228–9w

Training
Dentists 112w
EC grants and loans 152–4w
General practitioners 721w
Prison governors 545–6w, 549–50w
Young people 349–50

Training and enterprise councils
Chambers of commerce training and enterprise 339w
Finance 266–7w, 466–8w
Wales 290–2w, 367w

Trains
Bicycles 733–4w

Transplant surgery
Kidneys (29.01.97) 315–21

Transport
Leicestershire 359w

Transport of animals
716w

Travel allowances
Taxation 614w

Travelling expenses
Prime Minister 609w

Travelling people
Northern Ireland 500–1w

Treasury
Computers 733w
Early retirement 759w
Environment protection 238w
Equal opportunities 731w
Government buildings 37–8w
Sustainable development 330–1w

Tredinnick, Mr David
Questions
Exhaust emissions 786

Trickett, Mr Jon
Debates etc.
Local government finance (03.02.97) 705, 717–21
Questions
War pensions, Social security appeals 608–9w
War Pensions Agency, Administrative costs 712–3w

Trident
Expenditure 484w

Trimble, Mr David
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland Parades and Marches Review (30.01.97) 512–3
Questions
Northern Ireland government 496

Tripartite Commission for the Restitution of Monetary Gold
141w

Tropical diseases
Grampian Health Board 64w
Scotland 63–4w

Trotter, Mr Neville
Questions
D'Oyly Carte 657w
Personal tax allowances 678w
Pharmaceutical price regulation scheme 641–2w

Trusts
Capital gains tax 337w
Taxation 337w

Tuberculosis
London boroughs 599–600w

Turkey
Arms trade 526w

Turnbull Commission
Church of England 47–8w

Turner, Mr Dennis
Debates etc.
Local government finance (03.02.97) 766
Questions
Local government finance, Wolverhampton 794

Twin towns
EC grants and loans 220w

Tyler, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Food Safety Council (30.01.97) 525–6
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 718w
Genetically modified organisms, EC law 515–6w
Genetically modified organisms, Food 1128

Tyrrell Committee
see Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee

UK contributions to EC budget
Scotland 445w

UK membership of EC
27–8w, 504

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child
118w

UN Environment Programme
535–6w

UN Special Session on the Environment
533w

Unemployed
Take-up of employment 257w

Unemployment
36–7w, 146, 354–5, 563–4w, 796, 1142
Chorley 36w
Ealing 482w
Glasgow 1004
Lone parents 474–8w
Northern Ireland 492–3
Public expenditure 567–8w
Scotland 1004, 1006
Sedgefield 36w
Wales 38w

Unemployment benefits
Social security claims 260w

Uniform business rate
Small businesses 789–90
Small shops 789

Unit trusts
Stamp duties 678–9w

United Arab Emirates
Arms trade 697–8w
Ministers' visits abroad 620w

United Kingdom Membership of the European Union (Referendum) Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R order read (31.01.97) 646

United Kingdom NIREX
Rock characterisation facility 448w, 532w

Universities
Pay 355–6
Research 355

University of Wales College of Cardiff
Meningitis 42w, 592–3w

Unpaid taxes
336–7w

Unparliamentary expressions
Speaker's rulings and statements (03.02.97) 697, 728

Urban areas
Food 286w, 356w
Insurance (05.02.97) 1009

Urban development corporations
Scotland 630w

Urban development grants
Glasgow 989–90

Urban Regeneration Grants
Ovenden 351

USA
Defence research 29–30w, 195–6w
Electronic mail 171w
Nuclear weapons policy 195w

Vacancies
Hospital consultants 595–6w

Vaccination
Meningitis 118w

Valuation
Church property 47w

Value Added Tax (Registered Social Landlords) (No 2) Order 1997
Debates etc.
(30.01.97) 567

VAT
11, 34w, 237w
EC action 237w
EC law 6
Energy 149
Fuels 238w
Severn bridge 149–50

Vaz, Mr Keith
Questions
A46 129w

Vaz, Mr Keith*—*continued
Bank of Credit and Commerce International, Company liquidations 170w
Handicapped pupils 747w
Handicapped pupils, School admission 747–8w
Transport, Leicestershire 359w

Vegetables
Nitrates 355w

Vehicle number plates
Dept of the Environment 9–10w
Welsh Office 38w

Venture capital trusts
Tax yields 142w

Veterinary Investigation Service
Animal welfare 352w

Veterinary Laboratories Agency
287w

Veterinary services
Import of live animals 1125–6

Viggers, Mr Peter
Questions
Royal yacht 3–4
Tourists, Northern Ireland 369w

Violence
Prisons 215w

Visas
Fees and charges 226–7w, 611w
Hong Kong 226w

Voluntary organisations
National Lottery 489w

Voting methods
EC integration (29.01.97) 269–90

Waldegrave, Rt Hon William, Chief Secretary to the Treasury
Questions
Cardiff Bay barrage 35w
Economic analysis 35w
Interest rates 424w
National debt 239w
National Lottery, Capital investment 145w
Private finance initiative, Hospitals 420w
Public expenditure 568w
Public sector borrowing requirement, Floating debt 420–1w
Public sector borrowing requirement, National Income 420w
Public sector borrowing requirement, Scotland 681–2w
Public sector debt 424w
Royal yacht 568w
Unemployment, Public expenditure 567–8w

Walden, Mr George
Debates etc.
Higher education, Educational finance (05.02.97) 1117–20

Wales
Acid rain 616w
Alzheimer's disease 759w
Ambulance services 159w
Assisted places scheme 157w, 289w, 520w
Beaches 411w
Beef 522w
Benefits Agency district offices 426–7w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 156w, 587–8w
Community care 518w
Community charge 411w, 590w
Community hospitals 366w
Company liquidations 517w
Cottage hospitals 366w
Council house sales 408–10w

Wales*—*continued
Countryside stewardship scheme 158w
Deaf 663–4w
Defective housing 290w
Dental services 157w
Dentists 591w
Domestic energy conservation 366w
Drug abuse 517w
Ear disorders 43w
Education vouchers 519w
Educational finance 521w, 664w
Electricity supply industry 411w
Energy consumption 663w
Environmentally sensitive areas 157–8w
Foreign investment in UK 158–9w
Fowl pest 517w
Health authorities 43w
Health service staff 366w
Higher education 294w
Homework 616w
Hospital wards 615w
Local government finance 44–6w, 159–60w, 517–8w, (04.02.97) 858–908
Local government functions 663w
Lone parents 615w
Magistrates' courts 9w
Medical rehabilitation 615w
Meningitis 42w
Mental health community care 43–4w
Military aircraft 194–5w
NHS trusts 43w, 365w
Nurses 40–1w
Nurses' training 40w
Pensioners 331w
Planning appeals 518w, 616w
Police 667–8w
Police pensions 673w
Policewomen 124–5w
Post offices 559w
Postgraduate students 291w
Primary education 46w
Public sector housing 408w
Pupil referral units 617w
Regional selective assistance 291w
Residential care 589w
Road traffic 590w
Schizophrenia 759w
Special education 38–9w
Special schools 592w
Student grants 291–3w
Student loans 292w
Student numbers 293w
Suckler cow premiums 519–20w
Surgery 617w
Taxation 614w
Teachers 520w, 591w
Tourism 591w
Training and enterprise councils 290–2w, 367w
Unemployment 38w
Wheelchairs 364–5w
Working hours 522w
Young offenders 456–8w

Walker, Mr Bill
Debates etc.
Air Force (06.02.97) 1169, 1176, 1179–80, 1187, 1210–5, 1226
Cold weather payments, Scotland (29.01.97) 305, 313
Constitutional Change Bill, 1R (05.02.97) 1010–1
EC integration, Voting methods (29.01.97) 270, 282–3, 285–7
Public Accounts Committee, Points of order (04.02.97) 801–2
Questions
Business questions 1149
Cold weather payments, Republic of Ireland 147
Highlands and Islands Enterprise 373w

Walker, Mr Bill—continued
Jobseeker's allowance 347
Local government expenditure, Glasgow 989
Northern Ireland government 370w
Overseas Development Administration, Cash limits 377–8w
Social services, Perth and Kinross 1007–8

Wallace, Mr James
Debates etc.
Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill, Rep and 3R (29.01.97) 420, 428–30, 432–3
Education (05.02.97) 1089, 1100–5
Scotland, Housing (04.02.97) 910–4, 917
Questions
Education vouchers, Scotland 997
Hospital waiting lists, Scotland 441–2w, 581w
Scottish Grand Committee 706–7w
Suckler cow premiums 516w
Suckler cow premiums, Northern Ireland 656w
Suckler cow premiums, Scotland 689w
Suckler cow premiums, Wales 519–20w
Water authorities, Scotland 184–6w

Walley, Ms Joan
Debates etc.
Civil Procedure Bill (HL) 2R and money res* (30.01.97) 548, 561–2
Questions
Hospital doctors 761w
Hospital doctors, Working hours 761w
Mine accidents 693w

War pensions
199w, 297–9w, 364w
Ear disorders 633–6w
Personal records 192w
Social security appeals 608–9w

War Pensions Agency
429w
Administrative costs 712–3w

Wardell, Mr Gareth
Questions
Electronic mail, USA 171w
Swansea Canal 533w

Wardle, Mr Charles,
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Data banks 720w

Wareing, Mr Robert N
Debates etc.
Ford Motor Company, Halewood (05.02.97) 928–9
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Germany 714w

Warships
620w

Warwickshire
789
Opencast mining 536w

Waste disposal
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 718–9w, 1125, 1136
Castle Cement 135w
Northern Ireland 653–4w
Ports 126–7w
Sanitary protection 13w

Wastes
Packaging 530w

Water and sewerage companies
Scotland 580w

Water authorities
Scotland 184–6w

Water pollution
Coal mine closures 675w
EC law 13w

Water safety
Fishing vessels 704w

Water Service
see Northern Ireland Water Service Agency

Water supply
Donaghadee 652–3w
Fluoridation 163w, 398w

Water supply industry
Competition 138–9w

Water treatment
EC law 136w
Northern Ireland 302–3w

Waterson, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill, 2R (31.01.97) 575–82, 585–6, 590, 634–6
Questions
Areas of outstanding natural beauty, Sussex 788
European Court of Human Rights 505w
Planning permission 225w
Tourist industry, EC Social Charter 667–8

Wates houses
Southampton (27.01.97) 125–34

Watson, Mr Mike
Questions
Labour Party, Scotland 1000
Rough sleepers initiative, Scotland 623w

Watts, Mr John, Minister of State, Dept of Transport
Debates etc.
Severn bridge, Road construction (05.02.97) 976–80
Questions
A46 129w
Ammonium nitrate, Tilbury 359w
Birmingham relief road 571–2w
Bus services, Glasgow 359w
Bus services, Passengers 391w
Channel tunnel, Inquiries 251w
Great Eastern Railway, Performance standards 702–3w
Lorries, Axle weights 391w
M6, Costs 645–6w
M74 55w
Parking offences, Fines 54w
Railtrack, Railway maintenance 393w
Railway fares 360w
Railway timetables 569w
Railway travel, Crewe 358–9w
Road construction, Wheelock 361–2w
Road finance 56–60w
Road traffic, Air pollution 54w
Royal train 647–9w
Termination of employment, British Railways Board 360w
Trains, Bicycles 733–4w
Transport, Leicestershire 359w
West Coast railway line 647w

Weather
Health services 343w
Scotland 627w

Weather forecasting
Equipment 209w

Welfare of Broiler Chickens Bill (HL) 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R order read (07.02.97) 1316

Welsh, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Cold weather payments, Scotland (29.01.97) 295–6
Questions
Beef, Exports 71w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Compensation 71w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Research 71w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Scotland 71w
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, Local government finance 1001

Welsh Development Agency Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
Order relating to Com (07.02.97) 1317

Welsh language
591w
Primary education 46w

Welsh Office
Cash limits 411–2w
Computers 664w, 758w
Departmental publications 40w
Information technology 757–8w
Planning appeals 591w
Public expenditure 518w
Publicity 588w
Vehicle number plates 38w

West Coast railway line
647w

West Dunbartonshire Council
Government grants 182–3w, 326–7w

West Middlesex University Hospital
(03.02.97) 773–80

West Yorkshire
Cold weather payments 140
NHS and private practice 471w

West Yorkshire Health Authority
Health service staff 471–2w

Weston-super-Mare
Gypsies (28.01.97) 262–8

Wheelchairs
Scotland 61–2w
Wales 364–5w

Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John, Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office
Questions
Army in Northern Ireland, Prisoners 498–9
Assisted prison visits scheme, Northern Ireland 726–8w
Civil disorder, Northern Ireland 651w
Committee on Standards in Public Life, Public bodies 412w
Complaints against police, Northern Ireland 52–3w
Computers, Northern Ireland Office 729–30w
Crimes of violence, Northern Ireland 497–8w, 499, 499w
Criminal injuries compensation, Northern Ireland 310w
Gibson, Mark, Parole 745w
Homicide, Northern Ireland 173w
Intimidation of witnesses, Northern Ireland 499
Kane, Patrick, Criminal appeals 500w, 602w
Life imprisonment, Northern Ireland 745–6w

Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John—continued
Local government finance, Northern Ireland 727w
Mental illness, Northern Ireland 746w
Northern Ireland Office, Andersen Consulting 500w
Police Authority for Northern Ireland 52w
Publicity, Northern Ireland Office 601w
Racial attacks, Northern Ireland 500–1w
Road accidents, Northern Ireland 307–8w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Efficiency scrutinies 368w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Homosexuality 308–9w
Security, Northern Ireland 367w
Stalking, Northern Ireland 499–500
Taking and driving away, Belfast 368–9w
Taking and driving away, Northern Ireland 172–4w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 367–8w

Wheelock
Road construction 361–2w

Whips and whipping
7

Whitemoor Prison
Prisoner escapes 315–6w, 449–50w, 740w

Whitemoor Prison Escape Inquiry
553w

Whittingdale, Mr John
Questions
Army bases, Colchester 621w
Film industry 491w
Flood control, Research 1126
Small businesses, Uniform business rate 789

Wicks, Mr Malcolm
Questions
Maintenance, Children 428–9w
Means tested benefits 136

Widdecombe, Ann
368

Widdecombe, Rt Hon Ann, Minister of State, Home Office
Debates etc.
Police grant (29.01.97) 455–63, 473, 475–8
Questions
Birmingham Prison, Immigrant detainees 212–4w
Bullingdon Prison, Hunger strikes 218–9w
Dentists, Crimes of violence 210w
Health services, Glen Parva Youth Custody Centre 739–40w
HM Inspectorate of Prisons 554w
HM Inspectorate of Prisons, Publications 741w
Home Office, Legal costs 379–80w
Hunger strikes 365, 367
Immigrant detainees 362–8
Immigrant detainees, Hunger strikes 359–62, 365, 368
Immigrant detainees, Women 213–4w
Life imprisonment, Homicide 212w
McAliskey, Roisin, Extradition 452–3w
McNamee, Danny 451–2w, 603w
Paedophilia, Prison sentences 215–6w
Prison accommodation 553–4w
Prison accommodation, Category A prisoners 451w
Prison governors, Training 545–6w, 549–50w
Prisoners, Childbirth 8–9w
Prisoners, Death 740–1w
Prisoners, Drug abuse 210–2w, 216w
Prisoners, Dyslexia 737–9w
Prisoners, Handicapped 216w

Widdecombe, Rt Hon Ann—continued
Prisoners, Publications 554–5w
Prisoners, Restraint equipment 7w
Prisoners, Suicide 546–50w
Prisoners' transport 740w
Prisons, Violence 215w
Risley Prison, Women 449w
Thomas, Geoffrey, Prisoners 449w, 554w
Whitemoor Prison, Prisoner escapes 449–50w, 740w
Whitemoor Prison Escape Inquiry 553w
Woodhill prison 8w
Young offenders, Custodial treatment 456–8w

Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Debates etc.
Gypsies, Weston Super Mare (28.01.97) 262–5

Wigley, Mr Dafydd
Debates etc.
Town Centres (Insurance and Restoration) Bill, 1R (05.02.97) 1009
Questions
Hill livestock allowances 573–4w
Public expenditure, Private finance initiative 8
Unemployment, Wales 38w

Wild animals
Arable farming 574–5w
Licensing 223–4w

Wilkinson, Mr John
Debates etc.
Air Force (06.02.97) 1168, 1183, 1203–6, 1231
Questions
Business, Deregulation 1–2
Common fisheries policy, EC enlargement 715w
Electronic warfare 487w
Joint Service Command and Staff College, Armed forces training 525–6w
Ministry of Defence, Cash limits 432w
Security, Northern Ireland 367w

Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Debates etc.
House of Commons procedure, Points of order (27.01.97) 22
Questions
Royal yacht 432–3w

Williams, Mr Alan W
Questions
Beef, Exports 49w
Beef, Prices 48–9w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 280–1w, 284–5w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Animal feed 354w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Costs 513w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 352w, 354–5w, 573w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Research 282–3w, 354w
Farm incomes, Northern Ireland 652w
Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus 343w
Military aircraft, Low flying 194–5w
Post offices, Wales 559w
Teachers, Early retirement 343–4

Wilshire, Mr David
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 225–6

Wilson, Mr Brian
Questions
Erskine bridge, Accidents 249w
Financial institutions, Jersey 33w

Wind power
25w

Windsor Castle
Repairs and maintenance 607w

Winnick, Mr David
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland Parades and Marches Review (30.01.97) 520
Questions
Business questions 1148
Cold weather payments 139
General elections 150
Heart diseases, Medical treatments 763w
Income support 744w
Japan, Prisoners of war 660w
Royal yacht 9
Travelling expenses, Prime Minister 609w

Winterton, Mrs Ann
Debates etc.
Education Bill, Rep and 3R (28.01.97) 235
Questions
Educational finance, Cheshire 348–9
Road construction, Wheelock 361–2w
Veterinary services, Import of live animals 1125–6

Winterton, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
EC integration, Voting methods (29.01.97) 283
Questions
Building workers 334w
Business questions 1149–50
Housing construction 781
Legislation, Members' speeches 469w
Teachers, Early retirement 344

Wirral South
By election writs (03.02.97) 657
By elections 795, 1141–2

Witness Protection Bill 1996/97
Debates etc.
2R adjourned (31.01.97) 637–45
Order for resuming adjourned 2R read (07.02.97) 1316

Wolverhampton
Local government finance 794

Women
Immigrant detainees 213–4w
Risley Prison 449w

Woodcock Inquiry
see Whitemoor Prison Escape Inquiry

Woodhill prison
8w

Working conditions
Young people 736w

Working hours
EC law 169w, 522w
Hospital doctors 761w
Wales 522w

World Cup
586–7w, 661

Worthington, Mr Tony
Questions
Civil disorder, Northern Ireland 651w
Council tax capping, Scotland 184w
Educational finance, Northern Ireland 492
Educational qualifications, Northern Ireland 501w

Worthington, Mr Tony—continued
Ethnic minorities, Northern Ireland 500–1w
Government grants to local authorities, Scotland 183–4w
Local government finance, Scotland 582w
Local government functions, Scotland 581–2w
Local government revenue, Scotland 181–2w, 184w
Means tested benefits, Social security recipients 189–90w
Racial attacks, Northern Ireland 500–1w
Small businesses, Scotland 181w
West Dunbartonshire Council, Government grants 182–3w, 326–7w

Wright, Dr Tony
Questions
Environment, Disclosure of information 531w
Eye tests, Pensioners 163w
Judicial review, Dept of the Environment 676w
Universities, Research 355

Xenotransplantation
114w

Xenotransplantation Interim Regulatory Authority
279w

Yeo, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill, 2R (31.01.97) 590–4

Ynys Mon
Special education 39–40w

York
Employment schemes 338w
Youth unemployment 479w

Yorkshire and Humberside
Exports 169w
National Lottery 659w
Project Prime 106w

Young, Rt Hon Sir George, Secretary of State for Transport
Questions
Dept of Transport, Cash limits 391–3w
Railway industry, Performance standards 393w

Young offenders
Administration of justice 313–4w
Custodial treatment 456–8w
Wales 456–8w

Young people
36–7w
Arts 660–1
Arts finance 661
Drug abuse 37w
Housing benefits 103–4w
Income support 104w
Industrial training 350
Jobseeker's allowance 97–8w
Social security recipients 190w
Training 349–50
Working conditions 736w

Youth unemployment
349–52, 1006–7
York 479w

Zahoorul, Syed
Arrests 745w

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